

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara  
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler**

*Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)*

## Awaken to the Geula

Sho-f'tim - 24 p'sukim, Yishayahu 51:12-52:12

"Arise, Hashem, and don Your might as You did in earlier generations", cries Yishayahu HaNavi in the verses that precede this week's haftara. Only then, the prophet declares, UF'DUYEI HASHEM Y'SHUVUN UVA'U TZIYON B'RINA..., "will those, redeemed by G-d, return to Tziyon in joy." And, therefore, the opening words of our haftara reading are not the words of Yishayahu but the words of G-d, Who responds to His prophet's pleas. Hashem argues that it is He, and only He (ANOCHI. ANOCHI), Who can fully comfort the nation but, sadly, the nation had lost sight of this simple idea. In their fear of the surrounding nations, Israel abandoned G-d and were blind to His Helping Hand. As a result, they eventually forgot His great powers and His ability to save them, to redeem them and, yes, to comfort them.

Understanding the implication of G-d's words, Yishayahu turns to the people and tells them HIT-OR'RI, HIT-OR'RI, "Awaken yourselves!", in effect, telling them that he was

wrong when he called out to G-d (in the p'sukim preceding the haftara) to 'awaken'. After all, Hashem is certainly 'awake' and ready to redeem them, but Hashem's message to his beloved nation is that their redemption and, therefore, their consolation, does not depend upon G-d alone! Israel herself must awaken! It is SHE, as the Malbim explains, who must arise and repent; it is SHE who must return and recognize G-d's powers; it is SHE who, ultimately, must understand the consoling words of G-d in order to be comforted.

Returning to the theme Yishayahu struck on Shabbat Nachamu, i.e., that the people should be comforted in the knowledge that they have paid for their sins and that G-d's punishment is over, the prophet now reassures them that the punishments will, instead, be visited upon their enemies who oppressed them so. This idea closes Yishayahu's prophecy in perek 51. But our haftara does not end there.

As we read the 52nd chapter, we enter a new stage of prophecy, a stage that goes beyond the immediate condition of the post-Churban. Almost all parshanim see the words of this next perek as a vision and promise of the final geula of ACHARIT HAYAMIM, the end of days. The navi opens this section by repeating and once again calling out

to Israel, URI, URI, - to awaken and revive themselves, reminding the people that they must not remain passive in the redemptive process but must actively be involved in their own return. The navi then continues his words by connecting the opening theme, one that we find expressed in the beginning of the haftara, to its final p'sukim of the n'vu'a. During the time of the final redemption, Yishayahu predicts, Hashem's miracles will be obvious to all, so that, rather than being blind to Hashem's abilities, the people will recognize G-d's greatness and appreciate His help.

Finally, in a message so pertinent to this generation, Yishayahu leaves us with a closing thought: KI LO V'CHIPAZON TEITZEI'U, "For you will not leave (galut) quickly." The redemption is a process - a slow process. It is a process that requires our patience, our involvement, and also our awareness of Hashem's Hand in bringing the time of redemption closer. As the haftara ends: "for G-d will walk before you AND will be your rear guard."

We follow G-d's lead and yet, at the same time, He walks behind us and protects us. ✨