

Date: 5 Tishrei 5787 (September 16, 2026)

Torah Portion: Ha'Azinu

Topic: Torah and Tefillah, Part 2

A person may pray for livelihood so that he can sustain his family, practice generosity, observe the commandments, and live without being consumed by anxiety over basic necessities. He may pray for health so that he possesses the strength to serve YHWH. He may pray for wisdom so that he can discern what is right. In each case, the physical blessing becomes a vessel for spiritual service. But when the vessel becomes the goal, prayer loses its proper direction.

This explains the Maharal's understanding of Mishlei 28:9. If a person deliberately **"turns away his ear from hearing Torah,"** he is not merely neglecting one mitzvah while performing another. He has rejected the very instruction that teaches him what his life—and therefore his prayer—is for. He asks YHWH to sustain him while refusing to hear how YHWH commands that sustained life to be lived. He desires the gifts while turning away from the purpose of the gifts.

There is an inherent contradiction in such prayer. The person effectively says, "Hear my words," while refusing to hear the words of YHWH. He asks Heaven to incline toward his requests while he refuses to incline his own ear toward Torah. He desires YHWH's attention without giving attention to YHWH's instruction. His prayer therefore becomes distorted at its foundation. The problem is not simply that Elohim refuses to grant what he requests; rather, the prayer itself has been separated from the purpose that gives prayer meaning.

This brings us back to the opening words of Ha'azinu: **"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak."** Before Yisrael can properly speak to Heaven, Yisrael must first learn to hear Heaven.

The Gra, however, discovers another dimension in the words, **"He who turns away his ear from hearing Torah."** At first glance, Torah study might seem to be associated primarily with the mouth. Torah is studied by speaking its words, discussing them, teaching them, and repeating them. If so, why does Mishlei emphasize the *ear* rather than the *mouth*? Why not say, "He who removes Torah from his mouth"? The Gra therefore offers an insightful interpretation. The verse may be describing not merely someone who refuses to study Torah altogether, but one who turns his ear away **because he has already heard it.**

This is a far subtler spiritual danger. A person may eagerly approach a new passage, a new interpretation, or a new teaching because novelty stimulates the mind. But once he has studied something, he may feel that returning to it is unnecessary. "I already know this," he thinks. His ear is attracted to what is new but closes itself to what is familiar.

Yet Torah is not mastered merely by encountering it once. Torah must be reviewed, repeated, reconsidered, and heard again. What was understood intellectually yesterday may need to descend into the heart today. A verse that appeared simple in one season of life may reveal an entirely different depth in another. Repetition transforms information into memory, memory into understanding, and understanding into character. The purpose of Torah study is therefore not simply to encounter something one has never heard before, but to allow what one has heard to become part of who one is.

The Gra sees a remarkable measure-for-measure correspondence in prayer. The person who refuses to repeat Torah nevertheless comes before YHWH each day and repeats many of the same prayers. He asks again for wisdom, forgiveness, healing, provision, redemption, and peace. His words are familiar because human dependence upon YHWH is continually renewed.

If repetition makes Torah unworthy of his attention, why should repetition make his own prayer worthy of YHWH's attention? The lesson is penetrating. One who says of Torah, **"I have heard this already,"** should consider how often Heaven could say the same concerning his prayers. Yet YHWH continues to hear.

Therefore, the repeated words of Torah should never be treated as stale simply because they are familiar. Just as yesterday's prayer does not remove today's need to pray, yesterday's Torah study does not remove today's need to hear Torah again. The words may remain the same, but the listener has changed.

A Daily Bread

בייה

This gives new force to Moshe's opening cry in Ha'azinu: **"Give ear."** Moshe is addressing a people who have already heard Torah. They stood at Sinai. They received commandments. They listened to Moshe teach them throughout the wilderness. Devarim itself consists largely of Torah they had encountered before. Yet at the end of Moshe's life, the command remains the same: **Listen again.**

The spiritual ear must never conclude that it has heard enough.

The Midrash, Maharal, and Gra therefore converge upon a single principle. The ear represents our willingness to receive direction from beyond ourselves. Prayer is our speech directed toward YHWH; Torah is YHWH's instruction directed toward us. A healthy spiritual life requires both. We speak, but we must also listen. We ask, but we must also receive instruction. We desire that YHWH hear our repeated prayers, and therefore we must be willing to hear His Torah repeatedly.

This is perhaps one of the deepest lessons hidden within the first words of Ha'azinu. Moshe does not begin by saying merely, **"I will speak."** He first says, **"Give ear."** Before words can transform a life, there must be an ear willing to receive them.

Thus Yishayahu's invitation expresses the matter beautifully: **"Incline your ear and come to Me; listen, and your soul shall live."** The path toward life begins with an inclined ear. To hear Torah is to allow YHWH to correct our desires, reorder our priorities, and teach us what our blessings are for. And when we return to Torah again and again—even to words we think we already know—we discover that repetition is not merely reviewing what we learned yesterday. It is allowing eternal words to speak anew to the person we have become today.

Shalom.