

YOU MUST HEAR THIS SONG

by Rabbi Berel Wein

All Jewish history, past, present and future, is on parade before our eyes and ears in this final section of the great oration of Moshe to the Jewish people before his passing. The greatness and pettiness, the holiness and decadence of the people are in the immortal words of this week's Torah reading. But it is the first word of that reading that conveys the entire idea of Moshe's message.

The word 'haazinu' means not only to listen and to hear what is being said but it also conveys a deeper meaning of the message being conveyed. If one is deaf to the internal messages of Torah and of Jewish history, if one is unaware that one is being addressed and called to attention, then no message, no matter how important and brilliant, will ever accomplish its goal. The listener, so to speak, must want to hear and understand the message that is being addressed to him or her.

Anyone who has had the experience of teaching, especially in a classroom setting, knows the frustration of students unwilling or unable to concentrate and pay attention. There are great teachers who by the force of their personality and their talents are able to command others to listen to what they have to say. However, even the greatest of teachers, even Moshe the ultimate teacher, can find one's message ignored or left unheard. It is within the nature of the young, especially the student, to oftentimes purposely ignore the teacher and not be bothered to hear what in fact is being said and thought.

Moshe speaks to us from the heights of prophecy, from millennia ago. Every generation hears his words and every generation must apply those words to the circumstances of their time and place. This is the secret of the eternity of Moshe and his Torah.

I would think that by now the Jewish people would be aware that it is impossible, and even dangerous, to ignore the message of Moshe and of Jewish tradition. We are witness to a large swath of Jewish society that is either completely deaf to the message of Moshe, who are at best certainly tone deaf to its nuances and meanings. Our attention span is a very short and today, when we only have the patience for 30 second sound bites, it has become ever more difficult to concentrate and listen intently to messages of cosmic importance and eternal greatness.

The key to this Shabbat, coming as it does after the Shabbat of spiritual repentance and concentration, begins with the ability to listen and to hear and to internalize the message of Moshe. Simply listen to the rhythm of Jewish history and tradition and automatically one will become a better Jew and a better person. It is no accident that generations of Jews had their children commit

to memory the total reading of this week, this great song of Moshe.

Shabbat shalom and Gmar chatima tova

Rabbi Berel Wein