



Parshas Vaeschanan - Benji Fruhman

י"ג מנחם אב תשע"ד – 7 August 2014 – שבת פ' ואשחנן

The sefer Abudraham Hashalem states that from Parshat Bereishit until Shiva Assur B'Taamuz we read a Haftora which is similar in content to the Parsha (Domeh Ledomeh).

From Shiva Assur B'Taamuz forward the Haftorot are related to the calendar rather than the Parsha. There are three haftorot (Shlosa D'Peronusa) of travail and seven Haftorot (Shiva D'nechemta) of comforting and two Haftorot relating to repentance.

It is interesting to note that although all of the Shiva D'nechemta are taken from sefer Yeshayahu, their order does not follow the sequence in the text of the Navi. The haftorah of Parshas Shoftim for example, is found in perek 51, whereas the haftorah of Parshas Re'eh which is read a week earlier is taken from perek 54.

These observations raise two questions.

The first question is why are the Haftorat not read in the order they appear in Yeshayahu?

Second, if we switch on Shiva Assur B'Taamuz to read Haftorat related to the calendar then why do we not switch to haftorot of teshuva earlier, perhaps from Rosh Chodesh Ellul. This question is strengthened by the fact that there is even a debate as to whether we switch to reading the Haftorah for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh during this period – demonstrating the significance of reading all these haftorot.

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

In the first chapter of Yeshayahu, read on Shabbat Chazon we read "*How is the faithful city become a harlot*" by Eikev we progress to a divorcee and ultimately to bride and groom on the week before Rosh Hashana. (*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 jewellery*) – so we move from no relationship with Hashem to an incredibly close one.

A second and complimentary theme we see running through the haftorah is that of Yerushalim. From the haftorah for Devarim and Eicha to that of Nitzavim, Yerushalim moves from sounding like an awful place full of corruption and devastation to one of vibrancy and hope and a home for the Shechina.

This week's haftorah, opens with those iconic words – Nachamu Nachumu Ami... Dabru el lev Yerushalim.. Dr Astor a professor at YU notes that Hashem speaking through Yeshayahu is inviting the whole people to comfort Jerusalem (Dabru El Lev Yerushalim) – at this time of destruction it is the responsibility of the people to collectively rebuild.

This Haftorah whilst so full of metaphors and promise of, lacks any practical steps towards redemption. (or comfort at the very least) It also lacks a direct dialogue between the People and Hashem.

The haftorah for Re'eh offers a more tangible vision it 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 Nachamu which was vague on detail.

Finally we have and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be still, until her righteousness emerges like shining light..." He implores the stones of Jerusalem not to be silent, day or night, until G-d restores Jerusalem and establishes it in glory.

Here Yerushalim is the proxy for the relationship between the people and Hashem. Yerushalim only truly functions where there is achdut among the people – a unity of purpose and mutual love – not an 'achdut' where everyone is doing and expected to do the same thing or act in the same way.

We can now answer our original questions. The order of the haftorat are designed to give us an increasingly vibrant view of Yerushalim driven by a more unified interdependent nation who in turn has a relationship with Hashem culminating in the 7th haftorah with its esoteric language and 'marriage' between the people and Hashem in Yerushalim. The harlot has become the longed for bride.

The very language of these 7 Haftorot are used to inspire the author of Lecha Dodi – and with that all we understand about Shabbat.

Chazal, through the eloquence of the prophet poet Yeshayahu and the order they chose to read him through Av and Ellul presents us a fascinating model to move from Tisha Be'av and towards Rosh Hashana – it is an all encompassing model where chazal challenge us to deliver a vision which is beyond ourselves as individuals involving the People, Hashem and unified Am at ease with itself.

Perhaps this aspiration is best summed up with the posukim from Yirmiyahu which bookends this period. We read both in the first haftorah of the three weeks and at the high point of the Rosh Hashana davening,

And the word of the Hashem came to me, saying Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem saying: so said the Lord: I remember to you the loving-kindness of your youth, the love of your wedding, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown.

Over the next 7 weeks May we be zochur to move from division and destruction to a heightened form of bein adam le'chavayro on which Yerushalim is built and indeed be a worthy bride for Hashem.