

This Shabbat we dance between two poles – hope and destruction.

We read in the parashah:

רָאָה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ בְּאוֹ וַרְשׁוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְקֹוֹק לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת  
לָהֶם וּלְזָרְעָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם: (דברים א/ח)

*Look – I have given you the land. Come and inherit the land which the LORD has sworn to your ancestors, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov, to give to them and their children after them. (Dt. 1:8)*

And then in the Haftarah:

(ז) אֲרָצְכֶם שְׁמָמָה עָרֵיכֶם שְׂרָפוֹת אֲשֶׁר אֲדַמְתֶּכֶם לְנִגְדְּכֶם זָרִים אֲכָלִים אֹתָהּ וּשְׁמָמָה כְּמִהַפְּכַת זָרִים:

(ח) וְנוֹתְרָה בַּת צִיּוֹן כְּסֹכָה בְּכָרֶם כְּמִלוּנָה בְּמִקְשָׁה כְּעִיר נְצוּרָה:

(ט) לוּלֵי יְקֹוֹק צְבָאוֹת הוֹתִיר לָנוּ שְׂרִיד כְּמַעַט כְּסֹדִם הֵייוּנוּ לְעַמְרָה דְּמִינוּ: ס (ישעיהו פרק א)

*7 Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. [8 The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege.] 9 Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah. (Isaiah Chapter 1)*

In one sense, we stand at a moment of infinite promise and new beginning, at the edge of our destiny in the Land of Israel. But on Shabbat Hazon, we see rampant destruction surrounding us at every generation of our history.

Although the emotions and tones of these two sections are completely opposite, their themes are the same, and it's those themes that I think speak to us this very week – a week in which the BP oil spill seems to be taking a step in the right direction, but where environmental crises are on our mind. I believe the parashah and haftarah can turn our thinking in that direction.

So let's compare these two passages. God invites the Children of Israel into the land with the word רָאָה – see. It is in a sense a veiled critique of the scouts of the generation before. They saw the land but were afraid to come and possess it. We have another chance. We can see that it can be ours, that we can come as a nation into the land of our destiny and settle in it. If we really look around, we will see the promise – the promise that we can possess the land, and the promise that it holds, for agricultural prosperity, for communal life, for spiritual growth.

Isaiah's words, too, focus on seeing. This Shabbat it called Shabbat Hazon because it is one of only a very few prophecies recorded in the Tanakh as a חזון (vision), but also because it emphasizes our need to wake up and see what is happening around us. In the very beginning of the haftarah, Isaiah says,

א/ג יִדַע שׁוֹר קִנְהוֹ וְחֹמֹר אֲבוּסִים בְּעֵלְיוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִדַע עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן:

*The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's trough, but Israel does not know; My people does not introspect. (Is. 1:3)*

The critique of the people is that they don't see what is happening around them. They are blind to their sins and blind to the destruction.

Beyond the common theme of seeing, though, is the common theme of our relationship to the land. The commentaries on our parashah pick up on the strange repetition of the word ארץ (eretz) in our verse:

נָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ וְרָשׁוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ

*I have given you the **land**. Come and inherit the **land***

Why not just say, I have given you the land, come and inherit it? Why repeat, the land?

I believe the Torah wants to connect this nation not just with their homeland in the abstract, political sense, or even geographic sense, but in the earth-y sense. I have given you this physical land. Come in and inhabit this physical land. ארץ (eretz) is the term used over and over and over in the creation story. It is the word used second most frequently in Genesis Chapter 1 – more than heaven, more than water, more than יום (yom - day), or even the root for create - ב.ר.א. It is second in mentions only to God - א-להים. Earth is our base, and the beginning point of our existence. Coming home to Eretz Kena'an, to Eretz Yisrael, means coming to the clods of earth our ancestors walked on. I know most of my memories of Israel are tied of with the very land itself – hiking, swimming, and otherwise.

And so begins the destruction in the haftarah – one of the opening phrases of this scene of wreckage is ארצכם – your land has been laid ruin. Your fields are being stripped by foreigners. One of the central metaphors – and actual scenes, of destruction of our people and our hope is the destruction of earth.

So our moments of greatest promise, at the brink of entering a new era in our people in this week's parashah, and one of our lowest moments, in this week's haftarah, share the themes of seeing, and of earth – of land.

These feel like the right themes for the weeks and months we have been living through.

If we are willing to open our eyes and look, I believe we will see that the earth is being destroyed. For those of you who are skeptics on climate change, hear me out. Indeed, one of the greatest environmental disasters,

which should've been avoided – took a step in the right direction with the capping of the Gulf oil spill leak. But it was also a week in which we learned that Arctic sea ice saw its lowest extent and fastest rate of decline on satellite record, and when a Yale environmental change blog posted that oil spills in the Niger Delta over recent decades, due to vandalism and corroding pipelines, are of a volume 3 times the projected Gulf spill, and have received 13 times less aid. And if you read about climate change and pay attention to that corner of the news, the picture looks bleak.

A speaker I recently heard cited Albert Einstein, who emphasized that technology should not be utilized so quickly that we are inventing things whose complete mechanisms and effects we don't understand, and which we will not know how to fix if they break. Einstein put it most powerfully when he said, "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity."

I think that was true in the case of oil spill, and it is true often as we create technology that we don't fully understand how to troubleshoot. And we often don't feel the effects. We export plenty of our pollution to the developing world, so we can hide from the mess we are making a little longer, until it comes to our own shores, as it did with BP.

From my reading, it seems clear that we are destroying our Earth. I believe this is the biggest issue we face in the world today, and it frightens me. R Yedidya Sinclair, who spoke here on the Jewish Climate initiative in the fall, said most powerfully, that after the flood, when God promised not to destroy the world, God did not promise that we, humans would not destroy the world. We may yet.

So what to do we do? I want to propose three small things, each emerges from the themes of seeing, and earth, the themes of the openings of the parashah and haftarah.

- 1) ראייה (*reiyah*) – seeing. Let's not be afraid to open our eyes to what's happening in the world around us. Let's read that news with a critical eye, talk about it around our Shabbat tables, and keep it on the forefront of our minds. And let's help others see what is really happening to our earth.
- 2) ארץ – (*eretz*) let's renew our commitment to taking care of the Earth generally, but since the ארץ in the parashah and haftarah are Eretz Yisrael, let's support the extraordinary and creative technologies and environmental activity going on in our homeland. Israel is a world leader in micro-irrigation, water desalination, and clean technologies like solar power and more. Let's financially support that where we can, and spread the word, and encourage other countries to follow suit where possible.

- 3) Bringing it into our personal Bayit: Make the little changes especially in our ritual lives: don't let the washing cup overflow, use timers, try to use environmentally friendly things in our homes.

Of course, in our collective Bayit, we are trying to take time to focus on these things, too, with greener cleaning supplies and recycling on our agenda for the coming weeks as we begin to settle into our new home.

Eikhah is days away, and there is no shortage of things to mourn at a national level. But this Shabbat Hazon, let the themes of seeing and of our relationship, earth in the parashah and haftarah, help us see what's really happening to our earth, and feel connected to it, and let's respond with strength and vision.