

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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The Light is Coming!

Ki Tavo - 22 p'sukim Yeshayahu 60:1-22

This week's haftara, a selection from the 60th chapter of Sefer Yishayahu, opens with the prophet's call to Israel to "Rise and Shine" (KUMI ORI). The navi's encouraging call stands in stark contrast to the peoples' cries in the previous chapter: NEKAVEH LA'OR V'HINEI CHOSHECH, "We hope for light but, behold, there is but darkness." In that chapter (59), Yishayahu reveals to the nation why their prayers for "light" and joy have remained unanswered, leaving in "darkness" and gloom.

The prophet opens that perek by telling the masses: G-d is not "incapable" of saving you, nor unable to hear your cries. Rather, Yishayahu explains, G-d's lack of response to your prayers is a result of a corrupt and insensitive culture that He has seen spreading over the past generations.

It is the navi's mission, therefore, to reassure the nation that, despite their sins, Hashem desires to remain close to them. And he then goes on to detail the people's sins,

confessing that those trespasses - primary among them being the lack of justice - that has kept the nation in exile and prevented G-d from redeeming them, and had kept them in "darkness" and distanced from G-d. Nonetheless, Yishayahu reassures the nation that, due to the serious danger in which the nation found herself and the fact that there was no one who would lead the people back to Hashem, G-d pledges that He Himself would step into the breach VAYILBASH TZ'DAKA KA-SHIRYON, "And clothe Himself in justice like armor" to save His children. It would be this victory over the enemy that would bring the people back to the land... and to G-d.

And NOW, we can begin to understand our haftara for NOW the prophet can begin his message by declaring: KUMI ORI. After revealing G-d's pledge to lead the people and mete out justice to her enemies, Yishayahu could inspire the nation to "rise and shine" and finally realize that Hashem's light will, indeed, shine upon you for, as that first pasuk goes on to explain, KI K'OD HASHEM..., G-d's glory will now shine upon you. No longer enveloped by the darkness of injustice, the future will be a time of divine light that will lead the way for Israel. The haftara underscores the contrast of the world of gloom described in the previous chapter with the bright world illuminated by

G-d's salvation. The light of which Yishayahu speaks would be a spiritual glow, reflecting the justice and righteousness that would fill the land.

For us, perhaps the focus of the divine message is that prophecy to which we ourselves can attest. BANAYICH MEIRACHOK YAVO'U..., "your children will come from afar"; there will be an influx of Jews returning to the Land. There will be children nestled in the arms of their parents, young men and women coming to defend the Jewish State and older couples with wizened faces coming to live out their life-long dream.

As we approach the Yamim Nora'im and plead with HaKadosh Baruch Hu to grant us a year of much-needed comfort for so many, of vital repair for devastated families and of His shining light for a nation thrown into darkness, our haftara reminds us that LO KOVDA OZNO MSH'MO'A - G-d DOES listen and, if we are but deserving, He WILL answer .

We need not "Probe the words of the Prophet". We need only to read them... and believe! ✨