



Parshat Shemot
Isaiah 27:6-28:13, 29:22-23
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The Isaiah Apocalypse is a term used to describe a series of oracles of doom that form the basis of chapters 24-27. These chapters represent the beginning of many judgments against Ephraim in the North and Jerusalem in the South; however, within these judgments is also a promise of national renewal. The Haftarah is connected to the Torah reading in at least two ways. The opening sentence of our Haftarah refers to both Jacob and Israel and the produce, representing the physical wealth, that they are capable of growing/receiving. This parallels chapter one of Exodus that explains that the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased greatly so that the land was filled with them. Chapter 1:8.

The Haftarah also seems to imply that a new Exodus will occur that will unite our people from Egypt to Assyria, all those who have learned to accept the Lord: And on that day, the Lord will beat out (the peoples) like grain from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt and you shall be picked up one by one, O children of Israel. Just as Moses asked Pharaoh to let our people worship God in the wilderness; Isaiah preaches that those who come to understand God's work as it is revealed through the wonders of creation will experience an inner awakening and they will worship God on his holy mountain in Jerusalem.

The Haftarah also introduces us to an educational process for learning to live with God. The Talmud asks: How would you feel if you had a daughter and she was walking down the street and looking at her from the roof of the second floor was a man who found her extremely attractive. While he was looking at her he leaned a bit too far forward and fell off the roof and landed on top of your daughter. And wouldn't you know it your daughter became pregnant! Wouldn't that be wrong! How could God allow something like that to have occurred? Shouldn't you pray to God that this shouldn't have been allowed to happen? And then the Talmud concludes by saying, Don't pray to God to request that the natural order of things be changed.

The Talmud tells us if we want a relationship with God we shouldn't do it just at those times when we need God to intervene. Instead we need to teach people from the time they are very young to walk with God, to have and hold in their hearts. Listen to the words of Isaiah: To whom shall he give instruction? To whom shall he expound a message? To those newly weaned from milk.

How do you teach people to grow up living with God? By speaking to them about God when they are children. And how do you do it? A little here, and a little there, with a murmur here and a murmur there. And slowly but surely they will march, that is to say, they will progress. A mutter here and a mutter there, murmur upon murmur, here a little and there a little and slowly and certainly God's presence will grow with your child.

Isaiah reaches out to us and explains that creating a better world, engaging people in a return (a new exodus) to God, is an educational process in which we need to become engaged.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for January 9, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarah. An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership". [Both of these books are available in the FJMC on-line store]