

HAAZINU 1995
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In the Torah portion Haazinu we have Moshe's last poem to the Jewish people. In it he reviews Jewish history. He tells the Jewish people how they are going to desert G-d and how they are going to be punished, but how G-d is still going to bring them back to the land of Israel and that any time they get into trouble they should read this poem because this poem will explain to them why things are happening to them and give them hope for the future. The poem starts out with the words, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak and let the land listen to the words of my mouth." This is the exact opposite of what Isaiah said in his statement where he said, "Oh, hear, o earth, and listen heavens." In other words, he reversed it. What is the difference between Isaiah and Moshe Rabbeinu?

Moshe Rabbeinu gave the Jewish people ideals. He wanted also to give them a land but he could not give them a land. He said, "Give ear to the heavens." Moshe Rabbeinu fleshed out the covenant that was originally given to Avraham Oveinu. We all know that we Jewish people have two covenants. We have the covenant that was given to all mankind by G-d to Noah. Therefore, we believe that all human beings are in a covenantal relationships with G-d. That is why we do not feel compelled to convert everybody to our religion because they still have a way to G-d. It is a difficult road to G-d but they still have a way to G-d. We feel, though, that we have a special covenant in addition to that covenant, the covenant that was given to Abraham, and our covenant is to be G-d's partner in bringing redemption to the world, to help G-d perfect the world. This covenant was fleshed out at Mount Sinai when Moshe Rabbeinu brought down the Torah to us so, therefore, this covenant was explained and Moshe Rabbeinu gave us the values in order to implement the covenant. He gave us the means in order to implement the covenant. He gave us a view of life, meaning to life which has persisted to this day. He also wanted to give us the land but he could not. They say that the difference between David Ben Gurion and Moshe Rabbeinu was David Ben Gurion wanted to give the Jewish people values and meaning to life but all he could give them was the

land. Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, gave the Jewish people values, gave the people a way of life although he was not able to give them a land. This poem demonstrates that the Jewish people have a land but they desert the values that Moshe Rabbeinu gave them, if they desert the Torah then they will be expelled from the land. They will not be able to keep the land.

The question still remains, why is it that Isaiah said, "Give ear, o earth," and then he said, "Listen, o heaven." We all know that in addition to ideals, in addition to Torah, we have to have practical realities. Isaiah lived during the time of King Cheeskeahu, a very righteous king who pushed Jewish education, so much so the rabbis say that every child in Israel knew all the laws of Judaism, even the intricate laws of ritual purity. He stressed Torah and ideals very much, but you also have to live in the real world, too. He felt that he did not have to participate so much in the real world. He did it for two reasons, one of which was because he wanted to concentrate on Torah, but the second reason was he thought that because of the prophetic nature of his own character that he was going to produce an evil son. In fact, the Tenach tells us that Cheeskeahu grew deathly ill, almost on the verge of death when he was visited by Isaiah, and Isaiah told him, "What's the matter with you? Why don't you get married like everybody else is supposed to get married?" He said, "I can't get married because I have a prophetic premonition that if I get married my son is going to turn out evil and I don't want to produce an evil son." Isaiah said that was not his business, that he was just to produce children and give them the best Jewish education he could and then it was up to them to follow in G-d's path. Isaiah went on to say, "And I will tell you what I will even do. I will even give you my daughter to marry," and that is exactly what happened. Cheeskeahu got well and married the daughter of Isaiah, according to this Medrash, and they had a son. The son turned out to be a very wicked king. His name was Menashe and he ruled for over 60 years. IN fact, in the Gemora Sanhedrin he said that Menashe was one of those people

who did not deserve the world to come. Later they relented and said since he did Teshuva he probably will get the world to come, but why did Menashe act the way he did? Menashe acted the way he did because he was under terrible pressure from Assyria. Assyria had just destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. It was the year 721 and he was besieging the city of Jerusalem. It looked hopeless but Yeeshayu said you have to fight. The Jewish people have to be preserved. You cannot give up even though Cheeskeeahu wanted to concentrate on Torah, so Cheeskeeahu fought and a miracle happened. The army of Sanchered for some reason disbanded and fled. It was even recorded in the annals of Egyptian history as the day of the mouse. What the mice had to do with it, nobody is quite sure.

Either there was a constellation in the sky similar to a mouse or mice attacked the camp. Sanchered lost his battle and went back home to Assyria he was actually assassinated by his own children who blamed him for not conquering Judah, but because Cheeskeeahu held out and fought Judah was able to last for another 150 years, so we see that as Isaiah said, it is not just enough to have values; you have to be willing to fight for these values. Therefore, he stressed give ear to the heavens. It also must be pointed out that Menashe, according to the Medrash, ended up by killing even his own grandfather, Yeeshayu because he protested and felt that Menashe was making too many concessions to the Assyrians. Menashe's job was to make sure Israel could stay independent and because he was under such terrible pressure from the Assyrians he had to let in the idol worship and do other things to placate them. He was successful. He preserved the Jewish state and the Jewish people but he allowed a lot of evil influences in. At the end of his life he did do Teshuva but we see from this that many times we are under terrible pressure and many times it is difficult to know what to do. In fact, what the rabbis in the Talmud were saying that Menashe would not be worthy of the world to come and other rabbis said, what are you talking about? If you had lived in the times of Menashe you would have picked up your skirts and togas and would

have run after him. In Jewish life we must listen to the heavens and we also have to take account of the earth, but the most important thing, Moshe Rabbeinu was right, is listening to our values. We see that in America today our values are being called into question. Jews do not feel that it is important to be Jews. As I mentioned earlier in my Rosh Hashonna speeches that we Jews have to feel that we are Jews for the world, to redeem the world. Unless we feel that it is necessary for the world for us to be Jews then we will stop being Jews, and if we stop being Jews then we will quickly assimilate if we do not continue listening to the heavens. In fact, I remember when the Hungarian Jews came over in 1956 after the Hungarian Revolution, I remember that they all had marks on their arms and had lived through communism. These were poor people and in many respects they did some harm to orthodoxy because they brought certain ways from eastern Europe which are not fitting to America, but, on the other hand, they saved Jews in America because in spite of their poverty, in spite of the fact that they came with nothing, they insisted their children receive a good Jewish education. They had lived through the Holocaust. They all had numbers on their arms. They have lived through communism and they saw what happened when the world deserts Jewish values. They were determined that their children were going to have Jewish values and they filled yeshivas and started schools and gave the orthodoxy a big push which it still has even to this day. It is true that there are certain people who, because of the Holocaust, lost faith in G-d, but the truth of the matter is that most of the people who actually lived through the Holocaust believe in G-d. Their percentage is so much higher than Jews who did not live through the Holocaust. All the Chassidim in Brooklyn, most of them have numbers on their arms, and the same thing goes for Naysharim. The Jewish people must always remember that they were chosen to create redemption in the world, that they are partners with G-d in redemption. If we forget that, then we are going to be destroyed. That is exactly what the problem is today with some people in Israel. Some people

in Israel want Israel to just be a normal nation. If it is a normal nation it will disappear. In fact, that is what the Arab newspapers are saying right now. They are saying, all right, maybe we won't defeat Israel militarily but we will defeat them culturally slowly by slowly because the Jews will tire of being Jews and we will infiltrate them culturally and take them over. In fact, I have a good friend, an Arab, in fact, I have several good friends who are Arabs, there are more Arabs in Houston than there are actually Jews, and this Arab told me that this treaty with the PLO and with Egypt and maybe with Syria and Jordan is because the Arabs have given up. All this bravado of Arafat in his last minute negotiations coming and starting and going out and going in is just to cover up the fact that they have really given up the fact of physically trying to destroy the Jewish people. I do not know if it is true or not. I hope it is true but I do know that Israel has to be careful because if Israel is only going to be a nation like any other nation they are going to lose all Jewish support in the United States. There would be a terrible cleavage between those Jews who want to be still Jews and those Jews who do not want to be Jews. In fact, what has happened now is that we see that the Jews of America only support Israel because of two reasons. One reason is that they see it as a shining light to the world, that it is going to help the world find completeness. It is going to bring redemption to the world and be a light unto the nations. The second reason why Jews in America support Israel is because it gives them pride. Jews for 2000 years had to shuffle and say yes sir and no sir even to people who had no education and who did not understand culture, people who did not understand intellectual things. That is what one of the curses that G-d says He is going to bring upon us. He says that since you have chosen gods who are not gods I am going to provoke you with nations who are not nations. We Jews for 2000 years when someone spit on us had to say, "Oh, it is raining out," or if someone slapped us on the face we had to thank them because they helped our toothache. We had to grovel and be excessively polite.

That's why in Israel today some of the people there act the exact opposite, not polite at all just to show that they do not have to grovel anymore. Unfortunately, what is going on now in the negotiations have given many Jews the feeling that Israel is once again groveling, groveling to get a treaty with the European Union, groveling before the Arabs, and that has caused many Jews to lose this appeal that they can hold Israel up as a model for which they want to aspire. Therefore, it is very important for the sake of the unity of world Jewry and for the sake of Israel's future security, too, that we remember what Moshe Rabbeinu told us in the Sedra, "Listen to the heavens." Make sure that you represent Jewish values. Make sure that you want to bring redemption to the world, that you just do not want to be a normal nation.

Today is also the Shabbos on which we are honoring our new members and I am so pleased that we have so many new members, 41 families have joined our shul in the past year. This, of course, is something that we are all very proud of. We are proud because we know that you have joined our shul because you want to preserve and further the Jewish idea that we need to help bring redemption to the world. I know that you know Jewish education is about. I know that you know what Judaism is about. Unfortunately, though many times when Jews say they need to have a Jewish school and teach Jewish things they do not know what to teach because they really do not believe anymore that Judaism is necessary for the redemption of the world. We are glad that you have joined us on this adventure and we hope that you will be with us for many, many years.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a husband and wife who came to shul. Afterwards at the kiddush the wife looked at the husband and said, "Did you see the spot on the rabbi's tie?" The husband said he didn't see it. She said, "Did you see how Mr. Goldberg yelled at his children?" He said he didn't see that. She said, "Did you see that terrible stare that Mrs. Stein gave her husband?"

He said he didn't see it. She said, "Well, what good is shul for you?" In other words, shul is also a social place where we all get together. What good is shul doing you? It is also when we get together and enjoy each other's company. I hope that you will all come to the kiddush later on and we will all enjoy each other's company and we will all be together for many years. I hope and pray that with our working together to further Jewish ideals and with our working together as a group to make sure that our institutions are firm because if we have Jewish ideals we will build the institution, just as the Hungarian Jews did who were poor who believed in the ideals so they somehow built the institutions. If you do not believe in ideals you will never sacrifice for institutions, so that we will be together to make sure that these institutions are created, the heaven and the earth is created, so that we can further the Jewish ideals and that we will be together in friendship and share simchas and, unfortunately, if sorrows come we will be able to dilute the sorrows but that we will be together as an extended family and that we will be together to further Jewish ideals so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.