



**Haftarah for Shmot
Isaiah 27:6-28:13, 29:22-23
January 2, 2016 / 15th of Tevet 5775**

"Must it be Armageddon?" Rabbi Menachem Creditor

Classic religious philosophy involves someone suffering: It's "us or them."

This week's Haftarah, taken from Isaiah's prophecies of doom and destruction, poses that classic theme with graphic details. For instance: "Was Israel beaten? Did Israel suffer as much slaughter as their slayers? (Is. 27:7)" The verse suggests that while the Jewish People has suffered, God's has caused (or will cause) far greater pain for the agents of Jewish suffering, be they Egypt, Assyria, or others. Our return to God's Grace includes both the national ingathering to the Land of Israel as well as Israelite military triumph. This day-to-come will be announced by a great ram's horn (Is. 27:13).

There are striking similarities and striking differences between the Haftarah and the Torah reading for Shmot. Both speak of liberation and the acknowledgement of God's Holy Name by the Israelites and the world. Both liberations will be manifest in miracles and in the physical exit of the Israelites from Egypt. Both liberations are not dependent upon the actions of the Israelites. Rather, they are parts of God's mysterious plan.

It is this last point that should draw our attention more than any other. It is well-known that, in the context of Biblical Israel, the success of any clan was understood as the expression of their god's will and power. This is why, in next week's Torah portion, God sends Moses to Pharaoh "as a God (Ex. 7:1)" so as to convey the liberating message of Adonai in language familiar to Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia.

How should Jews today interpret the theology of Isaiah's Armageddon narrative? Must our relationship with God continue to be understood as "us or them?" What happens to a world in which my People's success must come at your People's demise? And, more to the point, what does it mean when I see my success (and your suffering) as a manifestation of what God wants?

Can there be an authentic Jewish theology that sees the "ships" of all faiths rising with one tide? Is there a way to create a language of faith in which God's will is only fulfilled when every member of the collective human family is treated as a worthy divine image?

This week's Unraveller commentary was written by Rabbi Menachem Creditor, the spiritual leader of Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley, CA, editor of the transliterated Siddur Tov leHodot, author of Rabbi Rebecca and the Thanksgiving Leftovers, whose latest solo album Within is available on iTunes.