

HAAZINU 1993
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In the Torah portion Haazinu we have Moshe's last poem to the Jewish people. Moshe in his final address ended his address with a poem. This almost all the rabbinic authorities say is an admonition. Moshe warned the Jewish people that when things are going to go bad they should read this poem and they would then understand why things are going bad with them and they will repent and things will get better. The Ramban, on the other hand, considers this poem not an admonition but a detailed blueprint of the future of the Jewish people, that this poem starts by talking about the origins of the Jewish people and ends up by telling all their history. In fact, if we read this Torah portion carefully we can see that it speaks about events which seem to be occurring in our day. It talks about gathering the Jewish people in the land of Israel. It also talks about the Holocaust when it says, "I thought I would make an end of them or make their memory cease from among men were it not that I dreaded the enemy's provocation that their adversaries should think wrongly, lest they should say our hand is exalted and not the Lord hath wrought all this." In other words, G-d was going to make an end of the Jewish people but He thought better of it so that the enemies of the Jewish people and His own enemies should not gloat because G-d's name is inextricably tied up with the Jewish people. Hitler, himself, said that. He said, "I hate that semitic G-d with His thou shalt nots and thou shalt." We know that G-d, according to this poem, is going to redeem the Jewish people for the sake of His name, not necessarily because the Jewish people had done Teshuva but that He was going to save the Jewish people so that His name should not be desecrated among the peoples. Afterwards it ends by saying, "Single out, o ye nations of His people, for He doth avenge the blood of His servants and hath rendered vengeance to His adversaries and does make expiation for the land of His people."

Even today there are many who cannot understand why our generation was the one who was privileged to see the rebirth of the State of Israel. What great merit did we have that we should see the ingathering of the exiles in our own day and the rebirth of the State of Israel? In fact, some people on the ultra orthodox

right have a great deal of trouble theologically with the State of Israel because, after all, the State of Israel was not brought into being by religiously observant Jews. Yes, Ben Gurion went to yeshiva and many of the early leaders of the Jewish people were actually Talmudic scholars, but they, themselves, were not personally observant 100%, and how come G-d used people who, themselves, were not 100% observant to bring about the redemption of the Jewish people? They have great difficulty with this, so there is an ambivalent attitude toward the State of Israel. They are in the government, out of the government, do not want their children to serve in the army, sometimes have them serve in the army, and even though they have, so to speak, left wing views as to the validity of the State of Israel religiously they still in many political areas have right wing views. The ultra orthodox started a city called Emanuel on the West Bank, but they are having difficulty dealing with this because they cannot understand what merit do we have, especially the leaders of the State of Israel, in order to bring about the redemption of the Jewish people in this time of history? Of course, they forget that Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest redeemer of the Jewish people who redeemed us out of Egypt, of course, with G-d's help, was a person who never suffered a day of slavery, who intermarried, who even according to the Medrash had agreed to raise his son as a gentile, yet, he was chosen to redeem the Jewish people. Who G-d chooses to redeem the Jewish people is His business, not our business. Of course, the Mizrahi and modern orthodox have always supported Israel 100% without any ambivalence, but the question still remains, what is it that caused our generation to be the one who was found worthy to redeem the Jewish people?

According to certain rabbis there is a Medrash which explains this. According to this Medrash as soon as the Jewish people were exiled from Israel Abraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov, and Moshe each came before G-d pleading for the Jewish people. Abraham came before G-d and said, "G-d, you have to save the Jewish people. I was willing to throw myself into the fiery furnace of Nimrod for You. You have

to save the Jewish people." G-d said, "That is very nice, Abraham, but you go sit down." Then Yitzchak came forward and said, "I was willing to be bound to the Jewish people, to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah on the Akedah." G-d said, "That is true, Yitzchak, but go sit down." Then Yaacov said, "I was willing to fight for the Jewish people. I was willing to confront my brother Esau and fight him and risk my life." G-d said, "That is true, Yaacov, but you go sit down, too." Then Moshe Rabbeinu came forward and he said, "G-d, I was willing to blot my name out from Your book just so YOU would save the Jewish people after the sin of the golden calf and the sin of their not wanting to enter the land of Israel. I was willing to sacrifice everything for the Jewish people. Forgive the Jewish people." G-d said, "That is true, Moshe, but go sit down." Then Rachel came before G-d and she said, "I was willing to sacrifice even my love, Yaacov, so I should not embarrass my sister, Leah." According to some rabbis Rachel and Leah were actually twins and it was very difficult in twilight to recognize one from the other because the only difference was their eyes. Leah's eyes were weaker and more watery, I suppose, than Rachel's eyes, so Rachel and Yaacov had devised a scheme whereby Rachel would give Yaacov different signals because she knew her father and knew that he may want to trick Yaacov if not with Leah with another girl, so she gave him signals so that Yaacov would know that this was really her. After all, they were heavily veiled, but then when the wedding day came and Rachel saw that it was her sister Leah who was coming to be brought to Yaacov she just could not stand to have her sister embarrassed so much. It would ruin her. She would probably never get married, so she gave her sister her signals, knowing full well that it may mean that she would never be able to marry Yaacov, her love, and G-d said, to her, "Because you were willing to sacrifice for your sister, Leah, so she should not be embarrassed because you felt her pain, therefore, I will redeem the Jewish people." The rabbis say that the reason why our generation is worthy is that after World War Two when the 100,000, 200,000 or maybe 250,000

d.p.s were remnants of Jewry who were people who had just come out of the concentration camps who were once again herded into d.p. camps and once again treated in a wretched fashion. Here were people who had suffered so much that they were treated in such a terrible fashion that when the Jews of Israel saw this and they saw how we were once again shamed, how we were once again put into cages, although this time we were not sent to gas chambers that they said, "Enough of this shame," although under the British they had a good life. Economically they were doing very well. They said they had to have a state. We have to redeem the honor of the Jewish people. We cannot stand that our people should be so humiliated and treated in such a shameful fashion, so they were willing to risk their lives to start a state, and that was the great merit of our generation. As you know, not everyone was willing to do this. Ben Gurion won with a very slim majority. The left wingers in those days wanted a bi-national state. They did not want to have Israel as an independent state, so we see from here that it was the willingness of the Jewish people in Israel to make sure that the shame of having these survivors still lingering in camps two and three years after the Second World War did not go on. In fact, many times when I teach my Hebrew class I pose a question, and almost always they get it wrong. The question that I pose to them is, if a little old lady came up to you in the streets and asked you for \$10 and out of the goodness of your heart and without any hesitation and with a smile you give her your \$10, is this the greatest mitzvah? The greatest mitzvah is when this little old lady comes and asks for \$10 and you reach into your pocket but you really do not want to reach into your pocket. You really do not want to give her the \$10 but you still have a smile on your face and she does not know about any of inner turmoil going on and you, though, give her the \$10 because this was the way that you were taught. You remember the days of old. You remember the teachings of your fathers and you do it because it is the right thing to do. What is the greater mitzvah? When you did it with a full heart giving her the \$10, or when you struggled inwardly

with yourself and finally gave her the \$10? Almost always the young people in the class say, "Oh, when you gave it with a full heart it is a great mitzvah," but that is not so. The greater mitzvah is when you do it even when you do not really feel like doing it, but that because you remember the lessons of Passover, you are sensitive to the pain of the person in front of you that you go and do it, that is the greater mitzvah. The baby is crying in the middle of the night. You really do not want to get up. You do not want to take care of that baby, but you have to. You know it is the right thing to do. You are sensitive to the needs of the baby. Or you are a doctor and you just came home when the phone rings and you have to go out again. You really do not want to go out again. Or you are a rabbi and it is the first time you sat down to watch a ballgame for 4 years and someone calls and says, "Rabbi, I have to see you right away." If you are a good rabbi, of course, you will go. We see from this that the greatest mitzvah is not the mitzvah of doing something because you feel like doing it but doing it because you know you have to do it. You know that you cannot stand to see the pain of someone else because you know that this is the way you have to act in order to be a human being. Unfortunately, there are many couples that come to me with different marital problems. One of the problems is the husband or wife will say, "This person is not doing with their full heart and I don't understand why they can't do it with a full heart and I just don't like it." I ask, "Is the person doing it? Is your wife going to the ballgame with you even though you know she does not like ballgames? Are you going to the ballet with her even though you know she knows you do not like the ballet? Are you doing things for each other even though you know that the other person really does not want to do it?" They say yes, so I say they should be happy because that is the essence of marriage, to compromise, to do things for somebody else even though you do not feel like doing it. This is what you should be doing. That is what it means when you love somebody. When you love somebody many times you do things

that you do not feel like doing but you know that the other person likes those things so, therefore, you are trying to please them. Why do you want a full heart for? It is a greater sign of love that this person is willing to do it for you even though they really do not feel like doing it. That, my friends, is, of course, what we all have to recognize. If we see another person's pain, if we are sensitive to another person's need we will respond, and if we will respond then we will truly do a great mitzvah, and then we will truly be worthy of redemption and the coming of the Mashiach.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a boy who was doing his homework. He asked his father if he would help him with his homework. The father said he did not think that would be right. The son looked at the father and said, "Dad, why don't you try anyway? It might be right." So we all should remember to be sensitive to other people's needs. We should always try to help, and we should remember that the greater mitzvah really is to do something when you do not feel 100% like doing it but you know it is the right thing to do and you know you have to satisfy another person's needs. You know you have to be sensitive to their pain. Let us all, because we are sensitive to the pain of others, be truly worthy of seeing the coming of the Mashiach quickly in our day. Amen.