



As a Bride and a Groom

NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH - 23 p'sukim - Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9

This Shabbat's haftara, the very last of the seven haftarot of comfort, opens with Yishayahu's joyful cry, SOS ASSIS BASHEM. Actually, the navi himself is not celebrating but, rather, he is quoting Israel's future ecstasy upon recognizing how Hashem's prophecies have, indeed, come to fruition. It is also quite moving to hear the navi compare the future joy and bliss of Israel to that of a bride and groom (in the very first pasuk). And, although we might think that this comparison is commonly used by our prophets, we would be surprised to find that it is used but seven times in all of Sifrei N'vi'im: once in Sefer Yoel, four times in Sefer Yirmiyahu, and but twice in Sefer Yishayahu. And, while Yoel demands that "bride and groom" must leave the wedding canopy to join the nation-wide repentance, and Yirmiyahu uses the comparison (three out

of the four times) as a warning that there would no longer be the joyous voice of "bride and groom" in Yerushalayim, Yishayahu, the prophet of nechama, uses the connection of "bride and groom" - both times that it is used - as expressions of deepest love and a blissful relationship of Israel and their Creator.

In commenting upon this prophetic relationship, Rav Soloveitchik quotes the Rambam's commentary on Avot [1:6] and then he describes Rambam's three levels of friendships/relationships, Pragmatic Friendship, Empathetic Friendship and Value Friendship in the following way:

- Pragmatic Friendship is seen as an association where two people need each other for practical benefits, as in a business partnership. When their mutual needs cease - the friendship lapses.
- Empathetic Friendship involves a caring responsiveness and a sharing of innermost feelings. Life's burdens are lightened and its celebrations are heightened in a relationship of emotional rapport. Such friendships are firmly based and enduring.
- Value Friendship allows for the deepest level of friendship to thrive for, aside from their mutual commitment, they share a dedication to a noble idea and lofty cause. Theirs is a unity of purpose and a joining of

dreams. Their relationship transcends their personal concerns.

Rav Soloveitchik takes these "friendships" and applies them to "Bride and Groom" relationship. Human beings are subject to the same biological needs that are common to all animal life. However, as the Rav explains, they also possess transcendental yearning that demands more than a drive for self-preservation or physical indulgence. As human beings, we possess a soul that transcends more than simple animal existence, and understanding this truth, is an essential ingredient in building a meaningful marriage. He writes: in his work "Reflections":

A meaningful marriage must, at the least, partake of the second level of friendship which reflects a depth of feeling for each other. But only with the addition of the third level does a marriage assume a sublimity of purpose: two individuals who are joined by a noble vision.

The lofty words of Rav Soloveichik should help inspire us to understand - more clearly - the expected relationship of Israel toward Hashem, as Yishayahu visions in his nevu'a. True, we could never equate the bond between "Bride and Groom" to that of Man and the Divine. But the importance of enabling all of Hashem's nation to transcend the mere existence of animal life and

develop a deeper relationship with their Creator is certainly a challenge we must strive to meet!

And, on this last Shabbat of 5786, I also believe that the message of "Bride and Groom" should inspire us to reflect upon our own relationships at home and to renew those deepest bonds of friendship and closeness that, over the years, may have weakened. ✨