

Message from the Haftara

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The Many Dimensions of Love

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Dedicated to the memory of Robert M. Beren z”l on the occasion of his third yahrzeit. A philanthropist of rare clarity of vision and enduring commitment to excellence, Mr. Beren, together with OTS Founder Rabbi Shlomo Riskin shlit”a, helped establish spiritual entry points that have engaged tens of thousands of Jews around the world. May his memory be a blessing, and may we continue to honor his legacy through the work he inspired. For further reflection, see Rabbi Brander’s tribute, on the occasion of Mr. Beren’s Sh’loshim in 2023.

ots.org.il/jpost-what-would-mr-beren-ask/

The weeks between Tish'a b'Av and Rosh HaShana carry us through the Seven Haftarot of Consolation. The second of them, which we read this week, is drawn from the book of Yishayahu (as they all are), and stands out because it does not content itself with offering one comprehensive image of divine engagement. Instead, it sets several different paradigms of relationship

side by side, allowing their distinct voices to sound together, showing multiple modes of intimacy between God and the Jewish people, all present at once. In an era when our people know both the vulnerability of conflict and the fragile intimacy of return, this multifaceted vision of how we connect with the God who consoles us is of profound importance.

The most tender of these expressions is maternal. “Can a mother forget her own baby; can she fail to care for the child of her womb? These too may yet forget, but I will not forget you” (49:15). Here, God is portrayed as a mother whose bond with her child is so instinctive and strong that even the rare failures of human care cannot serve as an adequate comparison. Further along in the prophecy, the mode shifts, and God speaks as a spouse, insisting that the bond between Him and Israel was never truly severed: “So says the Lord: Where is your mother’s bill of divorce with which I banished her? Which one of My creditors have I, then, sold you to?” (50:1).

Alongside both of these images stands a third, more awe-inspiring relationship model: the omnipotent God who is our protector and the firm ground on which we stand: “Let one who walked in darkness, nothing shining for him, trust in the Lord’s name, and lean on his God” (v. 10).

The Malbim draws our attention precisely to this diversity of human relationships compressed into a very short span of prophecy, offering three distinct yet simultaneous modes of relationship: God is described as the parent, beloved and ruling sovereign of the Jewish people. This is no accident of poetic variety. It is a reminder of the multiple pathways through which we are able to approach God, and a recognition that no single metaphor can hold the whole of the relationship.

We must first recognize Him as sovereign, a pillar upon which we can depend. This is the image embraced by the one who walks in darkness, with nothing shining before him, and still leans on his God. Despite all the conflict and hardship of our history, He has never walked away from us or abandoned His covenant with us. In that steadfastness, we can find comfort. Our Sovereign is not a distant ruler but the one fixed point when everything else shifts; the ground that holds firm when the path itself has gone dark.

We must then recognize that we are bound to God in a relationship of profound partnership, much as a husband and wife are bound to one another. This is the deepest claim of the spousal image: the relationship is not one of dependence alone but of covenantal partnership and mutual

responsibility. Through God's love, support, and inspiration, we are filled with the strength and sense of purpose that allow us to carry out our mission in the world. Through that work, we become more fully ourselves and, in the process, we help bring the world, and its divine purpose, toward completion. As the haftara expresses, the bill of divorce was never written precisely because this bond is ingrained in the identity of both partners; each is bound up in the destiny of the other.

Finally, we must understand that He is also a parent, the mother who cannot forget the child of her womb. He leads us with a compassion that persists despite all of our challenges and failures. He does not wait for us to earn our way back into His care; He continues to reach out to us. Our task is to learn to recognize His extended hand and to take it. Where the sovereign steadies us and the spouse calls us into partnership, the parent forgives us and keeps the door open, no matter how far we have wandered.

Taken together, these three parallel relationships give us a multidimensional prophetic account of consolation and redemption. Consolation, this haftara teaches, is not one note but a chord. We are steadied as a nation that leans on its sovereign. We are summoned to responsibility as partners in a covenant of love. We are

forgiven as children who can never be forgotten. If we cultivate awareness of each of these relationships, we can discover and embrace God authentically on every level at once: as a nation, as families, and as individuals. The promise of the prophet is that the One who will not forget us is waiting to be found in all of these images together; the work of consolation is learning to hear each of them – and to answer. 