

Torah Table Talk
Holiness, Help, Happiness
 Parshat Ha'azinu
 Deuteronomy 32/ 2 Samuel 22:1- 55



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt
 in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.
 "He was the perfect child."*

Today's Haftorah contains a song of victory and thanksgiving. Looking back at his career, King David gives thanks for God's constant protection in times of distress and attack. David depicts God as a mighty warrior and a sheltering rock. In powerful images he speaks of how God saved him when he was under attack. God is not only a sheltering rock; God also "thunders forth from heaven and He lets loose bolts and scatters them." This imagery places God both in heaven and on earth.

Like Parshat Ha'azinu, the chapter from the book of Samuel is poet in style and nature. The two poems contain similar images and metaphors in the way God is described. But the similarities end there. While Moses speaks on behalf of the entire nation, David offers a deeply personal hymn of homage in his poem. In Deuteronomy God requites sinners with vengeance and doom. In Samuel, David speaks about God's beneficence and kindness which results from his faithful obedience to God's commandments. Divine vengeance is against the enemies of King David and not against the nation.

This Haftorah is also read on the seventh day of Passover. For those who may have missed it, here is some of the sources on the final verse of the Haftorah which also appears in the book of Psalms and in the Birkat HaMazon.

2 Samuel 22:51

A tower of victory to His king, the one who deals graciously with His anointed, with David and his offspring ever more.

Michael Fishbane: Commentary on the Haftorah

Hebrew: *migdol y'shuot*. As usual this translation as read (*keri*). Meanwhile the text as written (*ketiv*) preserves the first word as a verb, *magdil*, yielding "He accords wondrous victories" (as in Psalms 18:51). The image of God as a tower is not out of keeping with the song, yet the verb better matches the next part of the verse. Both *keri* and *ketiv* versions are preserved liturgically, at the close of the full grace after meals. The *ketiv* is recited weekdays. The *keri*, on Shabbat and holidays.

Note: there are many words in the Biblical text which are preserved in two forms: they are written one way (ketiv) but pronounced another (keri). This may be a product of an error or a variant tradition which was passed on in the transmission of the Biblical text.

Midrash Tehilim 18:36

In the book of Samuel it is said, "God . . . is the mighty tower (*migdol*) of deliverance for His king" (2 Sam. 22:51), while the parallel verse in Psalms, taken literally, reads: "Mightily He enlarges (*magdil*) deliverance for His king" (Ps. 18:51). "This means," R. Yudan said, "that deliverance will come to this people not all at once, but little by little." Can "mightily He enlarges" be understood in any way except that deliverance for Israel will gradually grow larger and larger (*mitgaddelah*)? The children of Israel now live in the midst of great troubles, and if deliverance were to come all at once, they would be unable to bear such great deliverance. . . Hence, it will come little by little and will be enlarged gradually for Israel.

Reuven Hammer Or Hadash A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom

There are however, two readings of the first word of the verse, It is either *migdol* (a tower) or *magdil* (He magnifies). The later (from Psalms) is used on weekdays; the former (from 2 Samuel) is used on Sabbath and festivals. The reason is not clear. It may simply be the desire to use both readings. The active verb, *magdil* (He magnifies), is used on weekdays and the passive *migdol* is used on Shabbat, when no work is done. It has also been suggested that the Hebrew abbreviation for 2 Samuel (*Sh-B*) was mistaken for an abbreviation for Shabbat, leading to this custom.

Arye Leb Gordon Iyyun Tefillah on the Siddur

(Why do we use *magdil* on weekdays and *migdol* on Shabbat and holidays?) Weekdays are more like exile so we pray that God will increase our deliverance; deliverance is not complete yet. We ask that God will increase our salvation. Shabbat, on the other hand, is more like the messianic era when salvation will be complete; it is, therefore, described as a tower since all of our needs have been completed and provided like a great tower of protection.

Maimonides: Thirteen Principles of Faith (*Ani Ma'amin*)

I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah (*mashi'ach*), and even though he may delay, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the reasons given for the different versions of the Birkat *Hamazon* for holidays and weekdays? What other reasons can you think of for the differences between *migdol* and *magdil*? Do you prefer one text over the other? If so why?
2. It may be that both of these version of the text were included in the Birkat *Hamazon* simply to account for the variety of different traditions. Consider for instance the fact that there are two versions of the Modim prayer which we recite in the Amida and two different versions of the final blessing of the Amida, *Sim Shalom* and *Shalom Rav*. What can the inclusion of these variants teach us about the importance of diversity and pluralism? It is important to make room for all varieties?
3. The verse in Psalms and 2 Samuel speaks of *mishicho*, God anointed one. Who is this verse referring to in its original context and who do you think we are referring to when we use this expression in the Birkat *HaMazon*? How do you account for the difference in understanding?
4. Notice that some translations translate the word *yeshuot* as victories while others translate the word as salvation. What is the difference between these two translations – how are they different from and similar to one another?
5. Have there been times when you have thought of God as a tower of strength in your life? When and why? Have you ever thought of God as one who “accords salvation?” What do you think the difference is between these two expressions?
6. How do you understand the idea of the Messiah in Judaism? Do you think of the Messiah as a person, a period or an idea? What difference does it make?

Torah Table Talk

is a weekly e-publication of Rabbi Mark B Greenspan sponsored by the Oceanside Jewish Center on Long Island, New York. If you would like to subscribe to Torah Table Talk please send an e-mail to Tabletalk@oceansidejc.org. To remove your address from this list, send a blank email to tabletalk-unsubscribe@oceansidejc.org. To see an archive of sermons and TTT go to <http://www.oceansidejc.org/rebmark/RabbiGreenspan.html>

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***

See other Torah Table Talks online at
www.oceansidejc.org