**[Time for the Timeless – Parshat Ha'Azinu](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/time-for-the-timeless-parshat-haazinu)**

Once, when the Baal Shem Tov was about to enter the synagogue, he stopped at the threshold. Those behind him waited patiently, but after some time passed, one of them politely asked him if he was going to go in.

“I can’t go in,” replied the Baal Shem, “there is no room for me – the entire space is crowded with teachings and prayers. How can anyone enter when there is no space?”

They looked at him dumbfounded.

Then he continued, “When prayers and teachings don’t come from the heart, but are merely repeated mechanically, they don’t rise to heaven, but rather they fill up the room from floor to ceiling. That is why there is no room for me to enter!”

This is the great challenge of any formal spiritual practice, especially Jewish prayer and teaching – that there is a tendency towards verbosity without *kavanah,* without sacred intention. The approach of the Baal Shem, along with much of the Hassidic teaching that came after him, was to emphasize simplicity and sincerity. While not outright reforming Jewish common practice, the Hassidic teachings and stories counterbalanced it with teachings about simple sincerity over scholarship and formal comformity to the order and texts of the prayers.

No time is this problem more apparent than on the High Holy days, when the sheer immensity of the liturgy makes depth and sincerity a profound challenge. There are many external approaches that can be employed to help avoid this pitfall, such as simplifying the liturgy, the use of music and verbal guidance into the inner dimensions of the prayers, and so on.  But the one who prays need not be dependent on any of these things; it is within our own power to bring forth the depths of sincerity from our hearts so that our prayers “ascend to heaven,” so to speak.

There is a hint in the *parshah:*

כְּנֶ֙שֶׁר֙ יָעִ֣יר קִנּ֔וֹ עַל־גּוֹזָלָ֖יו יְרַחֵ֑ף יִפְרֹ֤שׂ כְּנָפָיו֙ יִקָּחֵ֔הוּ יִשָּׂאֵ֖הוּ עַל־אֶבְרָתֽוֹ׃

*Like an eagle who rouses its nest, hovering over its eaglets, spreading its wings and taking them, elevating them on its pinions…*

* Deuteronomy 32:11

This verse describes the Divine as an eagle, and we as the eaglets; we are lifted up out of our inner bondage by the Divine power. But this Divine power is not only something we may sense gracing us from beyond; it is also the power of our own awareness from within, elevating the “eaglets” of our feelings, our impulses, our longings. According to Hassidic teaching, this happens through the primal emotional energies of *ahavah* and*yirah,* love and awe.

In fact, these two qualities are imagined as the two wings of a bird; prayer is the bird, and in order for the bird to fly, in order for prayer to ascend, it needs to have both of these qualities.

How to we bring forth these qualities from within?

There is a message encoded within the Hebrew word for “wing” or “pinion” used in this verse – *aver,* which is *alef – bet – reish.*

אבר

*Alef* א represents feeling fully; we embody the *alef* when we decide to unflinchingly experience whatever is present. Be it pleasure or pain, we can be the Oneness behind whatever experience is arising.

*Bet* ב, which means “house,” represents hospitality; it is “inviting the Divine” into whatever feelings are present, recognizing that we can direct our energy toward the Divine, and that the feelings themselves are essentially Divine.

*Reish* ר, which means “head” and also “beginning,” represents That which is beyond thought. We can think about and understand how things work in the world of form, but the “beginning” of all things, the ultimate Reality of Being, is beyond the “head” – it transcends the thinking mind.

In the same way, our ordinary, natural feelings can lead us into transcendence of the ordinary, into the Supreme Mystery of ר *reish,* which is embodied in the word ירא *yirah,*meaning “awe” or “transcendence.” This happens when when we feel them fully (represented by א *alef*)*,* and and then direct them toward the Divine (inviting the Divine in, represented by ב *bet*).  *Alef* and *bet,* together with ה *hei* which represents authentic self-expression, form the word אהבה  *ahavah,* “love.”

How do we begin?

Simple:

עַל־גּוֹזָלָ֖יו יְרַחֵ֑ף – *hovering over its eaglets…*

יְרַחֵף – *y’rakhef –* “hovering” means simply being with experience as it is. Just as an eagle “hovers” – neither landing on the eaglets, which would crush them, nor flying away, which would be abandoning them, but simply hovering, patiently waiting for them to fly on their own. Meaning – waiting for the love and awe to emege in their own time, in their own way.

This combination of the two poles of simple, patient waiting on one hand, and aiming toward a goal in time on the other hand, is also the inner meaning of *Kaveh,* which means both “wait” and “hope.” The last line of Psalm 27 reads:

קַוּ֗ה אֶל־יְה֫וָ֥ה חֲ֭זַק וְיַאֲמֵ֣ץ לִבֶּ֑ךָ וְ֝קַוֵּ֗ה אֶל־יְהוָֽה
*Kaveh el Hashem, hazak v’ya’ameitz libekha; kaveh el Hashem!*
*Wait/Hope for the Divine, be strong and your heart will have courage; have hope/wait for the Divine!*

***More on Ha'Azinu...***

[**No Inside or Outside – Sukkot and Parshat Ha'azinu**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/no-inside-or-outside-sukkot-and-parshat-haazinu)
9/27/2018  [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/no-inside-or-outside-sukkot-and-parshat-haazinu%22%20%5Cl%20%22comments)

The realization of your essential nature as simple openness is represented nicely by the *sukkah.* The *sukkah* is a structure that has an inside and an outside, and yet the inside really doesn’t feel very different from the outside; it is open and permeable.

Similarly, when you recognize yourself as the open space of awareness, your thoughts and feelings come to reflect that openness, becoming permeable like the leaves and branches atop the *sukkah.* Normally, we tend to feel ourselves as being “inside” our bodies, with the rest of the world on the “outside.” But as we recognize that both “inside” and “outside” appear within awareness, this duality becomes less pronounced, and we can know ourselves as the simple open space within which all opposites arise.

How do we do that?

There is a beautiful hint in this week’s reading: *Parshat Ha’azinu* records a song that Moses teaches the children of Israel, so that they may sing it and remember their connection with the Divine. Appearing in the middle of the song are the following words:

 יְסֹֽבְבֶ֙נְהוּ֙ יְבֹ֣ונְנֵ֔הוּ יִצְּרֶ֖נְהוּ כְּאִישֹׁ֥ון עֵינֹֽו
*It surrounded him, imbued him with understanding and preserved him like the pupil of Its eye…* (Deut. 32:10)

Here is the coded instruction for becoming present and awakening to your essential being:

יְסֹֽבְבֶ֙נְהוּ֙ *– Y’sovevenhu – It surrounded:* Surround the fullness of your experience right now with consciousness; let your awareness connect with everything that arises in your field of perception, without pushing anything away.

יְבֹ֣ונְנֵ֔הו – *Y’vonenehu – imbued him with understanding:* Understand that everything you perceive – from sensory impressions, to emotional feelings, to thoughts – are all literally different forms of consciousness. Everything you experience happens within consciousness, and is therefore *made out of consciousness,* at least within your experience.

יִצְּרֶ֖נְהוּ כְּאִישֹׁ֥ון עֵינֹֽו – *Yitzrenhu k’ishon eino ­– and preserved him like the pupil of Its eye:*Return yourself repeatedly to knowing that *you are consciousness,* that you are essentially an open space of awareness, beyond all thoughts and feelings. Just as the pupil of an eye is a simple opening through which light can flow, so too the full spectrum of Reality as you experience it flows through and as the open field of awareness that you are.

In this joyful time of *Sukkot*, may we become like a *sukkah;* may we invite in the *ushpizin*(guests) of everything that arises, that we may discover anew and live our nature as the openness of hospitality...

Good Shabbos!

[**The Salad- Parshat Ha'azinu**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/october-13th-2016)
10/13/2016  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/october-13th-2016%22%20%5Cl%20%22comments)

Once, my son told me about a show he saw on food waste. He learned that in our country alone, every person wastes a staggering twenty pounds of food per month! And yet, with a little more consciousness and care, much of the wasted food could be put to good use.

To illustrate the point, they assembled a group of folks and served them a gourmet salad. They asked the group to rate the salad, and everyone loved it.

Then, they revealed the truth: the salad was made entirely out of food waste!

A gourmet chef was given food that is normally considered waste- peelings, stems, stalks and other items that are usually discarded. The food scraps were cut, peeled, marinated, pounded and transformed into something the group perceived to be not only edible, but a unique and delicious gourmet dish.

It’s a good thing that the human mind can differentiate between food and garbage, between “wheat and chaff”, between nourishment and poison. But the shadow side to this dualistic thinking is that we tend to develop a rigid narrative about what is good and usable, and what needs to be thrown away.

Or, sometimes the opposite happens-

Out of fear that something valuable might be lost, some people become hoarders, surrounding themselves with far more junk than they could ever use.

But what if the human mind could be flexible enough to fully use whatever is present? Not hoard for another day, and not look at a fridge partially filled with odds and ends and decide, “there’s nothing to eat!”

One time, I was away with my son and my wife Lisa was home alone for a few days with our daughter.

Lisa thought, “I wonder if I can avoid going shopping and just live off whatever is in the house?”

Guess what- she did! No shopping that week. They were fine.

When the mind is full of rigid preconceptions, it’s impossible to see the full potential of what is present. But get some space around your thoughts (like send the boys to Arizona!), connect with what is really here in this moment, and new possibilities open up. There are little miracles waiting to happen.

But to open up this space and become present, you need to bring together the two opposite poles of your being- consciousness and flesh.

Ordinarily, human consciousness tends to congeal into a constant stream of thinking, taking the thinker into all kinds of imagined realities, while the body is left to deal with the here and now. The eyes are looking in the fridge, but the mind is thinking about something else!

This week’s reading begins with Moses’ words to the Israelites:

*“Ha’azinu hashamyaim va’adabeirah-*
*Give ear, O Heavens, and I shall speak-*

*“V’tishma Ha’aretz imrei fi-*
*And listen, O Earth, to the words of my mouth.”*

The “Heavens” and the “Earth” are metaphors for these opposite polls of our being. When mind is extricated from the relentless narratives of thought and brought into intimate connection with the body, then the mind and body can “listen” together as one. When that happens, the “secrets” that are hidden in plain sight can be revealed.

These “secrets” are ever-present, as it goes on to say-

“Let my teaching fall like rain, let my utterance flow like dew, like storm winds on vegetation, like raindrops on blades of grass…”

Torah is everywhere, soaking everything like rain, blowing through everything as the air we breathe. But to see it, to hear it, you have to open to it.

Opening means: there must be an opening in your thoughts, so that your awareness and your body can fully join together.

When that happens, there is no more sense of “me” as the thinker and “my body” that “I” inhabit. That separate “I” drops away.

There is a hint of this in the concluding verses of the *parshah:*

*“Aley el har… ur’eh et eretz… umoot b’har…*
*Ascend the mountain… see the land… and die on the mountain…”*

“Ascend the mountain” means to rise above your thinking mind.

“See the land” means to really see what is right here before you, now.

“Die on the mountain” means that when you rise above your mind and yet connect fully with your body, your ordinary thought-bound self can drop away.

This is the deepest freedom- freedom from the sense of “me” as a separate entity that is living in “my” body.

And when there is no more separate "me", what is left?

This can’t really be described, because language itself is rooted in thought, which is the basis for separateness. But there is a hint in this *parshah*:

*“He is suckled with honey from a stone, and oil from the hardness of a rock…”*

In other words, what seemed to be dead is bursting with life. Everything is miraculous, everything is nourishing.

Rabbi Moshe Hayim Efraim, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, told a story in the name of his grandfather:

“Once there was a fiddler who played so sweetly that no one who heard the music could resist dancing. One time, a man walked by a house where the fiddler played and he saw people dancing through the window. He couldn’t hear the music they heard, and so he thought they were madmen, flailing their bodies about tastelessly.”

As we approach the joyful and celebratory days of *Sukkot,* may we hear the music of Existence that plays all around us and within us. May we be like the *sukkah-* an open form, a beautiful frame, without much differentiation between “inside” and “outside”.

And as we leave behind the day of fasting, may we take care to fully use and share what we have, nourishing each other and minimizing our food waste. If you haven’t already, make the fast of Yom Kippur real by donating to your local food bank or other relief organization. Take a moment and give *tzeddaka*now!

*Moadim L’Simkha!*
Good times!
love,
-brian yosef

**​**[**The Mouse- Shabbat Sukkot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-mouse-shabbat-sukkot3623376)
10/21/2016  [4 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-mouse-shabbat-sukkot3623376#comments)

Once, during the days after Yom Kippur, we suspected that there was a mouse in the house.

First, the strange little pieces of refuse that would show up on the floor when we knew we had already swept. Then, the little mysterious scratchy sounds I would hear when I knew everyone else was asleep. But we knew for sure when we found that a bag of leftover *hallah*had been chewed through.

Not knowing how the mouse got in and out, we quickly became much more disciplined about putting all our food away! We could tell the mouse was still coming in, but most of the time there was nothing for it to steal.

It wasn’t until *Sukkot* began, however, that I actually saw it.

We were eating in the *sukkah,* when I went back into the house to get the main course. As soon as entered the back door of our house, I saw the little mouse scurry across the floor and squeeze right through a little opening below a sliding door that goes into the wall.

I took some plastic bags and pushed them into the opening to block it, then used duct tape to seal it up. A temporary measure, but the mouse seems to have not returned, leaving the sanctuary of our home free from it for now.

But there is another kind of sanctuary- a space in which the heart is free and the mind is clear. That space is a sanctuary from all stress, from all problems, from all *tzures.*

That space is the present moment.

It is ever available, and always right here. And yet, the ordinary human mind is unaware of this space. Living life almost entirely through the screen of thinking, this sanctuary is overrun with the “rodents” of thought.

Craving some peace, one attempts to put life in order so that the rodents won’t disturb anything too much. Unaware of where the rodents are coming from, all you can do is put the food away so as not to attract them.

By “putting the food away” I mean arranging your life to your liking- organizing things so that stress and chaos are kept at bay. This is a wonderful thing. I’ll tell you, our kitchen was never so consistently clean as when that mouse forced us to develop better habits!

But once you see where the mouse is coming from, you can seal up the hole at its source. Meaning- once you see that the source of all chaos and worry is your own mind, you can “close the hole” through which chaos and misery enter.

Then, you can still clean your kitchen if you want to, but you’re not dependant on it. Meaning- you can organize your life to maximum benefit, but even when life is chaotic externally, even when there is loss, failure and uncertainty, the Sanctuary of the Present is not lost. Your mind can be free from those “rodents” of excess thinking, and in that clarity the Sanctuary reveals itself.

And yet, this is still a big secret, even for long-time spiritual practitioners!

Many people enter the Sanctuary in their moments of *avodah,*of meditation, ritual, chanting and so on, but cannot seem to stay connected in the midst of life.

In this week’s special reading for *Shabbat Sukkot,* Moses seems to have this very problem. Moses- the one who speaks to Hashem face-to-face, is afraid that the Divine Presence will not accompany him on his journey of leading the people (Exodus 33:12):

*“Re’eh Atah omer eilai, ha’al et ha’am hazeh-*
*"See, You say to me, ‘take this people onward’, but You did not reveal whom You will send with me!”*

Moses is afraid that the One who sends him on his mission will abandon him. What is Hashem’s response?

*“Panai yelekhu v’hanikhoti lakh-*
*"My Presence will go and give you rest!”*

The Presence “goes” wherever you go!

That’s because the “Presence” is not something separate from your own presence, from your awareness when it is actually present. And when your awareness is present, there is “rest”.

The word here for “I will give rest”, *hanikhoti,*has the same root as the name *Noakh,*the fellow who built the ark for the great flood. Whether the metaphor is rodents or destructive floodwaters, the idea is the same- there is an ark that floats above the raging waters in which you can find refuge.

In the case of Moses and the Israelites, they lived in temporary dwellings on their journeys- the *sukkot*in which Jews everywhere are now dwelling for this holiday that commemorates the ancient dwellings of the Israelites.

The *sukkah*is a sanctuary, yet it is hardly a solid thing. Open to the sky, vulnerable to the elements, it is really just a frame, not secure at all.

And that’s the paradox- that “sealing the hole” and securing your mind from the “rodents” of thought does not mean something hard or effortful. No plastic and duct tape! It means relaxing the mind, allowing the mind to be open to the fullness of what is already present.

But still, to do this constantly takes a special kind of effort that eludes most people. So much of the language of prayer is longing for the fruit of this effort!

​As King David says in Psalm 27:

*“Akhat Sha’alti me’eit Hashem-*
*"Only one thing I ask of You, Hashem, that I should dwell in Your house and meditate in Your sanctuary all the days of my life!”*

The Sanctuary of Presence is ever-present, yet it is so easy to block it. Think of this- the sun is 864,938 miles in diameter, yet you can block its view entirely with just your little hand.

And yet, even while you are blocking the Presence, the blocking is itself happening in the present! The only thing blocking God, ultimately, is God- as God tells Moses a few verses later (Exodus 33:22):

*“It will be when My Glory passes, I shall place you in a cleft in the rock and shield you with My hand…”*

When our fleeting and immaterial thoughts hide the “Glory” of this passing moment, hardening the openness of the present into what feels like a narrow cleft of rock on all sides, remember: Your thoughts themselves are also part of this moment. Accept them with openness and let them pass as well.

In accepting and releasing your thoughts, they can dissolve, revealing the open space once again, as Hashem says next:

*“Then I will remove My hand and you will see my ‘back’…”*

Meaning, you will see in retrospect that your thoughts blocking the Sanctuary are themselves part of the Sanctuary. They are part of the reality of the present moment.

But the more simple and direct path is simply to bring your attention to literally anything physical that is already present. The more you train yourself to do this, the more you will become aware of the space *behind*whatever is present- the ineffable openness that is the present moment.

There is a story of Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi, that once he asked his son what he “prays with”. The boy answered that he inspires himself with the verse, “Every form shall prostrate itself before You.”

The boy then asked the rebbe, “What do you pray with, Abba?”

The rebbe answered, “I pray with the bench and the floor.”

On this *Shabbat Sukkot,* may we commit our attention ever more deeply to the bench on which we sit and the floor on which we stand, that we might open ever more deeply to the *Sukkat Shalom*- the Space of Peace that is this moment in which we now live.

Good Shabbos!