

Ha'azinu: Heaven and Earth and Connecting the End of Torah to the Beginning
Rabbi Eliot Malomet September 18, 2026 7 Tishrei 5787 Shabbat Shuvah

We find ourselves near the end of the Torah. But the first words of this parasha take us back to the beginning. When we read the words...

הָאָזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבְּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי פִי.
*Give ear, O heavens, that I may speak,
 hear, O earth, the utterance of my mouth.*

it is hard not to recall...

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ is a very common word pair in the Bible.¹ But the fact that it occurs at the beginning and the end of the Torah is probably not a coincidence. When the end of a text or a story hearkens back to the beginning, we get a feeling of satisfaction as if we are tying a bow and putting everything together neatly in a proper narrative box. The technical term for this is *inclusio*, of which there are many examples in the Bible.² Are there any other verbal connections between end of the Torah and the beginning? Indeed. Take a look:

<i>Ha'azinu - Deut. 32</i> End of Torah	<i>Bereishit - Gen. 1</i> Beginning of Torah
כַּשֵּׁעִירִים עָלֵי דָשָׁא וְכַרְבִּיבִים עָלֵי עֵשֶׂב. <i>Like droplets on herb-yielding seed, like showers on grass.</i> (v. 2)	וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִבְרָא הָאָרֶץ וְתֹבֵצָה הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֵשֶׂב <i>And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, herb-yielding seed... And the earth brought forth grass, herb-yielding seed after its kind...</i> (v. 11-12)
וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר וּבְתֵהוּ יָלַל יִשְׁמֹן <i>He found him in a wilderness land, in chaos.</i> (v. 10)	וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוּ וְנָחָה <i>Now the earth was chaos and confusion.</i> (v.2)
כְּנֶשֶׁר יְעִיר קִנּוּ עַל גּוֹזְלָיו וְרָחַף <i>Like an eagle protecting its nest, over its young-birds hovering</i> (v. 12).	וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת <i>And a wind from God hovered over the surface of the waters.</i> (v. 2)

Richard Elliott Friedman makes the compelling claim that these little hints deliver a big message: *What does this mean — that instead of directing us forward to Joshua, Moses' song directs us back to the beginning, to Parashat Bereishit? It implies: Start over. Read the Torah again. And when you arrive back to this point in a year (or three), start over and read it again. And when we've read it many times, and we've become clearer and clearer about our past, then, like God (imitatio Dei), we'll be better equipped to see what our future will be.*³ How the Torah became a book is a great question. Friedman himself has made significant contributions to the conversation with his bestseller, *Who Wrote the Bible?*⁴ The rabbis were the ones who serialized the Torah into a set of weekly portions. This was arguably, the single most important innovation to shape the spiritual life of the Jewish people.⁵ In the Babylonian tradition, the Torah was to be completed in a year. In the tradition of the Land of Israel, it was to be completed in three years, giving rise respectively, to the annual and triennial cycles. The Babylonian tradition emerged as the normative tradition in Judaism (thank God!), which means that all of us could cite our ages by the number of Torah cycles we have experienced - the way we note the age of a tree by counting its rings. We take this for granted, but we cannot overstate the religious impact of this innovation. It meant that the entire Jewish world would literally be "on the same page" (or the same section of the Torah scroll) every week, notwithstanding some minor discrepancies between the Israel and Diaspora calendars. Every week, all Jews throughout the world are engaged in the same conversation. Another consequence of an annualized reading is a celebration - Simchat Torah - the day when we commemorate the completion and the restarting of the annual reading. This also impacts the way we interpret the Torah. *We spend a lot of time and interpretive energy connecting the sequence of stories and concepts from week to week. It is only natural that we also make textual and thematic connections between the end of the Torah*

¹ Perhaps most familiar to us from Psalm 121:2, which we have been reciting daily: **עֲזָרִי יָמֵם ה' עֹשֶׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ. My help comes from the Lord, creator of heaven and earth.**

² Such as the life of Abraham. It starts and ends with the phrase, **לֶךְ-לָךְ-Go forth**. He **goes forth** migrating from his birthplace to Canaan, and he **goes forth** when he takes Isaac to Moriah for a sacrifice. The *inclusio* of the migration and the Akedah function as two bookends for his life.

³ See the REF's article, **Does the Torah End with "The End"?** at TheTorah.com.

⁴ The first edition came out in 1987. He updated it in 1997 and then came out with a third edition in 2019. At this rate, we can expect another edition perhaps by the end of the decade!

⁵ In the last century alone, several additional reading cycles have been incorporated into the spiritual and cultural life of the Jewish people. We are presently in the last 9 months of the roughly 7.5 year **Daf Yomi** cycle - the daily study of a page of Talmud. It is scheduled to conclude on June 7, 2027. The **929 Project** in Israel began in 2014. It advocates the daily study of a chapter of the Tanakh (there are 929 chapters) with completions approximately every 3.5 years. There are serialized projects for the daily study of the Mishnah, Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, and for Chabad Hasidim, the study of the Tanya, the seminal work of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the movement's founder. The daily study of the Tanya also takes a year, starting and finishing on 19 Kislev, The "Rosh Hashanah of Hasidism" the day that R. Shneur Zalman was liberated from a Czarist prison in 1798.

7 וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת הֵם הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ הָרְאוּשִׁימִים הַנִּזְכָּרִים
בְּבִרְאשִׁית, כִּי הֵם יִבְאוּ בְּבְרִית עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל.