



## Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

# Today's Torah

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### Shabbat Parashat Ha'azinu

September 22, 2018 – 13 Tishrei 5779

*The Ziegler School extends our best wishes to all for a meaningful  
Fast and a good year!!!*



**By: Rabbi Gabriel Botnick**  
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## Good Things Are On The Way

Torah Reading: [Deuteronomy 32:1-52](#)

Haftarah Reading: [2 Samuel 22:1-51](#)

It's nearly impossible to read Parshat Ha'azinu without connecting it to the final verses of the preceding parshah, VaYeilekh, in which Moshe paves the way for the doom and gloom that is to follow in his farewell message:

*“Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death, you will surely become corrupted, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. In the end, evil will befall you...”*

At first blush, this warning is not only terrifying, but utterly disheartening – are we truly destined to meet such terrible ends? We know all too well how easy it is for us to err, but are we so flawed that turning towards corruption and evil is inevitable? How could these be Moshe's final words to us before parting ways? Why

would the Torah end on such a dour note?

Nevertheless, despite all the doom and gloom contained within this epic poem, Ramban understands the message of Ha'azinu as not depressing, but inspirational. For once Moshe nears the end of his rebuke, he concludes the poem by telling us that God will, in an act of forgiveness, deliver us from our enemies. Ramban notes that this promise is not dependent on our taking any great actions – we don't have to offer additional prayers or perform any mitzvot – rather, God will simply step in and save us in our darkest hour.

How often are we made to believe that the troubles in our lives are our own fault? But even when we've been living good lives and doing what's right, trouble still manages to find its way into our lives.

What Ha'azinu tells us is that life, by definition, will include ups and downs. Sometimes our highs and lows will be our own doing, and other times they will simply be random occurrences.

The important thing to remember is that, when our world is dark and it feels like we can't take any more, there's always the promise of future redemption. We can – and should – take steps to speed up its arrival. But sometimes, the only remaining option is to accept that we've reached the limits of our ability to affect change and that we simply need to let life run its course.

Over the past six weeks – since the start of Elul – we've focused our efforts on finding ways to make life better in the coming year. We've searched our souls and considered our actions. But still, it sometimes can feel like we're setting ourselves up for disappointment – that no matter what steps we take, we will keep running into that wall which prevents us from realizing the change we so desire.

If it feels like you've done all you can and you can't possibly think of another way forward, I want you to consider the promise of Ha'azinu: stay focused on doing good and maintain your faith and patience, and eventually God will bless you with your deliverance from darkness.

Shabbat Shalom.

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**Rabbi Gabriel Botnick**, is the rabbi of Mishkon Tephilo in Venice, California. A 2014 graduate of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, he now serves on the school's faculty, teaching Halakhah (Jewish law) in various capacities. He is also a Mohel (performs Brit Milah, ritual circumcision) and is the only non-Orthodox rabbi in the world certified by the Israeli Rabbinate as a Shochet uBodek, enabling him to perform Kosher slaughter on both small and large animals.

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