

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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

R'FA'EINI HASHEM V'ERAFEI

**B'HAR-B'CHUKOTAI - 17 p'sukim
- Yirmiyahu 16:19-17:14**

Perhaps the most well-known phrase found in this week's haftara is its closing pasuk: "Heal me, Hashem, and I will be healed." Many are familiar with the verse from the bracha in our weekly Amida, where we beseech G-d with this same appeal, albeit in plural form (R'FAEINU). What is not commonly known, however, is that, although it closes the haftara's message, the prophet's plea is not the end of his appeal, but, actually, the opening of his personal request. Which presents us with an opening to fully understand this week's haftara.

This Shabbat, after having read Parashat B'chukotai and its harsh TOCHACHA - G-d's admonition were Israel to fail to observe His mitzvot - we are not surprised to find that Chazal chose a comforting nevu'a from Sefer Yirmiyahu (16-17) which opens with the encouraging words HASHEM UZI UMA'UZI UM'NUSI - "G-d is my Strength, my Stronghold

and my Refuge." And yet, after reading the first three verses of the haftara, we begin the 17th perek with a litany of offenses and failings committed in Judea over many generations.

Just as the greater part of Parashat B'chukotai is focused upon the (future) sins of Israel and the frightening sentences, so too, our haftara surprises us concentrating the bulk of its fifteen p'sukim on Judea's sins and their consequences. We rightfully wonder, therefore, why must Yirmiyahu interrupt his opening nevu'a, one filled with optimism and promise for Israel (17:1-4), with the frightening recital of the nation's sins and the subsequent punishments that would befall them?

Perhaps, we would do better were we to reexamine the message that Yirmiyahu was sending to the people to be able to understand the nevu'a and its choice for the haftara of this parasha.

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein begins his explanation by pointing out that the closing words of the haftarah, R'FA'EINI HASHEM V'ERAFEI, was the very beginning of the prophet's plea to G-d. In it, Yirmiyahu prays that Hashem send him healing and salvation from the torment through which the people put Him, for bringing repeated censure and disparagement from G-d as His

"messenger". The message of this haftara, Rav Lichtenstein argues, is not one of comfort, per se, but one of BITACHON, confidence! WHY?

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein beautifully explains that the TOCHACHA which the Torah presents to Israel in our parasha, never mentions the nation's reaction to any of the warnings, the threats and the impending horrors that it prophesies. It is Yirmiyahu who, in this haftara, does just that.

How could they ever survive such punishment?

How could they live through the horrors that Moshe Rabbeinu predicted would arrive?

How can there be any future for the "Chosen Nation"?

To these unspoken questions, Yirmiyahu responds simply: BARUCH HAGEVER ASHER YIVTACH BASHEM - "How fortunate the one who trusts in G-d and had Hashem as his reliance."

Yirmiyahu presents a clear choice to the worried population: "Either trust in G-d or lose all hope!" It is precisely for this reason that the navi echoes the warnings of the Torah in his nevu'a. Not in order to sink the nation into deep depression but, rather, to convince them of the reality and respond with HOPE, not Despair.

It is for that reason, I believe, that

perhaps Chazal chose to include the seemingly "misplaced" closing plea of Yirmiyahu, to become a cry of hope in Hashem's salvation as a message to all of us.

True, we do not know why; we do not know how; we do not know when... but we DO know THAT. We know THAT Hashem's words come to be - and we also know THAT we have HOPE in G-d. It is that message that echoes throughout the generations: we have faith in G-d and, therefore, we have hope -

OD LO AV'DA TIKVATEINU ✨