

HAAZINU 1994
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In the Torah portion Haazinu we have Moshe's farewell poem to the Jewish people. In it he briefly reviews the history of the Jewish people and he mentions the fact that the Jewish people are going to desert G-d, that when troubles come upon them if they read this poem they will return to G-d and the enemies of the Jewish people will get their comeuppance. We also learn here many expressions that have made their way into the English language like apple of the eye, old as the hills, the howling desert, and so forth because this poem influenced greatly the development of English literature. One of the lines it mentions here is, "Remember the days of old. Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you."

In Judaism there are actually 3 covenants. The first covenant G-d made with all humanity when He made it with Noah, and the sign of that covenant is the rainbow. The second covenant is the covenant that G-d made with Abraham and the sign of that covenant is the Bris Milah, the circumcision. The third covenant G-d made with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai and He confirmed it again at the Plains of Moab and in that covenant, of course, we learn how to implement the ideals of Judaism. We learned about all the mitzvahs. The question is often asked, what it is that was unique and special about the first covenant that the Jewish people had to with G-d that was made with Abraham? The answer is that although there were not any particular mitzvahs of G-d in that covenant, that covenant allows us to feel like Jews because He gives us Jewish ideals. Abraham was given the mission to bring G-d's message to the whole world, to make sure that the whole world would eventually live in peace and dignity with brotherhood and love and compassion reigning supreme. That is why we learn in the first book of Bereishis, Genesis, after all, why should we even read that book? That book has no mitzvahs in it, and we do not even have any of the mitzvahs until shortly before the exodus from Egypt, so why should we learn the first book of the Bible and part of the second book of the Bible, Shemos, or Exodus? The answer is because we have to learn how to feel like a Jew. The

patriarchs allowed us to feel like a Jew. At Mount Sinai we learned how to implement Jewish ideals through Jewish means. That is what the mitzvahs are. In our day and age almost all the world has accepted Jewish ideals. They are even emblazoned on the building of the United Nations, how from the words of Isaiah the nations are going to beat their swords into ploughshares, etc. Unfortunately, many of the nations of the world use means which are antithetical to Jewish ideals. They do not realize that the means in order to achieve the ideals are also very, very important. There is a great Jewish role to still be played in the world because we must utilize Jewish means in order to implement Jewish ideals, Jewish goals otherwise we will not be able to do it. That's why many times the nations of the world look at the Jewish people and say, "Why don't you come along with us? We have already accepted your ideals. Why don't you join us now?" The answer is, of course, that they have not adopted our means and so, therefore, since they have not adopted our means many of the means being used to implement our Jewish ideals are antithetical to these ideals. They will not cause these ideals to be realized in practice. That is what this sentence is talking about when it says, "Remember the days of old. Understand the years of every generation. Ask your father and he will tell you." Your father is the commandments on Mount Sinai. "Ask your elders and they will talk to you." Your elders are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You know that there are actually 4 distinct types of Jewish memory. We Jews remember not just so we should remember but we remember so that we should be able to use what we remember in order to achieve the Jewish future, the future when the whole world will be at peace, when the world will have learned the lessons of Judaism and will know brotherhood and love and compassion and kindness. Therefore, we are supposed to remember, remember so that we can use what we remember to implement the ideals of our religion in the future. There are 4 different Jewish memories. One is a negative memory. There are many Jews who remember all the persecutions and they do not want to be Jews anymore because they do not want to be hounded

persecuted so they drop off. There are other Jews who drop out also with negative memories because they feel that maybe we Jewish people deserve all these terrible things that have happened to us, otherwise why would they have happened to us? But most Jews know that this is not so and one of the reasons why Jewish history, which is the second Jewish memory, is so popular is because they teach us that we are just as good as anybody else. Jewish memories show that Jews have made such wonderful contributions to the world. We have nothing to be ashamed of. The only problem with this type of Jewish memory is that it just tells you that you are as good as everybody else. It does not tell you that you should continue to be Jewish. There are many Jews, especially nationalistic Jews, who feel that they are just as good as everybody else and since they are just as good as everybody else they intermarry and assimilate into other cultures. They have nothing to be ashamed of. They can stand on their own with any other group. Then you have the third type of memory which is a didactic memory, a memory which teaches the Jewish people about the different folkways and mitzvahs and observances of the Jewish people but it does not tie it in with the Jewish mission. What it does is teaches us about different Jewish customs and ceremonies and folkways but it does not show that these things are really essential for the world. It does not show that these are the means that are necessary in order to achieve Jewish goals. Unfortunately, that is how a lot of our Hebrew school teaching is today where people are taught a snatch of Hebrew and Jewish history and the Tenach and even the Gemorah but it is not really tied in. It is not experiential. The fourth memory is experiential which means that we experience in our own being that we know that being Jewish is important not only for ourselves but also for the world. We know more than just facts. We cover the first covenant as well as the second covenant. That's why it mentions over here, too, when it says, "When the most high gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated children and men He said, 'The borders of the people is according to the number of the children of Israel for the portion of the Lord is His people,

Jacob the light of his inheritance." In other words, that the Jewish people have a unique and special mission and that observing the mitzvahs and observing the commandments allows us to fulfill our mission. These are not just folkways or mores or ways of Jewish expression. These are an integral part of the way we Jews are going to try to achieve Jewish ideals in the world. Let us all hope and pray that we will give our children the idea that there are two covenants: the covenant of Abraham and the covenant at Sinai and we will show how they are connected and that they will want to be Jews and will continue to be Jews until the Mashiach comes quickly in our day.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man named Sam who was taking a class in math. The teacher asked him, "Sam, if you had \$2 and you asked your friend Gary for \$4, how much money would you have?" Sam replied, "Well, if I had \$2 and asked my friend Gary for \$4, I'd have \$2." The teacher said, "Sam, you don't understand math," and Sam replied, "Teacher, you don't understand my friend Gary." When it comes to life it is not just isolated facts that are important. Facts must be tied together to a vision. It is Abraham's vision that is all inclusive and at Sinai we learned how to implement the vision. Let us all hope and pray that all of us Jews throughout the world will want to implement Abraham's vision using the means of Sinai so the world will quickly be redeemed and the Mashiach will come. Amen.