

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : וְאֵתְחַנֵּן

This Haftorah is from Chapter 40 of Sefer Yeshayohu, verses 1 — 26.

1. This Haftorah is the first of the Seven Haftorahs of Comfort which follow the three Haftorahs of Rebuke and Warning which led up to Tisha b'Av. Tisha b'Av, the fast day which commemorates the Destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and our Exile amongst the nations of the world, has now passed and the Haftorahs of the coming weeks are Haftorahs of Comfort.
2. But it says something to us that while there are three Haftorahs of Rebuke and Warning, there are Seven Haftorahs of Comfort. If our Chachommim recognize that it needs seven Haftorahs of comfort after only three weeks of warning of a tragedy, this should be an indication to us of the great tragedy that has in fact happened. And perhaps the greatest sadness lies in the very fact that we today don't really appreciate the need for so much comforting and consolation.
3. This can perhaps be compared to a toddler, a young prince, who has had his sparkling little toy taken from him and is very upset about his loss. Some kindhearted person then gives him a collection of toys and games as compensation and the little prince half-wonders to himself why he has so many toys to replace the one toy that he lost. Only when he is older will he understand that the "sparkling toy" that was taken from him was in fact one of those gold-and-platinum diamond-encrusted toy trains created by the House of Faberge.
4. In our case, perhaps it's not so much that we don't appreciate the loss of the Beis HaMikdash — for some of us do. Maybe, too, it's not that we don't realize that our continued Exile, with its accompanying humiliation and hatred at the hands of our enemies, is the Chillul HaShem that it is, for this too is felt by some of us. Maybe it's just that we've been so long without the Beis HaMikdash, we've been so many centuries in Exile — more than two thousand years, now — maybe we've grown so accustomed to our state of exile and dispersion in the world that we simply don't know any more what it's like not to be in exile, what it's like not to be dispersed, what it's like not to be hated and discriminated against.
5. Perhaps another analogy will help: a man has suffered incurable toothache for so long that he doesn't remember any more what a life without pain is like. He's so accustomed to continual pain that he doesn't know any more the sheer pleasure of a life without it, to the sad extent that when he has the opportunity to be cured, he doesn't really bother to contact the specialist who can treat him and release him from his pain.
6. This Haftorah is one of the visions of the Novvi Yeshayohu of the great future to come, when the Jewish exiles will be gathered in by HaShem once again from all the points of their dispersion and the detractors and enemies of His People will be punished. All this will come about in G-d's good time but when it does, the reputation of HaShem and of His prophets will be restored and enhanced. In the same way that HaShem is the Almighty Master of Creation, with no power assisting Him then, so too will the final redemption of His People come about only through HaShem and no-one else.