

S3.  
HAAZINU 1981  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Moshe Rabbeinu closes out his farewell speech to the people with a poem, a song. Judaism can only survive if there is a song, a dream, a goal. Moshe knew how the people would turn from G-d but if they would read this song they would understand what was happening to them and they would be able to return. The people would err because they would confuse what the real purposes of life should be. They would not realize that we are junior partners of G-d in creation and that it is our business to help Him perfect the world with all the talents and abilities we do have. We are to do our best. We are not independent masters of our own destiny as many people feel in America. We cannot do with our lives what we want to do. We must be moral and good people. There is no such thing as our talents. We are all given gifts by G-d. We did not determine whether we are smart or dumb. We are only the stewards of these gifts. We are supposed to use these gifts for good. We are not masters of our body. We most certainly have no right to die. We Jews are partners of G-d only in life, not in death. Only G-d kills. This is the same idea why we do not like to tamper with the body unnecessarily after death. Sure, it will decompose but that is G-d's doing not ours. Each of us is given certain gifts and even if we lose some of these gifts in life we still are an important personality. If G-d forbid we should lose a hand or foot we still are ourselves. If we cannot hear so well we still are important if we try our best. In fact, one of the greatest proofs that there is a G-d is where does inspiration come from? Ten equally trained scientists can work on a problem equally hard. One may get an inspiration and nine not. Where does this inspiration come from? According to the Kabala, G-d is constantly sending down His blessings, his Shefa to the world. It is up to us to pick it up. In fact, the Kabala says this is one of the main purposes of prayer, to bring G-d's blessings down to earth, to open ourselves to inspiration. That's why in this week's Torah portion it says Haazinu HaShamayeem V'a Dabairu, listen oh heavens and I will speak, and V'seshma Haoretz, and hear oh earth. We are urged to listen to the heavens, but in order to do that we must prepare ourselves here in earth. Listening to G-d's inspiration is like being in a shower with a record playing. You can barely grasp the notes. If you have rehearsed the tune maybe you can make it out. There is inspiration in the world for all of us. We just have to prepare ourselves and

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listen well. In order to receive scientific inspiration you must study science. In order to receive moral inspiration you must learn Torah. We are told that if we will prepare ourselves we will find answers to our personal problems, and to society's problems. We must listen to the heavens by preparing ourselves here on earth. The story is told of a group of Jews in Kansas City who were dedicating a Shul when the ceiling collapsed. Two of them perished and immediately went to heaven. G-d met them and said, "You are not expected for two weeks. I don't have room for you". He then called Satan and told him to put them up for two weeks. At the end of two days Satan called G-d very excited, "You have to get these Jews out of here. They are organizing a fund raising drive to air condition the place". There is inspiration out there. We can solve our problems if we will but listen.

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In the Torah portion HaAzinu we have Moshe's farewell song to the Jewish people. We all know how important a song, a dream is to everyone. With it you can endure everything. Without it the least little upset, the least little pain is too much to handle. We all know how much suffering and pain the immigrant generation endured. We call it sacrifice. They, of course, did it willingly. They wanted their children to get an education, to get ahead. Nothing was too hard for them. They saved and saved for their education. It was called Kischekegelt because they hardly ate anything beyond the basics so that their children could get an education. Today we see the same thing with the Vietnamese who are here. However, without a song, without a dream everything goes to pieces at the first problem. We see that today among people who seem to have everything. Moshe knew that the Jewish people needed a song in order to get through all the adversities that were in store for them. However, right at the end of this Torah portion we also learn again about Moshe's sin, how because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it he was denied entrance into the Land of Israel. Why should this have been so? Why should we learn about this again right next to the song? The Torah is written in paragraphs. It is not written in chronological order and there was no need to put this paragraph here. There seems to be no purpose by mentioning again Moshe's sin right by the song. When the Jewish people first left Egypt we learn in the Torah portion Beshalach how they were thirsting for water, how Moshe was told to take his staff and hit the rock. The word for rock there is Tzor. It means narrowness. The Jewish people had just come out of Egypt. They were slaves. They did not think they could do anything. They were very narrow. Moshe had to goad them and push them into doing anything. He had to take the staff which stands for Midos Tovos Hein, for the fact that they had good qualities and get them to use their good qualities. In the Torah portion Chukas where we learn how Moshe was commanded to speak to the rock, we have the expression for rock being Seleh, a pause or an interlude or to weigh or consider. The needs of the Jewish people were different now. They no longer were a slave generation. They were free men and women who knew how to act. Moshe now had to explain things to them, to let them weigh and evaluate things. His job was not to goad and push them. He had been successful.

He had rid the people of the slave mentality, but he was still trying to goad them. He was still using old means. That's why, I believe, we learn about Moshe's sin by the song of Israel. Moshe failed to realize that new means, new techniques were used to further and keep alive the Jewish song. The Jewish song is eternal, but the means that we use to implement it change in every generation. Many times the older generation does not realize this. They do not realize that they have been a success and that now new means are necessary. Many times we ask them why we have to do things a certain way and they tell you because they were always done this way. When you question them carefully, though, you find it was only done for the last 20 or 30 years this way after they had changed what the previous generation had done. We Jewish people have always been able to keep the song alive because every generation has re-evaluated our means and techniques for implementing it. Moshe was a great leader but his means were not fit for the new generation. Perhaps that is why Menachem Begin resigned, because he knows that his techniques and means are not what the next generation needs. The ability of the Jewish people to always evaluate their means is what has kept us alive. I am reminded of the story of how it happened that a Frechman had a great, great thirst. He then drank some wine to quench it. A Russian had a great, great thirst. He drank some vodka to quench it. A Scotsman had a great, great thirst. He took some scotch to quench it. A Jew had a great, great thirst. He went to a doctor to see if he had diabetes. Analysis of how to implement our dream has allowed us to live.

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This year in Ha'Azinu we read the Haphtorah of Shabbos Shuva. The Haphtorah in Shabbos Shuva speaks about "Shuva - returning". "Shuva Yisrael Adonoi Elechecha - Return, O Israel, unto the Lord your G-d - Kikoshalta Vanecha - Because you have stumbled in your sins." When it talks about people following G-d's right path, people turning back, usually the expression "Haleecha" is used, the expression of "walking", "going". In fact, that is even what the word "Halacha" means, to walk in the right path. "Vetzhadcheem Yale Chubon - And the righteous, they will walk in it." In other words, when it comes to doing Teshuva, to returning to G-d, we must walk, we must take action. Teshuva does not just mean fulfilling your potential, as I speak about many times. Teshuva does not just mean repenting for those sins you have done and being sorry for them. It also means to return to the source. Teshuva, it is true, means feeling sorry that you have not lived up to your potential, not that you have actively done anything wrong but that you have not answered all the challenges of life. In this Haphtorah the word "Teshuva" is not stressed, but the word "Shuva - returning to your source". Many of us are dissatisfied in life. Many of us are not happy in life because we have, so to speak, turned our back on the source of being. According to Judaism, each of us has a Neshoma, a soul. This soul is part of G-d and yearns for Devaikus, for union with G-d. It yearns to feel meaning and purpose in life, and when we sin we besmear our soul. We estrange ourselves, we alienate ourselves. We cause ourselves to feel depressed. I am not talking about biological depression, which is something else. Sometimes people don't have the right hormones and, therefore, feel depressed. I am talking about people who seem to have everything, but life has no meaning or spark for them. They feel they live in an alien world where they do not really belong. Many of these people actually seek death, if not openly and advertently, at least inadvertently. These people, in effect, are in perpetual mourning. The rabbis say that when a person sins he puts up an iron fence between himself and G-d. He becomes like a mourner. He loses contact with the source of his being, and just as when one loses a loved one, he feels terribly depressed and alone. When a person sins he feels this feeling of mourning, nothing is good, nothing is right. He feels alone.

The rabbis tell us that when G-d created the world everything was G-d, so how could He create the world? He did it by retracting, called "Simsun", and leaving a little piece of Himself in everything. When we do deeds of loving kindness we release these pieces of G-d, and we are able to come close to Him and human beings. In this Haphtorah we learn something very strange. We learn it says, "Altir U'B'Hamos Sedai - Don't be afraid, animals of the fields". Why do they mention this? Animals do not have free will. Animals, it is true, do have a Neshoma, but not a soul like a human being has a soul. Their soul animates them but is not the piece of G-d like ours is a piece of G-d. Why does it say, "Don't be afraid, animals of the fields"? The rabbis explain that a person is happy, a person fulfills his being when he carries like a donkey, pulls like an ox, and when he sows like a cow pulling a plow.

All of us know that in life we must feel connected to G-d and to other people. This we can only do if we assume responsibility. It is the assumption of responsibility for ourselves and others in the world which makes life meaningful and liveable. That's why we should not be afraid of loading responsibility upon ourselves. Of course, not enough to break us. We would not load a donkey until it breaks. We must be concerned about pulling, like an ox does. We must also sow seeds for the future, raise a family, be interested in children, perpetuate and support institutions. In this way we will feel the purpose of life and be happy. It does not good to just sit at home and wallow in your depression and feel self-pity. That does not help at all. What we must do if we are to connect to our source of being, to other people, is Haleecha, to walk, to do things. Even when a person does not feel like doing things and would rather stay home, the person should go out and help people and mingle with people. He should plan for the future by supporting institutions and helping his family.

The rabbis say that only the outward part of our soul could ever be besmeared, but the inner part of our soul, the core of our being, still yearns for G-d and still wants Tavaikis with Him. This we can achieve if we Shuva - return - to our roots. It means

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not only living up to our potential and feeling sorry for our sins, but it also means returning to the source of being and finding meaning and purpose in life. You cannot just sit home. That just makes things worse. I am reminded of a man who met his friend and said, "Business is terrible. Monday I only sold one suit. Tuesday I sold no suits, and Wednesday was even worse than Tuesday." His friend said, "How could Wednesday be worse than Tuesday? You didn't sell anything on Tuesday." The man said, "Yes, but the man who bought the suit on Monday returned it on Wednesday."

We see that things will only get better if we act, if we do things. They will not get better if we sit at home. We must energize ourselves, do more Mitzvahs. We must learn to connect more with other people. If we connect more with other people we will release those sparks, and we will have a good relationship with man and G-d. We will return to our source of being, and we will be blessed with a good and happy year. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Ha'Azinu we learn how Moshe, in his last speech to the Jewish people, concludes with a poem which he said the Jewish people should read every time they get in trouble, and then they will understand why these troubles came upon them. Moshe knew the Jewish people had to have a song in their hearts if they were to survive. When they would read this poem, this song, they would understand why the evil things came upon them.

In this song it seems to me that the key to understanding why evil things came upon the Jewish people as a whole is included in one sentence which says, "Elohim Lo Yodoum Chodoshim Meekorobochu - New gods came up - V'Lo Shorum Avosechem - which your forefathers dreaded not - Seeleechu Techu - the rock that begot you you forgot, you forgot the G-d that bore you." In other words, the Jewish people were overcome by new things. Today, too, we seem to have the same idea that whatever is new is better. This may be true in the technological field. After all factories which are using the same techniques today they used forty years ago are going to go broke. They will not make it in the market place. And, of course, one of the reasons the United States is having a hard time competing in the marketplace today is because our factories were never destroyed in World War II so we are still



producing many products from factories that are 60, 70, 80 years old while the factories in Japan and Europe are much newer and are using much newer techniques. Most of the vaunted Japanese technology really comes from the United States. They have just used the techniques we have developed but which we have not implemented, and they have implemented them right away. Our companies said, "Well, we invested too much in this machinery and need to get a few more years use out of them. The new machinery we will put in slowly." We actually invented the robots, but the Japanese use them. We actually invented new quality control methods, but the Japanese use them. We did not. We invented a car in which all four wheels turn when you steer but we have not produced it; the Japanese have. In technology it is probably right that what is new is better, but, of course, life is not just technology. Life is more than technology. When it comes to new methods of producing products, new is better, but, you know, in life many things have changed throughout the generations. Man has different languages and customs and cultures, but one thing has never changed, and that is man's passions. The passions man has today are the same passions that man has had since recorded history. You can read the cuniformal writings of the Sumarians, the ancient Indian sanscript, the ancient Greek writings, the papayra of the Egyptians, and, of course, of own Bible, and you can see that man's passions has not changed one bit. We are still the same human being

with all our foibles. We are filled with ambition, cupidity, lust, all sorts of competing and conflicting passions which strive to take us over. We may not agree with some of the solutions of the Greek writers to these passions, but they speak about them. They speak about man's overweening ambition, his arrogance, his greed, etc. We know our passions have not changed. They have remained the same.

The wisdom of the old is very relevant today. We, to our own peril, have dropped the wisdom that has been accumulated through thousands of years, and we are suffering for it today. For example, today young people do not have a sexual identity, and, because people do not have a sexual identity, we have all these problem of husbands leaving wives and wives not wanting to be mothers, etc., even after having children. One of the biggest problems we have today is that there is no sense of sexual identity. In fact, Margaret Mead, before she died, wrote an article and said that if it were up to her she would not have coeducational high school, because coeducational high schools blur the difference maleness and femaleness and the men and women do not have a sense of sexual identity. We have done many things to confuse young people today so, therefore, women do not want to have children and men do not want to support their wives and families are not what they used to be. Twenty-five percent of the children of America live in poverty. This

is a terrible statistic. We have so many fathers who run away and so many mothers who desert their children. It is a terrible blight, and there are so many young people who do not want to get married at all. There is a famous author, Ben Rotenberg, who was known for his liberal views, who recently wrote a book and said America is decaying because the elite, the people who have all the education are not having any children. It is a terrible situation. We can look at our own families and see the problems. Sometimes you have a wonderful husband whose wife just gets an idea in her head that she does not want to be a mother anymore and will not take care of the children and vice versa. We have so many bad situations today.

We thought we were doing good. We were going after the new. We thought we were going to improve human relations, but the fact is we have not. The old ways are actually better. It is important that young people develop a sexual identity. In fact, that is actually what is happening in traditional homes where actually the only Jewish people who are actually marrying early and having children are those who go to traditional religious institutions, by and large. It is a very difficult situation, and it is very hard to convince somebody of it, because they are so enamored of the new that they cannot see that the new methods they use are bringing about bad results.

As Moshe said in his poem, "Remember the days of old. Consider the years of many generations." In other words, when it comes to human passions and emotions there is thousands of years of experience here based upon the Torah which has always allowed the Jewish family to be strong and to be filled with vigor and to be a family where youngsters can learn proper values. Unfortunately, today the Jewish family is disappearing. It is hard for a rabbi. He tries to give this message over and over again, but the people do not seem to be listening.

It reminds me of the story they tell about a rabbi who went to an insane asylum and there he gave a talk to the inmates. In the middle of his speech one of them jumped up and said, "This is the biggest garbage I have ever heard." The rabbi finished his speech and as he was leaving the warden said, "You know, rabbi, you have to come back again. You did so much good. You know that man who jumped up in the middle of your speech and said he had never heard such garbage? That's the first sane thing he has said in years." Unfortunately, that is the case with many of the pronouncements that rabbis have been trying to get across. People just do not understand them and will not accept them. It is a shame because not everything new is better. In technology it is true, but when it comes to human relations the old should be listened to. They yielded in the past better results than we

have today. Let us hope and pray that in the New Year we will return to these values and once again have strong Jewish families.

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In the Torah portion Haazinu we have Moshe's last words to the Jewish people. They are in the form of a poem, because only if the song of Judaism is in the heart of every Jew will Judaism survive. In this poem Moshe predicts that the Jewish people <sup>will</sup> rebel against G-d, but if they read this poem they will come back to G-d and they will understand why evil things occur to them. Other religions have taken the Bible in totality, including this poem, and have applied all the curses to the Jews and all the blessings to themselves. It is true, though, that many times our people get tired of the religion, that many times our people do not follow the precepts of morality and justice which are delineated in the Torah. When they do this, of course, catastrophe comes upon them, families break up, Jews stop being Jews, etc. It says, "And he said, referring to G-d, 'I will hide My face from them. I will see what their end shall be because they are a generation who turns things around, children in whom there is no faithfulness.'" This, of course, means that many times people will run after the new instead of sticking with the solid and the traditional. They will look for things to turn their lives around which cannot help at all, ~~that~~ they will go after new fads and experiences and forsake decency and loyalty and devotion and dedication, all those things which really make life worthwhile.

I am reminded how people sometimes act against their own best interests because they are mad and do certain things. It says, "And children, they will have no faithfulness." I know recently how many young women have come to me complaining. Their husbands are mad at them so they do not give them child support. Does that really settle the argument? Is the father of the children really getting even with the mother? What he is doing is punishing

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his own children. Many times when we seek to accomplish things we do the exact opposite of what we should do. This father, by withholding child support payments, is harming his children. He is not really harming his wife. Is that really what he wants to do? Recently I attended a meeting at the Federation where certain people got up complaining about Shamir and the Israeli Lichud policies. One man said from now on he would not give money to Israel. Is this really going to help? Where does the money from the UJA go to? It goes, by U.S. law, to the same type of institutions it goes to in America, to old folks homes, to education, to help poor people, to Jewish family services and Jewish community centers. By withholding funds from Israel he is not going to change their defense policies one iota. All he is going to do is harm the poor. We see this also in synagogues where sometimes people get mad and will not give money to the synagogue. All that means is that the synagogue is going to build a larger debt at the bank, and there will be more interest to pay, and later on when the fellow is reconciled to the synagogue, he is going to have to make a larger donation.

This so often happens that we act the opposite to our own best interests. Sometimes the only person who can help you is the person you turn against because you are so angry. I once witnessed how a person thought he had a reservation on an airline. The plane, though, was full. The person, who obviously had an emergency, and had to take that airplane. However, instead of talking nicely to the reservations clerk who was helping the passengers, he berated her and called her names and acted in a very bad way. The only person who could really help him, he really castigated and was very angry at. Of course, he did not get any help. This happens many times, that the only person who can really help you is the person that you are angry at. I have seen it happen many times when one spouse was sick and the other spouse

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was caring for him or her, that the spouse who was sick, because of their frustration at being sick, would vent all their spleen on the spouse who was helping him or her. Of course, the spouse who was helping him or her did not like it, and eventually they stopped helping in a positive way. Also, many times we see other cases. I once had a case where two sisters were caring for their mother. One of the sisters thought the other was not caring good enough for their mother so she used to check 3 or 4 times a day. It was true that the second sister was not doing her job as thoroughly as the first sister. The first sister got mad at the second sister and said she would not check in and see how they were doing and give them a hand once or twice a day. So she did not, and the mother fell down and broke her hip. Who suffered? Not the sister but the mother. Many times we have that same problem. When we attack a problem we use inappropriate means and exacerbate the problem and do not make it better.

At the end of this Torah portion it says that Moshe Rabbeinu was told to go to the mountain where he would die. "Go up to Mount Havorim." The rabbis all ask the question, why does it "Ally"? "Ally" means a "spiritual going up". Moshe was going to die. Why was this a spiritual going up? When we are called to read the Torah it is called an aliyah. When we go to Eretz Yisroel it is called an aliyah. Why is this going to up the mountain to die called an aliyah? The rabbis answer that Moshe Rabbeinu always tried to achieve all his goals. He was not successful. He did not achieve his goal of entering the Land of Israel, but he always tried to achieve his goals by using correct means, by not venting his spleen and harming those very people who could help him achieve his goals. When Moshe worked for his goals he always was in aliyah, going up. He may not always achieve his goals, but he always worked in a positive manner. We, too, when we pursue our goals,



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should always work in a positive manner. We should not use childish antics. We should not, so to speak, beat our heads against the wall in order to hurt our parents. If we have different gripes, we should direct our gripes to the proper source and not take them out on the people who can help.

I am reminded of the story about a man who was waiting at an airport when he saw a robot machine that was supposed to tell your weight and everything about you. He stuck a quarter in the machine and it told him he weighed 195 pounds, he was married, and was going to San Diego. He was amazed because it was true. The next man stepped on the machine and it said he weighed 147 pounds, was divorced, and was going to Chicago. The first man was amazed and said he had to beat the machine. He went into a locker room, changed, put some books in his shirt, put dark glasses on. He stepped on the machine again and it said he was still 195 pounds, you are still married, and you just missed your plane to San Diego. By trying to knock other people down by using inappropriate means we do not achieve our goal. All we do it make it harder to achieve it in the long run. Let us all remember that and try to achieve our goals by positive means and not negative means in order that we should be able to say, as Moshe Rabbeinu did at the end of his life, that all our lives are an aliyah, a spiritual going up, and never a going down.

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In the Torah portion Haazinu we have Moshe's closing poem to the Jewish people. Moshe informs the people that when evil will come upon them they should read this poem and then they should understand why evil things came upon the Jewish people and they will take this poem to heart and they will repent. The question is often asked, why is it that Moshe said these final words of rebuke in a poetic form? The answer is, of course, that the song of Judaism must be felt in all our hearts if Judaism is to continue. If people feel the song of Judaism they will eventually repent and they will come back to the source of their identity and they will reassert their Judaism.

In this poem Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people how they are going to desert G-d and how they are going to be exiled and how eventually they will come back to the land and G-d will wreak His vengeance upon the enemies who persecuted us. The Rambam explains that this is actually a prophecy of Jewish history, and that if we read this poem carefully we can understand Jewish history from the beginning to the end. All the events of Jewish history are recorded in it. Other rabbis disagree, and they say that this is not a prophecy. This is only a statement of what will happen if the Jewish people do rebel against G-d, that if the Jewish people do not rebel against G-d then those things that are mentioned here will not come to pass. It is interesting to note that this poem starts out by saying in the fourth sentence, "The rock whose work is perfect for all His ways are justice. A G-d of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He. This corruption He does not know. His children is the blemish, a generation crooked and perverse." The poem then continues by saying that after all these bad things come upon you, "Remember the days of old and consider the years of many generations. Ask thy father and he will declare unto thee, thy elders and they will tell thee." Moshe here is telling us that in order for the Jewish people to come back they have to know their history, their past. "Remember the days of old." We see that in our own day Judaism suffered a precipitous

fall. Perhaps the reason for this was that we made exaggerated claims for Judaism. We said in the Middle Ages that in order to have a life of the mind, in order to appreciate music and art and literature, etc., you had to be Jewish. In large part this was true. We say the goy was a drug, and among the peasants of Europe this was basically true. The kings and queens of England could not read and write and it was we who founded the universities. It was not until we helped the Christians conquer Toledo that any university started at all in Europe. We were the ones who created the Arabic and Greek works of the great authors of ancient days into Latin. We were the ones who founded universities, and then we were expelled from them, but, by and large, the people in the Middle Age were a brutish, ignorant lot. We considered ourselves culturally superior to them, just the same way people in America today consider themselves to be culturally superior to the world around us. That is why Abraham Lincoln referred to this country as the last best hope of the world. We do not think that we are physically superior to anyone else, but we are culturally superior. We have a better way of doing things. That's why we are shocked when the Japanese and the Germans or any other group beat us on certain types of products because we feel they must have cheated because otherwise how could they have beaten us? For many, many centuries the Jewish people lived on a much higher level than the people around them, but then, all of a sudden, enlightenment came and Jewish people realized in the 1800's that Beethoven was not Jewish, Mozart was not Jewish, Voltaire was not Jewish, Locke was not Jewish, Thomas Jefferson was not Jewish, and immediately they felt that they were lied to, that you do not have to keep kosher or keep Shabbos or the Jewish holidays to have an intellectual life of the mind. What's more, the ideas of Newton were transcribed into the physical realm and pretty soon it became impossible almost to believe in G-d because everything seemed to be cause and effect. How could G-d even work in history at all? The yeshivas in Europe emptied, and the Jewish people, all

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of a sudden, began to feel that everything Jewish bad and everything goyish was good. Many Jews even went over and became Christians, not because they believed in Christianity but because they wanted to advance in the world, and although they thought less of Christianity than they did even of Judaism, they thought for their own personal advancement it was important that they convert, like Henrechaina and others. Therefore, they forsook the ways of their fathers. As the poem says, "And he forsook G-d and made him contend the rock of his salvation. We are arousing the jealousy of strange gods." In other words, gods that they knew not. They did not really believe in these things. Then Moshe Rabbeinu says, "Remember the days of old, and you will come back." Pretty soon the Jewish people realized that they had sold their heritage for a mess of pottage. The person who probably brought Jews back more than any other was Hitler because Hitler showed the great defect in western civilization. If the most brilliant and enlightened and educated country in Europe could do these things to the Jewish people, then there must be a flaw in western civilization. Besides, Jews all of a sudden began to realize that the things that they admired in the western culture were actually contributions that Jews had made. After all, 3 or the 4 pillars who founded western civilization as we know it today were Jews: Einstein, Freud, and Marx; the fourth one, Darwin, was not a Jew, but three out of four were. Besides that, in all the arts and sciences people suddenly realized that such great contributions were being made by Jews, so Jews all of a sudden started to feel that perhaps not everything in the Jewish tradition was bad and not everything in the western tradition was good, but there has been a radical change, especially since the Viet Nam War, where Jews have been able to stand up and be proud. I remember the time when people used to try to change their names and their noses and their identities and try to hide the fact that they were Jews. I remember the time when people told me, "Wear a

hat, not a yarmulka so they cannot tell you are Jewish." Anything that smacked of being Jewish was tried to be kept off the streets. We should not be obtrusive at all. Of course, most of the fights that we have had in the Jewish community in the last 100-150 years have all revolved really around the same problems, and that is, how much of the western world do we integrate into our religious life? We are not talking about integrating western technology or doing things so we can earn a living but integrating into our religious life, so we have had big arguments over yarmulkas and prayer books and languages and mechitzas and organs and things of this nature. Really, it is all one fight. The fight is about how much of the western world do you integrate into the Jewish religious culture? How much do you feel that Judaism still has to give to the world? When Jews, of course, started to read their history and realized the great contributions that the Jewish people made to the world and they realize how Jewish law was so far ahead of the secular law for many, many generations and Jewish pride returned, and Jews were no longer ashamed to wear yarmulkas and speak Hebrew. It is amazing what I see goes on today in the Federation where young Jews are willing to take positive stands and confront politicians and are proud of their Jewishness and they wave Mogen Davids and do not try to hide it anymore. This is indeed a revolutionary change. When it says, "Remember the days of old," that was why history was so important to the Jewish people of the last 100 years. They had to know their history so they could be proud of their identity. They did not have to quake and feel inferior in front of their gentile counterparts. Jews could now stand with their chests out and heads held up high knowing that they represented a proud tradition, but this, of course, is not enough. When you get a past it also allows you to have a present. It gives you the courage to fight for what you know is right and just and you do not have to feel that everything which is Jewish is primitive and medieval. We know now of the many great contributions that our people have made to the world. Even in technology

the instruments that Colubus used to discover America, his navigational instruments, were invented by Jews. We know all about these things and we are proud. The only problem with this is that it does not give us a future. In order to have a future we also must believe that Judaism has something still yet to give to the world. There are many Jews that I know that are very proud Jews and they realize the great contributions that Judaism has made in the past, but what about the future? They do not feel that the world really needs anything more from Judaism because the world now, especially the compassionate liberal tradition of the west, has taken upon itself all the Jewish values so all we have to do is follow what the "New York Times" says and that is really being a good Jew. Of course, that denigrates Jewish education and does not give us a future. In order for us to go further, although it is a wonderful, big step to know your history, you have to realize that the Jewish tradition makes demands on you in your personal living and moral living and ritual living, and we must be willing to live up to these demands if Judaism is to survive, if we are to come back from this low point that is mentioned in the poem in Haazinu. Of course, those Jews who really believe that Judaism has something to offer the world, they educate their children in Judaism. In the past, many Jews were afraid to educate their children in Judaism because they would be filled with superstition and guilt about doing certain things or not doing certain things which would affect their ability to succeed in the secular world. We all know that if the promises of this poem are to come to fruition that we Jewish people must take our traditions seriously, and we must remember that the world still has much to learn from us. If we will continue on the path that we have taken now after regaining our past and being proud in the present, if we continue on this path and feel that Judaism has something to say to the world today and tomorrow, we will also gain our future and the end of this poem will also come true, how G-d will redeem His people and will make sure that these calamities that occurred in the past

will not occur again in the future.

I am reminded of the story that we tell about two men in hell. It was very, very hot there. All of a sudden, a cloud came into the sky and it started to snow. There was ice all around. One of them looked at the other and said, "I don't know what is going on." The other said he did not know what was going on either. Finally, the first one said, "Well, you know, the only thing I can figure is the Astros won a World Series." That is history. Let us all hope and pray that we will always be proud of our people because we know Jewish history and that we will be willing to stand up for our people in the present, but also we will tell the world that Judaism still has much to teach the world so we will also have a future. May the Mashiach come. Amen.

HAAZINU 1991  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Haazinu Moshe Rabbeinu delivers a final poem to the Jewish people in which he tells them anytime they get in trouble if they read this poem they will understand what is happening to them. This poem is only 43 verses long, and in it Moshe Rabbeinu recapitulates Jewish history, how G-d took the people out of Egypt, how G-d was good with them, how G-d took them through the desert and sustained them and showered His many blessings upon them, how the people became complacent and took everything for granted and <sup>how</sup> they rebelled against G-d and then they were exiled and ~~they were~~ punished, but at the end they will come to their senses and G-d will redeem them either because it is important for the sake of His own name, <sup>or</sup> because the people repent, <sup>and</sup> and then those who persecuted them will be punished and the Messianic era will be ushered in.

If we look at this poem we see that in the very first sentence ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> says, "Give <sup>ear</sup> ~~your~~ heaven and I will speak and you will listen, earth, to the words of My mouth." Also, in the middle of this poem we see that G-d mentions Himself twice. It says, "See now that I, I am He. There is no god beside Me. I kill and I will bring back to life. I wound and I will cure, and there is not anybody who can save you from My hand." In other words, G-d says I, I. Why does He have to say it twice? What is the meaning of that? Also, if we look in first chapter of Isaiah we will see that there is a similar expression except there is says, "Hear, o heavens, and give ear, O Lord, for the Lord has spoken." Over there is says, "Hear, o heavens, and give ear, o earth," while in our Torah portion it says, "Give ear, o heaven, and the earth will listen to the words of My mouth." Why the change?



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If we look carefully we will see that actually in the world there are two different ideas of religion. Some people conceive as religion as nothing more than an insurance policy. G-d, I am going to do this and this and this, and I expect You to do this and this and this for me. G-d, I am going to give charity and be good to my family, I am going to keep Shabbos and keep kosher, and I expect, G-d, that You will give me this income and this type of job and I will be free from these types of worries. This is, according to Judaism, a lower form of religion where you bargain with G-d where you do things for G-d so G-d will do things for you.

There is another type of religion which is a higher form of religion which says that the purpose of religion is for you to get close to G-d and find meaning in life, that when you feel close to G-d then you can accomplish great things and feel closer to man. In the insurance attitude toward G-d, a person can sometimes be devastated because you can give his charity and do the right thing and still all sorts of troubles come upon him. This can cause a great deal of anxiety and actually cause him to doubt G-d, which is not the case when a person realizes that the purpose of religion is to get close to

There is a famous story they tell about a Jew who fled the persecution, he and his family, but the ship was overtaken by pirates and was separated from his wife and family and he was sold to a cruel master in North Africa. He managed to escape but he had a difficult time. He was out in the desert without any water and did not know where he was going to go. At that particular moment he looked up to heaven and he raised his fist and said, "G-d, what You do. You cannot make me stop believing."

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America in the past generation, because people realized that if they belonged to a religious institution it gives them stability in life and helps them raise their children and gives them a moral education, etc , but they are using religion for others purposes Therefore, Moshe says if you cannot do the first one, at least do the second one

That is also why Isaiah says here, "Listen to the heavens If you cannot give ear to it, if you cannot really feel that that is the main purpose of religion then at least give it a try Listen to heavens and then give ear to the earth." We do not demand that a person be on the highest level of religion always, but see, be open for a religious experience. Know what the real experience of religion is If you can only be really attentive to the earth and earthly needs and you know that religion is important for your children and for the community and religion is important so that government is moral and just, all right. Listen to them, but at least hear the heaven, too Don't exclude it.

That is, of course, why it says, "I, I am He, and there is no other god before Me." I am the same G-d who people believe in for instrumental purposes, because it seems to give them an insurance policy. I am the same G-d who people believe in because they know that the purpose of religion is to get close to G-d. Yes, there is a higher level of believing, and the higher level of believing is that we need G-d in order to overcome our problems. We need to be close to Him and that also allows us to be close to man

This, of course, is similar in a marriage People do not marry because

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the person can give them this and this and this. You know you have to be close to that person. That person has something within him that you admire and love and want to feel close to. It is not a bookkeeping scorecard. That, of course, is the same as with G-d. It is possible to get married the other way, too, and it is better to be married that way than not to be married at all, but there are different levels to the attachment. Isaiah is telling us here that if you start with the lower level you can still go to a higher level, that one does not block out the other.

We are today honoring an individual who realizes what the important things in life are, and the important things in life are friendship, family, education, things that transcend material things. They are concerns which spring from the heart because you want to get close to people and close to G-d. I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who comes into a drugstore and she says she wants to buy some lotion for her husband. The salesclerk asked what kind of lotion she wanted. She replied, "Well, we are celebrating our 50th anniversary. Do you have some Old Spouse?" We, of course, know that in life we must realize that relationships are more important than things. Getting close to G-d and getting close to others is what we are looking for. May we all find this so that quickly the Mashiach will come. Amen.

HAAZINU 1996  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion Haazinu opens up with the words, "Give ear, o heavens, and I will speak, and earth, listen to the words of my mouth." Isaiah says the exact opposite. He says, "Listen, earth, and I will speak, and give ear, heavens, to the words of my mouth." Moshe Rabbeinu, in this poem, was stressing to listen to heaven. It was his job to have the Jewish people listen and understand the words of the Torah. When the Jewish people wandered in the desert, they did not observe many of the mitzvahs of the Torah. They did not observe circumcision or Pesach, etc. Isaiah's mission was different. The Jewish people understood Torah, but they were not keeping it. He said, "Listen, land, and I will speak." The Jewish people had to learn how to implement the principles of the Torah in real life. They were just giving lip service to the ideals of the Torah. It is true that when people are far from religion, you have to teach them the ideals of religion and gradually they will come to understand what our religions demands of us, and then they begin to observe it. In Isaiah's time the people understood what the religion demanded of them and they acknowledged it, but they did not put it into practice. To them it was enough to believe in the right ideals. They thought that just believing in the right ideals was enough. Isaiah was telling them that that is not enough.

We know, too, that in our schools today many of our youngsters are taught about Judaism, but they are not taught to observe Judaism. They are not taught that Judaism has a unique road to G-d. Everyone is in a covenantal relationship with G-d, but it is not true that all roads are the same leading to G-d. After all, if all roads are the same, why should we Jews stick by one of the hardest roads? We believe that our road is the direct road to G-d and

