

Message from the Haftara

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All Who Mourn for Jerusalem...

SHABBAT ROSH CHODESH

This year, as Parshat Tazria-Metzora coincides with Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, and the weekly haftara gives way to the closing chapter of the Book of Yishayahu, it is impossible to hear Yeshayahu's stirring words of consolation this season without feeling their weight.

Two and a half years have passed since the horrors of October 7th. We have lived through wars fought on multiple fronts - in Gaza and Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Homes destroyed across the north, south, and center of Israel. Families cycling through bomb shelters and reserve duty. Non-stop shiva calls. And, as this haftara falls just before Yom HaZikaron, military cemeteries that have grown far too large. Yishayahu's vision of comfort is addressed precisely to this kind of grief - and it places a profound and demanding condition on that comfort.

The prophet paints a future of joy and renewal: Jerusalem rebuilt, her streets once again filled with laughter

and light. "Bring Jerusalem joy, exult in her, all of you who love her; celebrate her joy with her, all of you who mourned her" (Yishayahu 66:10). The Gemara (Taanit 30b) reads this verse with care and draws out a powerful principle: Only those who have genuinely mourned for Jerusalem will merit sharing in her future joy. The invitation to rejoice in redemption is conditional upon having grieved.

This teaching about who truly "mourns for Jerusalem" carries urgent contemporary weight. A Pew Research Center study released last month found that American favorability toward Israel has dropped eight percentage points in a single year, with 60% of Americans now holding an unfavorable view. More troubling is the trend within the Jewish community: just last year, 73% of American Jewish respondents held a favorable view of Israel. That figure has fallen to 64% - a decline of nearly ten points in twelve months. For those who love Zion, these are not merely political data points. They are a challenge to the very solidarity that Yishayahu's vision demands.

What lies behind this shift? Part of the answer is a well-funded, coordinated campaign to delegitimize the State of Israel and Zionism - visible in American higher education, in the media, and in political lobbying. This

must be named and addressed.

But it would be a mistake to look only outward. We in Israel must honestly ask whether the policies and public statements of top Israeli officials have not made it easier to misrepresent Israel as a state unconcerned with minorities, insensitive to other faiths (including Jewish denominations which are not Orthodox), and willing to flatten Gaza and repopulate it with Jewish settlements. The obligation to protect the State is sacred; so too is the obligation to ensure that the vision of an independent, flourishing Jewish State remains one that Jews in Israel and the Diaspora can embrace together.

“As a man is consoled by his mother, just so shall I comfort you, and in Jerusalem, you shall be consoled” (v. 13). Yishayahu’s image of consolation is strikingly intimate – the warmth of a mother, the certainty of belonging. This comfort is not meant to be experienced alone. It is promised to a people that returns to Jerusalem together, whose grief has been communal and whose joy will be shared. Since October 7th, so many Jews worldwide have indeed mourned, prayed, donated, advocated, and made aliya. That solidarity is real, and must not be taken for granted.

Generations ago, a visitor to the Kotel etched into its ancient stones a verse

from this very haftara: “You shall look on, your heart rejoicing, while your bones grow vigorous, like grass, and the hand of the Lord becomes known to His servants” (v. 14). An anonymous hand carved those words of hope into the wall – a private prayer left for all who would come after. This person understood Yishayahu’s meaning precisely: Our hope is not merely personal. The rejoicing, the vigorous renewal, the recognition of God’s hand in history – all of it belongs to all our people, as one.

As we approach Yom HaZikaron, mourning our fallen with aching hearts, may we recommit to the work of shared solidarity that Yishayahu demands. May we grieve together, hold one another, and confront with honesty and courage whatever stands between us and the vision of Jerusalem restored. And may we all merit, as a nation, and not merely as individuals, to see that day of consolation soon. 🌍