

A Taste of Torah – Nourishment in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Ha'Azinu: "From Drops of Dew to Honey from the Rock" How Can We Quench Our Spiritual Thirst with Hashem's Overflowing Nourishment?

How Does the Morning Dew Awaken Us to Hashem's Caressing Presence?

As the apples have ripened on our trees and adorned our Rosh Hashanah table, serving as a sign for an even better year, the figs and pomegranates still stand proudly on their branches. The glistening, honeyed figs gently invite us to partake of their sweetness, while the stunning, bright, blushing pomegranates turn the other cheek, offering their manifold pockets of ruby seeds, bursting with juicy sweetness. A sign that fall is around the corner is not only the ripening walnuts, but especially the deeper coat of dew that greets us in the morning.

As I opened the sliding door to my porch to step outside for my daily morning prayer, I breathed in the cool morning air. It felt moister than yesterday, and I noticed gentle drops of water dripping from the gutter of our roof. I welcomed the soft, blanket-like layer of dew covering the porch, thinking how beneficial it must be for our newly sown vegetable garden, as well as for the last lingering tomatoes and peppers. It was as if the plants and flowers opened their mouths to receive their nourishment from the blessed dew.

There is something so special about dew. Unlike pouring rain, it descends silently and gently, without demanding our attention. It settles softly upon every leaf, flower, and blade of grass, enveloping them in life-giving moisture. To me, dew feels like a caressing embrace of the Shechinah. I inhaled deeply, breathing in its moist sweetness, sensing Hashem's nearness, and praying for His continued closeness.

That morning, enveloped by the gentle dew, I quietly prayed that my Torah teachings, too, would become like dew, settling softly upon my students' hearts and nourishing their souls with enduring sweetness. Rather than inundating them with harsh words about how we need to shape up, arrive on time, focus, and put away our phones, I prayed that Hashem would grant me the Divine inspiration to reach them differently – to gently caress their souls with Torah as nourishing as dew.

Just as dew nourishes without overwhelming, Torah can penetrate most deeply when it touches the soul with gentleness. We may not even notice the moment when the tiny droplets begin to accumulate, yet together they saturate the earth with life-giving moisture. Likewise, words of Torah offered with love can quietly seep into our hearts, gradually softening, nourishing, and transforming us from within.

How Can the Same Torah Bring Forth a Different Flavor in Every Soul?

Parashat Ha'azinu opens with one of the Torah's most beautiful images of spiritual nourishment. Before Moshe recounts the blessings, failures, and ultimate redemption of Israel, he compares his Torah teachings to the life-giving waters that sustain all vegetation:

ספר דברים פרק לב פסוק ב

יְעֲרַף כְּמָטָר לִקְחֵי תֵּזֶל כְּטֵל אֶמְרָתִי כְּשֻׁעִירִם עָלֵי דָשָׁא וְכִרְבִּיבִים עָלֵי עֵשֶׂב:

"May my teaching drop like the rain, may my word flow like the dew, like showers upon vegetation and like raindrops upon grass" (*Devarim* 32:2).

Rashi compares the Torah, which Hashem gave to Israel, with the life-giving waters, "when the heavens drip down dew and rain." Yet whereas everyone rejoices in dew, rain is not always welcome. Travelers may be inconvenienced by a downpour, and someone whose winepress is filled with wine certainly does not want rain at that moment. Dew, however, descends gently, bringing blessing without interfering with

anyone's plans (Rashi, *Devarim* 32:2).

Torah, too, must reach us in different ways at different times. Sometimes we need the powerful downpour that penetrates deeply and awakens us to change. At other times, we need Torah to settle upon us like gentle dew, almost without our noticing, quietly refreshing and nourishing our souls.

The *Pesikta Zutreta* expands Moshe's comparison between Torah and water. Just as even a great person is not embarrassed to ask someone younger, "Give me a drink," a great Torah scholar may receive Torah insight from a student or someone younger without embarrassment. Just as the fish in the sea open their mouths to receive each drop of rain falling from heaven, so does the Torah scholar incline his ear eagerly whenever he hears a new teaching. Although the fish are already surrounded by water, they continue to thirst for every fresh drop descending from above. Likewise, no matter how much Torah we have learned, there is always another life-giving drop for our soul to receive (*Pesikta Zutreta*, *Devarim* 32:2).

Yet perhaps the image that speaks most directly to the way Torah nourishes us is the *Pesikta's* comparison of Torah to rain falling upon different trees. The same rain descends upon them all, yet it brings forth the particular taste of each tree according to its nature. Likewise, Torah does not erase our individuality. The same Divine Torah may awaken wisdom in one person, greater devotion in another, and an entirely different expression of holiness in someone else.

This may be why Moshe does not compare Torah to only one kind of water. His teaching falls as rain, flows as dew, showers upon the grass, and descends in droplets upon each individual plant. Torah nourishment is not one-size-fits-all. Hashem's Torah meets each soul according to its particular nature and helps the unique potential planted within it to grow. Hashem not only nourishes our souls through Torah; He also showers us with physical abundance. Yet the very abundance that testifies to His love can become a spiritual challenge when we enjoy His gifts without remembering their Source.

What Does It Take to Draw Honey from a Rock?

Moshe describes Hashem's tender care for the Jewish people in the wilderness like an eagle hovering protectively over its young. He then portrays the extraordinary nourishment with which Hashem blesses His people:

תורה ספר דברים פרק לב פסוק יג

יִרְכְּבֵהוּ עַל בִּמְתֵי אֶרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל תְּנוּבַת שָׂדֵי וַיִּנְקֶהוּ דְּבַשׁ מִסֶּלַע וְשֶׁמֶן מִחִלְמִישׁ צוּר:

"He made him ride upon the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the field; He made him suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty rock" (*Devarim* 32:13).

What an extraordinary image – honey emerging from rock and oil from flint! We generally associate nourishment with soft, fertile earth, not with hard stone. Yet Hashem can bring sweetness and sustenance precisely from places that appear barren.

According to Rashi, this entire verse refers to the bounty of the Land of Israel (Rashi, *Devarim* 32:13). Whereas "honey from the rock" reflects the extraordinary sweetness of the fruits of Eretz Yisrael, "oil from the flinty rock" evokes the image of olives flourishing in rocky terrain. The Torah's striking imagery of honey emerging from rock and oil from flint teaches us that external hardness does not necessarily imply inner barrenness. Hashem can conceal the greatest sweetness within what initially appears harsh and unyielding. The Torah continues with an overflowing description of the bounty Hashem bestows upon Israel: "Butter of cattle and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the finest wheat; and you drank the blood of grapes, wine" (*Devarim* 32:14).

Milk, meat, wheat, and wine – the verse evokes a table overflowing with the richness of Hashem's creation. Nothing is lacking. The animals provide milk and sustenance, the fields yield their finest grain, and the vineyards produce richly colored wine.

The expression “blood of grapes” is particularly striking. Wine is hidden within the grape until it is pressed and released. In the same way, the inner vitality Hashem places within creation is not always visible on the surface. Every morsel that nourishes us contains a concealed Divine gift.

At times, we may encounter periods in life that seem hard as rock, and our nourishment is concealed. Yet precisely from these places, Hashem may cause unexpected sweetness to emerge. Just as Eretz Yisrael can produce honey and oil from rock and flint, spiritual challenges can uncover hidden reservoirs of emunah, prayer, resilience, and closeness to Hashem.

When Does Our Overflowing Cup Become a Spiritual Challenge?

We learn from *Parashat Ha'azinu* that the purpose of nourishment is not merely to satisfy our hunger. Hashem's gifts are meant to deepen our relationship with Him. This is why our Torah surrounds eating with consciousness. We make a bracha before enjoying food and acknowledge Hashem again afterward. Through these blessings, the simplest acts of eating and drinking become opportunities to remember where our nourishment originates.

The challenge of “Yeshurun grew fat and kicked” (*Devarim* 32:15) is therefore particularly relevant when life is comfortable. The problem is not abundance itself, but allowing Hashem's blessings to make us forget the One Who bestowed them. We need Hashem not only when the well is dry, but also when it overflows. Abundance may require an even greater spiritual awareness, because its Source can so easily become concealed behind the gifts themselves.

This is where we need the nourishing rain and dew of Torah to awaken our spiritual awareness. Physical nourishment alone cannot sustain our deepest being. Torah teaches us how to recognize and receive Hashem's blessings while remaining connected to their Divine Source.

Toward the conclusion of the parasha, Moshe urges the Jewish people to take the words of Torah deeply to heart: “For it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life” (*Devarim* 32:47).

The nourishment imagery of Ha'azinu thus comes full circle. The parasha begins with Torah descending like nourishing rain and concludes by reminding us that Torah itself is our life. Between these two verses, we receive honey from the rock, oil from flint, milk, wheat, and wine – only to discover how easily material abundance can make us forget the One Who bestowed it.

When Torah nourishes our consciousness like rain and dew, we can taste the Divine sweetness within every blessing. Then the honey, oil, milk, wheat, and wine upon our table do not obscure Hashem's presence. They become pathways through which we recognize His loving nourishment and allow gratitude to flow back to its Source.

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