**Ha’azinu**

**By Roslyn Bryan**

When I signed up to do the D’Var, this was the only parsha available, and I wondered why nobody seemed to want to tackle it. And then I read it. My first reaction? “No Thank You!” Why? We have just experienced the beauty of the High Holy Days. We are cleansed. We are rejuvenated. We look forward to a year of good health and happiness. Then we read Ha’azinu. Parsha Ha’azinu talks about Israel’s unfaithfulness and neglect and God’s anger and vengeance.

This parsha is a poem that starts out gently:

“Give ear, O heavens, that I may speak,

and let the earth hear my mouth’s utterances

Let my teaching drop like rain

My saying flow like dew

Like showers on the green

And like cloudbursts on the grass.”

It starts gently, but sadly, this beautiful poem then descends into an onslaught of harsh words. Like:

“I will sweep down evils upon them

My arrows spending against them

Wasted with famine, withered by blight and bitter scourge

And the fang of beasts will I send against them

With the venom of creepers in the dust.”

However, as noted by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin :

“Hidden in the angry and vengeful words of this poem is a gentle interweaving of images of God as both mother and father, the most powerful presentation of this kind in the Torah. “Is God not the father who created you? The One who fashioned you and constantly sustains you?” (Deut. 32:6). “God found him in a desert region, in an empty howling waste. He swaddled him and watched over him and guarded him… He spread His wings over him and bore him along on His wings” (Deut. 12:10-11). “God fed him honey from the crag, with oil from the flinty rock” (Deut. 32:13). “You neglected the Rock that begot you, forgot the God who brought you forth” (Deut. 32:18)

The images of father and mother tumble together, showing through the usually opaque masculine scrim of the text, forming a dual image of God as father and mother. There are words of birthing, nurturing, and caring, of unconditional compassion, protection, and love. There are even two versions of parenthood, one as biological, the other as adoptive. We can read these two not as contradictory, but as emphatic, doubling the intensity of parental compassion, much like the dual image of mother and father doubles the intensity of parental love. But, the poem says, despite all this, Israel still rebelled and turned away from God- thus the need for punishment. “

This poem is a mixture of words of comfort, harsh condemnations, beauty and bitterness. Beginning gently with the words, “Give ear, O heavens, that I may speak,”

It then it descends into a tirade of condemnation. “I will sweep down evils upon them, my arrows spending against them.” Why? Could not Moses have achieved his goal of encouraging the Israelites by using gentle words throughout his speech? Perhaps the reasoning behind the various tones we hear is revealed in the first few lines of the poem, “Let my teaching drop like rain.”

I would like to share what Rabbi Melissa Buyer-Witman has written on this parsha:

“In this next-to-last portion in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses eloquently pleads with his community: Haazinu, “Listen.” He urges them to hear his sage counsel one last time before they make their way to the Promised Land without him. But why use four different descriptions of rainfall to describe how he wants his departing words to be heard? We read in Deuteronomy 32:2:

"May my discourse come down as the rain,

My speech distill as the dew,

Like showers on young growth,

Like droplets on the grass." (Deut. 32:2)

Perhaps Moses uses rain to symbolically suggest that his teachings are as life-sustaining to the Israelites, as water is to the earth. Rashi certainly agrees, noting that water here is symbolic of Torah. He notes, just as water is life to the world, Torah is life to the Israelites (Rashi on Deut. 32.2). But more significant than the use of water as the source is the way in which water is experienced. Moses speaks about rain, dew, showers, and droplets—all important, but very divergent means for delivering much needed water to the Land. Why then, does Moses use water as a metaphor for instruction? Moses is often referred to as Moshe Rabbeinu, our greatest teacher, and in this moment, he earns that title, reflecting the wisdom and patience of a seasoned educator, and the foresight of an educational prophet!

Carol Ann Tomlinson is considered the foremost expert on differentiated instruction, having written more than two hundred articles and authored books on the differentiated classroom. In an interview, Tomlinson shared that differentiated instruction is an attempt by the teacher to address students’ readiness needs, particular interests, and preferred ways of learning. But at its core, differentiated instruction means addressing ways in which students vary as learners. Was the comparison of rain to the delivery of content simply poetry or was Moses actually ahead of his time, making him the first differentiated instructor?

A skilled teacher ensures he or she delivers content in various forms, cognizant at all times of the vast and diverse ways people learn. We work to provide access to our material for the tactile learners that need to explore learning with their fingertips, for the visual learners that must see the learning in living color, and for the auditory processors that can listen intently but thrive when discussing the content with their peers. More importantly, like Moses, a good teacher will strive to know and understand her students intimately, work to nurture a community of learners who support and trust the educator. Only then can the educator ensure the learning will nurture and promote growth, just like the rain inspires vegetation to blanket the earth.

But there’s more. Some of our students need a relentless downpour of information, like a torrential rainstorm. In this case the educator works tirelessly to capture the imagination and intellectual appetite of the learner to satisfy her thirst for knowledge. For others the educator must tread lightly: with gentle words we urge the introvert to find his voice and to feel confident as master of the content. Moses knew his community well. After years of pushing and prodding, learning and living with the Israelites he knew the delivery of his message would need to be as varied as the learner. He knew after years of teaching this community that he must confer blessing and impart wisdom in as many diverse ways as water that falls from the heavens. All ways inspire growth, and all ways ensure that all have heard.”

In a classroom, there are many learning styles. The four most common learning styles are visual, auditory/oral, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Visually, this poem is attractive, being composed primarily of couplets. The first half of the line justifies to the left, the second, to the right. The visual learner is drawn in to see the words and not just see but hear. Being composed of couplets, the poem creates a rhythmic symphony that draws the auditory learner in. He hears the melody and he listens to the message. The crowd of Israelites standing before Moses were one people, yet individual learners.

As their teacher, Moses saw not just a mass before him. He saw a crowd of individuals. That is why he employed so many methods when gifting them the message. He reached the musician with rhythm. He reached the poet with rhyme. He reached the rebellious with harsh words. He reached the fearful with words of comfort. He reminded the fatherless that God is our Father. And he reminded his people that after all the tears, God will restore and redeem Israel.

Our rabbis taught:

If one sees a crowd of Israelites, one says:

Blessed be He who discerns secrets \_ because the mind of each is different from that of another, just as the face of each is different from another.

( Brachot 58a )