

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara

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From Galut to Ge'ula

SHABBAT NACHAMU

- 26 p'sukim - Yeshayahu 40:1-26

After the first thirty-nine p'rakim of Sefer Yishayahu, chapters that primarily focus upon Israel's past sins - their moral and religious transgressions that led them astray, the 40th perek - this week's well-known haftarat 'Nachamu' - marks the beginning of Yishayahu's prophecies of comfort, that continue through the last twenty-six chapters of the sefer.

The nevu'ot that fill these last p'rakim speak of the future redemption of the nation, of their eventual release from foreign oppression and even the promise of Israel's return to their homeland. Indeed, powerful words of comfort and solace for the people.

And yet, it is not difficult to understand the efficacy of such comforting prophecies when they were addressed to a generation that preceded the galut and the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash, by 150 years!? Why, after all, would Yishayahu dismiss the problems of his own time and, instead, prophesy

comforting visions of forgiveness for sins - not yet committed and a return to a land in which they currently dwelled?

The solution to this seeming enigma can be found by a simple review of Israel's history. Yishayahu served as Hashem's prophet during the era of Assyrian domination over Shomron and Yehuda. It was during the Assyrian invasion that the Northern Kingdom was exiled and many of the Judean cities were devastated. As a result, the population in the Yehuda feared their own exile - especially when the Assyrian hordes besieged Yerushalayim itself. In this light, we better understand the reason for Yishayahu's nevu'ot and the value of his comforting words to his generation.

However, we might appreciate the depth of Yishayahu's message in this nevu'a, the opening to the visions of comfort, and why it is so fitting as being the first of the prophecies of consolation.

HaRav Ya'akov Meidan turns to the disagreement found in the G'mara [Sanhedrin 97b] between the great scholars of the first Tannaitic era, Rav and Shmuel. In discussing what G-d would demand of His nation in order to bring about their final redemption, Rav submits that there is but one way that could bring the GE'ULA. He states: "all depends upon

repentance and worthy deeds", T'SHUVA and MA'ASIM TOVIM. On the other hand, Shmuel disputes the idea that there is but one way to bring redemption, arguing that "It is enough for the mourner [Israel] to endure his period of mourning."

According to Rav Meidan, the exceptional approach of Shmuel was one that Yishayahu preached throughout these chapters of comfort, pointing to the navi's recurring depictions of Israel's years of suffering and repression, and, in contrast, descriptions of their glorious future. Such visions were certainly powerful promises of relief for the Israel and comfort, as well. But beyond that, the navi's assurance that Ge'ula would come as a result of their suffering - even if the entire nation did not return to G-d in complete penitence - was powerful consolation for the nation! Certainly, we must strive to return to G-d and His mitzvot, but Yishayahu's prophecies implanted real hope in the future generations, that Hashem understood Israel's misery and regards their extended anguish as reason for their liberation.

Today we look back some 2000 years after Shmuel articulated his understanding of bringing redemption, and in doing so, we fully understand - and even witnessed - the years of torment and harassment, years of

banishment, pogroms and ghettos. Perhaps, we would never be able to imagine being worthy for redemption. But the Tana Shmuel told us (as explained by the Yad Rama) that "complete repentance is not a prerequisite for redemption; the very suffering of our exile atones for the Jewish nation!

And so, you now understand why Shabbat Nachamu is truly a Shabbat of comfort and hope. 🌟