

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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

Indispensable Comfort

**SHO-F'TIM - 24 p'sukim
-Yishayahu 51:12-52:12**

SHIVTI B'VEIT HASHEM...

This week, the month of Elul opened, a month that cries out to Israel to prepare for the Yamim Nora'im with their t'filot that focus on a return to Hashem and to His people. For this reason, we begin to recite the twenty-seventh perek of T'hilim, L'DAVID: HASHEM ORI V'YISH'I at the end of davening. In that perek, David HaMelech bemoans the difficult state in which he finds himself at times, but he always finds that G-d is his support. As a result, he declares that there is but one thing he wishes: SHIVTI B'VEIT HASHEM...

Rav Yigal Ariel turns to this week's haftara (Yishayahu 51-52) whose message echoes the very same need that David expressed in T'hilim.

The earlier messages of comfort prophesied by Yishayahu were descriptions of future victories, successes and accomplishments that

Hashem would perform to bring solace and consolation to the bereaved nation. But it was, in fact, Consolation through Representation, comfort through the words of the nevi'im. But in the opening words of this week's haftara G-d calls out: ANOCHI, ANOCHI HU MENACHEM-CHEM - "It is I Who Comforts You!"

The Avudraham points to the repetition of ANOCHI as G-d's response to the earlier statement that Israel has no one to comfort them EIN LAH MENACHEM... [1:3]. Hashem now responds that there IS someone who comforts - ANOCHI, ANOCHI - It is I, I, Who comforts you! Indeed, Rav Yigal Ariel adds that the original "inconsolable" statement referred only to mortals - but, as G-d declares now - it does not refer to the Immortal One.

Consider: after Iyov lost all of his children (and his possessions), his closest supporters attempted to comfort him and rationalize his suffering - but they failed. Yet, in the final chapters of Sefer Iyov, Hashem speaks to the bereaved protagonist from out of the whirlwind and, although He adds very little to what Iyov's friends had said, Iyov states:

I heard You with my ears ... I therefore recant and am comforted. G-d had given no telling argument nor explanation - so why was Iyov comforted? Because when he heard

G-d's words, when he was drawn close to his Maker, he was comforted!

SHIVTI B'VEIT HASHEM...

Iyov echoed the very same plea spoken by King David - "I wish only to dwell in Your House" - for being close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu brings comfort, consolation and peace.

And this is the first message that Hashem shares with us in this week's haftara.

Our Elul efforts to repent include a self-analysis to evaluate our behavior over the past year: Have we failed to treat our fellows properly, whether through negative speech or harmful actions, or even through heartless disregard of their difficulties? Have we been flippant in our observance of the mitzvot... or have we actually ignored some? Have we shown proper respect to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His Torah or to the elderly, the poverty-stricken or the ailing? These are the issues we must face during this time - and they are most difficult to tackle.

The navi Yishayahu sends us a message in the words of G-d Himself that will help us contend with - and overcome - these problems. ANOCHI, ANOCHI! Understanding that Hashem is behind us and, therefore, all we need is SHIVTI B'VEIT HASHEM..., a desire, a yearning to dwell in His house, to bring ourselves closer to

Him. Knowing that G-d is the essence and source of fundamental consolation for our troubles and worries, realizing that He yearns to be close to you as you yearn to be close to Him, will help us navigate through the difficult challenges of these weeks of repentance.

And how fortunate for us that Chazal gifted us with this haftara and its crucial Elul message each and every year. We can hear Hashem's message and, like Iyov, we can now: "recant and be comforted". ✨