

Haftarot Unrolled: Nitzavim

Hindsight

The final in the series of seven Haftarot of Consolation, the Haftarah of Nitzavim describes what it will be like when Redemption is in full bloom.

שׁוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בְּה' תִּגְלַל נַפְשִׁי בָּא-לֵהי... וּמִשׁוֹשׁ חֲתָנוּן עַל כְּלָהּ יִשְׂשִׁי עָלֶיךָ אֱ-לֹהֵיךָ :
I will **rejoice** in Hashem, my soul will delight in my G-d...with the **joy** that a bridegroom feels for his bride, your G-d will **rejoice** in you. (Yeshayahu 61:10, 62:5)

The feeling of joy that will be felt by the Jewish People, and by G-d Himself, is compared to that of a bridegroom and his bride. The joy of a bride and groom at their wedding is unadulterated. There is no baggage between them, no history of disappointments and anger, nor do they think of the future and the mistakes that might yet be made.

So, too, at the final stage of Redemption, there will no longer be any baggage between G-d and the Jewish People. Our past failures will be erased, our anger and resentment at the tragedies of Jewish History will be gone. Nor will we need to fear for the future. In Parshat Nitzavim, after warning the Jewish People that they will betray G-d and of the consequences of that betrayal, the Torah tells us that ultimately we will come back to Him.

...כִּי יָשׁוּב ה' לְשׁוֹשׁ עָלֶיךָ לְטוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׂשׂ עַל אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
...for Hashem will return to **rejoicing** over you, and be good to you, as He **rejoiced** over your ancestors. (Devarim 30:9)

When the prophecies of pain and suffering in the Torah had been fulfilled in every detail, what is left are the prophecies of good things to come. When there is no possibility of failure or disappointment, there can be pure joy.

There is no worry for the future, but what about the past? G-d and the Jewish People definitely do have baggage. In the Parsha, G-d says that He will forgive us for what we've done to Him, so His side is taken care of. But what about us? How do we forgive Him for two thousand years of suffering?

In the final verses of the Haftarah, the prophet looks back at our history from the vantage point of Redemption, when all the prophecies have come to pass and all of G-d's plans have already born fruit:

חֲסִדֵי ה' אֲזַכִּיר תְּהִלַּת ה' כְּעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנוּ ה' וְרַב טוֹב לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָם כְּרַחֲמָיו וּכְרַב חֲסִדָּיו:

The kindnesses of Hashem I mention, Hashem's praises, for all that Hashem has bestowed upon us, and much goodness to the House of Israel, that He has bestowed upon them in His mercy and great kindness. .. (Yeshayahu 63:7)

The prophet looks back at Jewish History, and he sees only G-d's kindness, goodness, and mercy. From the perspective of the End of Days, of the World To Come, everything is clear, all the pieces fall into place, and we see that all that we have gone through were steps on the road to ultimate joy.

There is one more thing that the prophet needs to tell us. The final verse of all of the Sheva d'Nechemta, the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, that we have been reading since Tisha b'Av says the following:

בְּכָל צָרָתָם (לא) לוֹ צָר וּמְלֹאךָ פָּנִיו הוֹשִׁיעֵם בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ וּבְחַמְלָתוֹ הוּא גָּאֵלָם וַיִּנְטְלֵם וַיִּנְשָׂאֵם כָּל יְמֵי עוֹלָם:

In all their pain, He has felt pain, His personal angel has redeemed them, in His love and His compassion He liberated them. He has borne them and carried them for all eternity. (Yeshayahu 63:9)

All along, throughout all our suffering, G-d has been with us. He has been personally carrying us, all along, towards a goal and a purpose.

There is a famous parable in popular culture, called Footprints in the Sand, which reads, in part:

You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you."

(see: <http://www.wowzone.com/fprints.htm>, for 3 attributed versions)

The last verse of the Haftarah looks back at all of Jewish History, and tells us that the entire time, there has ever only been one set of footprints. Going forward, in the time of ultimate Redemption, there will still only ever be one set of footprints, as we walk together with G-d in pure, unadulterated joy.

And now that we are at the end of the Sheva d'Nechemta, so let us also look back at the progression of the seven stages of Redemption, and try to understand the comfort that we are meant to find in each.

1. Va'Etchanan: An end to the oppression of the Jewish People by the nations of the world. We are reminded that it is G-d who runs history, not the so-called super-powers and empires.
2. Ekev: The return of the Jewish People to Jerusalem, as they make the desert bloom like the Garden of Eden. The years of waiting were not a sign of hopelessness and abandonment, but rather of our faith that everything He does for us has meaning and purpose.

3. Re'eh: The leaders of the Jewish People, who will be paragons of justice and righteousness, bring about universal knowledge of G-d and an end to war. It is G-d who determines whether weapons are effective or not; there is no one to fear but Him.

4. Shoftim: G-d's Presence returns to Jerusalem, and with it, prophecy. With the prophetic eye aligned with our physical eyes, we see G-d's justice in His world.

5. Ki Teitzei: No matter what happens, from this point on, the process will not be reversed. G-d will never let us fail again.

6. Ki Tavo: "The World to Come", where G-d's Presence is so palpable and visible, the entire world acknowledges our relationship with Him and wishes to be a part of it. The Beit HaMikdash, the Temple, is rebuilt.

7. Nitzavim: All the blessings that G-d promised in the Torah come to pass, and we realize that all of Jewish History that has led to this point was actually a function of G-d's kindness and His unconditional commitment to us.

Our generation has been privileged to see some of the early stages of these Haftarot with our own eyes, as Jerusalem is no longer abandoned, and the Land of Israel is no longer desolate. The other stages are ahead of us. Like all the generations of the Jewish People who have read the Haftarot and were comforted, we know that the future that awaits us is full of beauty, peace, and joy. We know that G-d is with us and we know that everything we go through has purpose.

More than that, we do not know. As Parshat Nitzavim tells us:

הַנְּסֻתָּה לַה' אֵל-לֵהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגִלַת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:
What is hidden is for Hashem, our G-d; what is revealed is for us, and our children,
forever, to fulfill all the words of this Torah. (Devarim 29:28)

It is tempting to try to predict what will happen and when, and it is tempting to try to influence spiritual forces to make things happen sooner rather than later. But the Torah tells us that we, human beings, are limited. There are things that we cannot know. We have what the prophet tells us, and we derive comfort from it and wait. And while we wait, we do the only thing that we can do: keep the Torah and carry on....

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