

Tapping into Hashem's Comforting Energy

Haftorat Shoftim

Yesha'yahu 51:12 - 52:12

Haftarat Shoftim, the fourth of the seven "haftarot of consolation" read between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashana, opens with G-d's promise: "I, myself am the One that comforts you!" (Yesha'yahu 51:12). Whatever hardship we have experienced in our personal life and as a people, Hashem's comforting energy is always near, if only we tap into it. This haftorah really strengthened my emunah, I hope reading this will strengthen your emunah too!

The Haftorah's Connection to the Parashah – Fear No-One but Hashem!

The theme of this week's Torah reading centers around the fact that Israel has many judges, yet, there is only one true Judge: G-d. The role of the judge is to bring Israel to true fear of G-d, by facilitating the keeping of His precepts. True fear of G-d results from removing fear of anything but Hashem. The beginning of the *haftorah* teaches us that the only One to fear is Hashem, He is our only true comfort, and the source of our life. "Who are you that you should fear Man who must die? ...have you forgotten Hashem your Creator, that stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and are you afraid continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor...?" (*Yesha'yahu 51:12-13*). Malbim distinguishes between the word יראה, *yirah* (awe) and the word פחד, *pachad* (afraid). The former is a fear of something external, whereas the latter is a continual state of internal fright, without being aware of the source of one's fear.

Internal and External Fear

Interestingly, the first word for fear in our *haftorah* is written in the feminine form וַיִּירָא from יראה (awe), whereas the word for being afraid continually is written in the masculine form וַיִּפְחַד from פחד (afraid). I was thinking of how external, occasional fear could possibly be more feminine than the constant fright of an unknown source. I came up with the possibility that women have greater innate *emunah* (faith), and therefore, are less prone to constant inner fright. Although women are stereotyped to be more fearful than men, it could be that actually women are more aware of their fears, whereas men suffer a deep unconscious fear. Women are more involved in self-development and awareness. By identifying possible fears and traumas, these fears are externalized, as a step towards removing them. I would like to call on my readers to give your opinion regarding the fears of men and women respectively.

The Garments of Jerusalem

"Wake up! Wake up! Dress up in your strength, Tzion! Put on your beautiful garments Jerusalem the Holy City... 2. Shake yourselves from the dust, arise, and sit down, Jerusalem; free yourself from the bands of your neck, captive daughter of Tzion" (*Yesha'yahu 52:1-2*). Part of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* song *Lecha Dodi* is taken from these two verses of our *haftorah*: הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעֹפָר קוֹמִי. לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרְתֵךְ עַמִּי – "Shake off yourselves from the dust, arise! Dress up in the garments of the splendor of my people!" We welcome the *Shechina* Friday night, by arousing ourselves and the entire Jewish people to shake off the dust of the mundane reality of the week, in order that we, our

community, and the whole world will be able to get dressed up in the spiritual Shabbat clothes of splendor. Just as we prepare for Shabbat every Friday, now, during the messianic era, we need to prepare for the great celebration of *Mashiach*, when all reality will become Shabbat. It reminds me of a giant wedding hall being cleaned spotless and decorated for a very special wedding. Just as it is mainly the woman of the home who is involved in the Shabbat preparations, women have the key role in preparing for the world's cosmic Shabbat, through self-development and spiritual healing. In order to become ready to dress up in our Neshama yetera – higher Shabbat/redemption level of consciousness, we must remove any blockages from our soul. We need to ask ourselves, "What is the dust we would like to shake off ourselves?" Which dust in my life clogs up my vessel from being a pure channel to receive Hashem's presence? Which stains of dust on the windows of my soul prevent me from perceiving Hashem with full consciousness and clarity? As we sweep and mop on Friday afternoons, let us work mentally on shaking off any fear, stress, anger, grudge and residue of sadness that blocks our soul from fully shining.

The Inner and Outer Garments of Israel

Getting ready for the banquet of *Mashiach* entails two stages, as reflected in our Shabbat preparation. In honor of Shabbat, we first take a shower and then dress up in our Shabbat clothes. Similarly, in the messianic era, only after having shaken off our spiritual dust, are we ready to wear our garments of holiness. We need to heal our childhood wounds and remove negative emotions and *midot* (character-traits), in order to illuminate the world with the light of our soul. Malbim distinguishes between the inner and outer garments of Jerusalem. "Tzion" referring to the City of David needs to dress up in her inner strength: The Temple, the Sanhedrin and Kingdom. However, "Yerushalayim," which refers to the general city, will wear the external garments of wealth and success. Tzion and Yerushalayim are the reflections of the inner and outer reality of each individual Jew. Thoughts, speech and action are the garments of our soul. By perfecting these inner garments, we become a pure channel for Hashem's *shefa* (abundance) to receive the outer garments of wealth and success. Our spiritual workout consists of developing a positive outlook – giving the benefit of the doubt, really working on cleaning our speech from negativity and gossip, and increasing acts and kindness. To the extent that we have perfected the inner garments of actions, speech and thoughts, we will be able to dress up in the outer garments of blessings and prosperity which Hashem constantly causes to flow down to us. When our outer garments match our inner garments, our unity with Hashem can never again be broken.

Everlasting Return

The *haftorah* concludes with the promise that the Jewish people will never have to leave Jerusalem in a rush, because Hashem will return to Tzion and protect us both from the front and the rear. (Ibid. 52:11-12) Rabbi Dovid Siegel explains this guarantee Hashem is giving Israel through a parable. A king became enraged at his queen, and banished her from the palace. After some period of time, he reconsidered his actions and informed her of his intentions to remarry her. She consented on the condition that he doubles the amount of her *ketubah* (the husband's financial responsibilities to his wife). This is a parable for the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. Our initial relationship with Hashem was established when accepting the Torah on Mount Sinai. At that time, Hashem revealed Himself to His nation and proclaimed, "I am your Hashem." Afterwards, the Jewish

people's behavior was so inexcusable that Hashem rejected us and exiled us from Tzion. Yet, at the time of redemption, Hashem desires to reunite with Israel. In spite of our failure in the previous relationship, Hashem promises to increase His revelations which will guarantee an everlasting relationship with His beloved people (*Yalkut Shimoni 474*).

Perceiving Hashem with Renewed Clarity

At the close of the *haftorah*, Hashem conveys his incredible new commitment to us: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings of peace; proclaiming goodness and salvation, saying to Tzion, your G-d has come to reign! The voice of the on-lookers is heard, they raise their voice in unison and singing, for they shall see eye to eye, Hashem returning to Tzion" (*Yesha'yahu 52:7-8*). Our Sages explain that until this point it was virtually impossible to behold Hashem's presence with perfect clarity. However, in the era of *Mashiach*, all constraints will be removed. The *Ba'al Haturim* on his commentary to *Bemidbar 14:14* echoes this concept and contrasts Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai to that of the Messianic era. When Hashem began this relationship and proclaimed, "I am your Hashem," the revelation was so overwhelming that we were incapable of maintaining our consciousness throughout the experience. In fact, our Sages (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88b*) reveal that we were miraculously revived after each of the commandments. However, in the era of *Mashiach*, the Jewish people's spiritual capacity will be greatly increased and we will be capable of viewing Hashem with total clarity. This is the meaning of the words of this week's *haftorah*: "For they shall see eye to eye, Hashem returning to Tzion." Hashem's return will be so tangible that we will merit to sense His presence with perfect clarity, and so to speak, look Hashem directly in the eye.

Double-Sided Eternal Relationship

It was our spiritual dust that prevented us from fully absorbing Hashem's revelation even at Mount Sinai when He proclaimed, "אֲנִי – I am your Hashem" (*Shemot 20:2*). However, the suffering of exile together with our spiritual Shabbat cleaning prepares us to absorb the new revelations in their fullest form. Therefore, during the Messianic era, the Jewish people will be perfectly prepared to receive Hashem's presence with complete consciousness. No longer will our relationship with Hashem be one-sided – אֲנִי, as during Matan Torah. Our *haftorah* opens with a double expression of Hashem's name – אֲנִי אֲנִי. With this expression, "I" and "Myself" Hashem informs us that the upcoming relationship will be double sided. It reflects both Hashem's perfect revelation, as well as the Jewish people's total reception. The renewed revelations will establish an everlasting bond between Hashem and His people. Hashem's "eye" – the degree of His revelation, and our "eye" – our perception of Hashem's presence, will finally match. We will then have the capacity to enjoy the ultimate everlasting relationship with our true Partner and Father above!