

Eikev-5778

This week we read the 2nd in the series of seven Haftarat which span the weeks between Tisha Be'av and Rosh Hashana. The sefer Abudraham Hashalem states that from parshat Bereishit until 17th Tammuz we read a Haftarah which is similar in content to the parsha (Domeh Ledomeh) but from 17th Tammuz the haftarat relate to the calendar not the parsha. There are three haftarat (Shlosha D'Peronusa) of travail; seven Haftarat (Shiva D'nechemta) of comforting; and two Haftarat of repentance

It is interesting to note that although all of the Shiva D'nechemta are from sefer Yeshayahu, their order does not follow the sequence of the Navi's text e.g. the haftarah of parshat Shoftim, is found in perek 51, whereas the haftarah read one week earlier is from perek 54. This creates a series of questions.

1. Why are the Haftarat not read in the order they appear in Yeshayahu?
2. If we switch to reading Haftarat related to the calendar on 17th Tammuz, then why don't we switch to haftarat of teshuva from Rosh Chodesh Ellul? This question is strengthened by a debate as to whether we switch to reading the Haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh during this period – demonstrating the significance of these haftarat.?

An answer to the first question is found in Tosafos (Megillah 31) which explains "d'derech hanechamos l'hiyos holchos u'm'shubachos yoser" - the order of these haftarat reflect the unique progression of the quality of consolation. But what is the consolation trying to achieve and why for so many weeks?

To answer, I will compare this week's haftarah with that of last week – Last weeks begins with – nachamu nachamu ami. These are not Hashem's words but of Yeshayahu. So it is not Hashem consoling directly. That Haftarah whilst so full of metaphors and promise of redemption, lacks any practical steps towards redemption. (or comfort at the very least) It also lacks a direct dialogue between the people and Hashem.

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein observes that in haftarah Nachamu, the people do not engage in repentance or turn to Hashem or give expression to any kind of relationship between Israel and God. This week's haftarah is different. Here, the people have discovered their voice again after their shocked silent state in last week's haftarah

The haftarah begins "vatomar Tzion azovani Hashem, v'Hashem shecheichani - and Tzion said Hashem has forsaken me, Hashem has forgotten me"

Yeshayahu responds during the haftarah with a question from Hashem.

In chapter 50 pasuk 2 Hashem asks "Why have I come and no one was there; have I called and no one responded?" This demonstrates Hashem's desire for relationship but begins to put the responsibility for action on the people. The Gemara (Brachot) tells us that when a minyan is formed to daven, Hashem's presence goes out to greet them. So perhaps the question posed through Yeshaya is twofold. Firstly, why do the people not take the first steps towards a relationship with Hashem and, perhaps more significantly, why not do it through unified action - a very basic pillar of a functioning society and antidote to sinat chinam.

In addition to a call for some tangible action by the people, from Hashem

Rav M Lichtenstein notes that whilst in last week's haftarah the relationship between Hashem and the people was one of master and servant, in this weeks haftarah it progresses to a number of relationships such as parents and children, a precious treasure and a divorcee unlike in the haftarah for Shabbat Chozen (Devarim) where we read "How is the faithful city become a harlot" (Yeshayahu 1:21)

The haftarah also hints at a glorious future. It refers to the streets of Jerusalem being too crowded (a prophecy fulfilled in our time and well articulated by contemporary Jews) unlike last week which was vague on detail.

By comparing these Haftarat we can begin to see a movement from destruction to rebuilding the nation and our relationship with Hashem. This is a gradual process which continues to unwind throughout the seven haftarat each an important step on this journey. So it is not until parshat Shoftim (the one out of sequence) , that a direct dialogue between the people and Hashem opens where the Haftarah begins with Anochi Anochi hu menachemchem - it is I, I am He who comforts you."

From our haftarah it takes another 4 weeks from the reestablishment of direct dialogue it then takes a further three weeks to reach the 7th haftarah with its breathtaking language and an incredibly deep and direct relationship of a marriage between the people and Hashem

It opens with Sos Asis BaHashem... KeChoson Yichahen Pe'er V'Kachala Ta'adeh Keilehah - I will rejoice in Hashem ...who in the time of the Geula will dress me like in the beautiful dress of a Choson and adorn me like a Kallah with jewelry.

The movement from Nachumu ami said through an intermediary to Sos Asis answers both our questions – why this order and why for so many weeks

Through the language and eloquence of these Haftarat (used weekly during Lecha Dodi) and the order they chose to read them through Av and Ellul, Chazel present us with a fascinating model to move from Tisha Be'av to Rosh Hashana – it is an all encompassing model involving the people, Hashem and a unified national vision as well as a simply personal aspiration and journey.