

Haftarot Unrolled: Shoftim

Seeing Eye to Eye

As the fourth of the series of seven Haftarot of Consolation, the Haftarah of Shoftim talks about the return of prophecy. In the Tanach, prophecy is described in two ways: as speech, and as sight. The first of these is defined in Parshat Shoftim:

נְבִיאָא אֶקִים לָהֶם מִקֶּרֶב אֲחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹךָ וְנִתְּנִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדָבַר אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה:
I will establish for them a prophet from among their brothers like yourself, and **I will place My words in his mouth**, and he will speak to them, all that I command him.
(Devarim 18:18)

The job of a prophet is to receive a message from G-d, and to pass it on to the Jewish People. The Haftarah describes it thus:

וְאֲשִׁים דְּבָרִי בְּפִיךָ וּבְצֶל נְדִי כִסִּיתִיךָ לְנֹטַע שְׁמַיִם וְלִיסַד אֶרֶץ וְלֵאמֹר לְצִיּוֹן עַמִּי אַתָּה
I will put My words in your mouth, I will shade you with My hand, while I stretch out the sky and form the earth, and say to Tzion: You are My people.
(Yeshayahu 51:16)

The full manifestation of being G-d's People is the ability to communicate with Him directly. We receive His undiluted message, and we know precisely what He wants us to do.

But there is a level that is even higher than that. Prophets are also described as צופה, "lookout" - one who sees into the distance. This level is also mentioned in the Haftarah:

קוֹל צִפְנִיךָ נִשְׁאָר קוֹל יִחְדּוֹ יִרְנְנוּ כִּי עֵין בְּעֵין יִרְאוּ בָשׁוּב ה' צִיּוֹן:
Your lookouts will raise their voices, together they will sing; for they will see eye to eye, as Hashem returns to Tzion. (Yeshayahu 52:8)

The Midrash sees this level of prophecy as being even greater than that of Moshe Rabbeinu:

אמר הקב"ה בעה"ז על שהיו רואין את כבודי היו כלין שנאמר (שמות לג) כי לא יראני האדם וחי - אבל לעתיד לבוא כשאחזיר שכינתי לציון אני נגלה בכבודי על כל ישראל והן רואין אותי וחיים לעולם שנאמר (ישעיה נב) כי עין בעין יראו בשוב ה' ציון
G-d said: In this world, if people see My glory, they can't survive it, as it says, "For no man can see Me and live" (Shemot 33), but in the Future, when I bring My Presence back to Tzion, I will appear in My glory to all of Israel, and they will see Me and live forever, as it says, "for they will see eye to eye, as Hashem returns to Tzion". (Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar 17)

This Midrash refers to the time after the sin of the Golden Calf, after G-d had already forgiven the Jewish People. Moshe Rabbeinu asked G-d to show him His glory. G-d refused, saying,

(כ) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פָּנַי כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי:
He said, "You will not be able to see My "face", for no man can see Me and still live." (Shemot 33:20)

The Midrash says that while Moshe Rabbeinu could not see G-d, in the future, at the time of the Redemption, the Jewish People will have no problem perceiving G-d's full glory and His full Presence. The proof of this is the verse from our Haftarah, "they will see eye to eye".

What was it that Moshe couldn't see, that we will be able to see? This term, "eye to eye" is not very common in the Tanach, appearing only three times. In two of those times, the Haftarah and one other, it refers to prophecy. The third time appears in Parshat Shoftim:

וְדָרְשׁוּ הַשֹּׁפְטִים הַיָּטֵב וְהָנָה עַד שֶׁקֶר הָעֵד שֶׁקֶר עָנָה בְּאָחִיו: וְלֹא תַחֲוֶה עֵינֶיךָ נָפֶשׁ בְּנָפֶשׁ עֵין בְּעֵין
שֶׁן בְּשֶׁן יָד בְּיָד רֶגֶל בְּרֶגֶל:

And the judges will analyze it carefully, and find that it is false witness; he witnessed falsely against his brother. Do not spare him; life for life, **eye for eye**, tooth for tooth, arm for arm, leg for leg. (Devarim 19: 18-19)

These verses are talking about a case when people lie to the court to get a particular person punished for crimes that he did not commit. The law is that whatever they had planned for their victim must be done to them.

Now we know, based on a similar phrase of "eye for an eye" elsewhere in the Torah, that "for" refers to monetary compensation, the way one buys merchandize "for" money. However, the fact that the Torah says it so starkly has a purpose. It tells us that in the ideal world, in the world of pure Truth, what the person deserves is literally an "eye for an eye". From the prophetic perspective, a person who planned to use the system of justice to cause harm to another person, deserves to have that identical harm boomerang back to him in every respect. Unfortunately, in the real world, it is not practical to do so with perfect precision, and it is more likely to cause injustice than otherwise. Thus money serves as a representation, the closest approximation of justice and truth.

Moshe Rabbeinu asked if He could see G-d's "face", that is, the pure justice and meaning in how He runs the world. G-d answered him that in the real world, or more precisely, the world that we currently know as real, this is not possible. The disconnect between the prophetic eye and the physical eye is too great. They cannot be aligned.

The Haftarah tells us that the future world will be different. G-d's Presence will be so strong and His relationship with the Jewish People will be so pure and unobstructed, that the physical eye and the prophetic eye will align perfectly. There will be no disconnect between them, no warping in the lens of pure truth and justice. When we shall see, "eye to eye", the Return to Tzion, we will also be able to see, "eye to eye", G-d's justice and meaning in His world.

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In memory of my father, Peter Rozenberg, ז"ל
לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי פנחס בן נתן נטע ז"ל