



**Parashat Shofetim**  
**Isaiah 51:12-52:12**  
**August 30, 2014/ 4 Elul 5774**

If our rabbis hadn't created this special cycle of haftararah readings leading up to the High Holy Days, I think they would have inserted the story of King Josiah discovering a scroll (which was most likely the book of Deuteronomy, in 2 Kings 22) and the resulting changes he instituted in his government. The link between the Torah portion and haftarah would have seemed a natural one. But our ancestors changed the rules and challenged us to wrestle with the text for seven weeks in order to be fully prepared for the High Holy Days.

This week is the fourth of those seven weeks. Four out of seven and finally I hear a God who speaks to the individual. "I am He who comforts you!" "I have put my words in your mouth and sheltered you with My hand" "You are my people! Rouse, rouse yourself, O Jerusalem!"

Can you discern the personality in Isaiah's message? Can you imagine God's voice? Can you feel the tension?

It's troubling that we have to work so hard to hear God's voice in our Torah and haftarat studies and so many of us want to hear it. One thinks, shouldn't it be easier? Shouldn't anyone who wants to hear God's voice be able to do so?

Perhaps Torah study in the broadest possible sense is not the most effective way of learning to hear God's voice even though it was the study of Torah that replaced the institution of prophecy. Perhaps prayer would be a more effective, easier vehicle for one to employ? But our prayers are fixed. They are filled with images of the Creator and the Redeemer and are continuously linked to our national destiny. The God that I read about in our prayer books is beyond my comprehension. How could that God take a moment to listen to me? And how could I possibly hear that God's voice?

But wait, in the middle of all that cosmic stuff, don't we have the opportunity through the amidah, the silent devotion to pray as individuals, and hope that our prayers will be heard? Yes, but even the blessings in the silent devotion are structured around ideas of Kingship, restoration of the Davidic line, and God's building of Jerusalem. Where can we find the opportunity to hear God's voice?

Perhaps we can hear that voice through deeds? The most constantly repeated theme found in the haftararah cycle is that our national, and by inference, personal behaviors makes all the

difference. Perhaps God's voice cannot be heard not through our ears but through our behaviors. Rouse yourself! I have put my words in your mouth and sheltered you with my hand! Now get off your tucheses and do something! Not just anything but behave in the manner that I have been telling you through the visions of my prophets all year and all your lives and throughout your history and I still haven't given up on you or forsaken you or stopped loving you.

It's taken me four out of seven maybe, just maybe I might be learning how to hear.

*This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one originally written for the Unraveller for August 14, 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".*