

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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## SOS ASIS BASHEM

**NITZAVIM - 23 p'sukim  
- Yishayahu 61:10-63:9**

This Shabbat we read the closing nevu'a of the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, a prophecy taken from perek 61 of Sefer Yishayahu. However, although the reading begins with the glorious cry SOS ASIS BASHEM ("I shall rejoice in G-d"), that exuberant opening is actually found at the very end of the chapter - the final two p'sukim of perek 61. As a result, we fail to understand who exactly are "rejoicing" and why exactly are they.

Upon glancing at the opening words of the chapter we reveal that Yishayahu discloses his very mission to the nation, as Hashem had told him. And, essential to carrying out G-d's mission, the navi was charged to include these tasks:

- "...to proclaim freedom to the captives"
- "...to comfort the mourners"
- "...to bring splendor in place of ashes to the mourners of Tziyon"

- "...and 'oil of joy' instead of mourning"

Yishayahu concludes his prophecy by telling Israel of the approaching Geula AND by describing their life after their redemption. Given that prophetic message, is it not obvious why the nation (KNESSET YISRAEL) who heard the prophet's message, would be those to now burst out and sing: SOS ASIS BASHEM? Especially at this time, when hearing the comforting and promising message of Hashem, they would surely "rejoice in G-d"!

Fittingly, it is this cry of ecstasy that opens the haftara that closes the weeks of comforting prophecies. But the haftara reading has more to say for this final Shabbat of the year.

After the nation's cries of joy, the haftara continues with the 62nd perek that include Yishayahu's comforting words, as he declares: L'MA'AN TZIYON LO ECHESHEH, ULMA'AN YERUSHALAYIM LO ESHKOT. The navi is telling his people that, despite their past faults and, perhaps, even their future lapses, he, as the agent of G-d Himself, would continue to speak out in support and defense of Tziyon and Yerushalayim. This is certainly, a powerful and comforting message with which to introduce his consoling prophecy that follows.

And yet, I see in these opening words of the navi more than eloquent and reassuring prophetic promises. I would contend that Yishayahu is leaving an essential message to all of Israel for all of time, especially, I believe, on this Shabbat before Rosh HaShana.

Yishayahu's words are not only meant to teach his generation that he would continue to support them, but also to tell Jews of future generations that, even when we may fall short of Hashem's expectations, when, at times, we might feel frustrated and disappointed by our own brethren, we must never fail to recognize the extraordinary - and even remarkable - nation that we are. Indeed, did not this same prophet declare in the previous perek (60), a mere eleven p'sukim before the beginning of our haftara, V'AHMEICH KULAM TZADIKIM - that your nation, as a whole, is a righteous one!

And, if so, would we be so bold as to turn away from our righteous people or abstain our devotion to Klal Yisra'el? More powerfully, Yishayahu was warning us never to speak in harmful or negative language about our Am Kadosh! On the contrary, L'MA'AN TZIYON LO ECHESHEH - we must never remain silent when our enemies (or even 'supposed' friends) disgrace, discredit and demean the eternal people who have survived

over a millennium of misanthropes and hate-mongers.

No, perhaps we may not always be as faultless as G-d would hope us to be, but ULMA'AN YERUSHALAYIM LO ESHKOT - we will, nonetheless, continue to speak up with pride about our people, until the time that, as Yishayahu says in conclusion to this promise - YEITZEI CHANOGAH TZIDKAH, "her [Israel's] righteousness will shine like a bright light!" ✨