



**Parsha Va-yeshev**  
**Haftarah Amos 2:6 - 3:8**  
**November 22, 2013 / 19 Kislev 5774**

Amos took his job very seriously. Living in the eighth century BCE, he lived in a relatively affluent society of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in a society with a large divide between the haves and the have-nots. He also sensed the impending consequences of injustices prevalent within the Jewish community. The words of the haftarah for Shabbat Vayeshev give voice to an exasperated prophet, a frustrated citizen who can't understand how others don't see the warning signs.

This past week a forest fire burned across hundreds of wooded acres on Clauseland Mountain in my village of Orangeburg, New York. While firefighters fought to contain the blaze, life went on in the community, largely as normal. Occasionally the wind would shift, and one could smell the smoke off the mountain. At certain times, traffic on the main thoroughfare was diverted to make room for emergency vehicles. At worst, a local school dismissed early because the winds were carrying fumes in its direction. Thankfully, there were only two minor injuries among responders, and there were no homes damaged before the fire was contained. As I read the haftarah in this context, I kept thinking to myself how easy it is to ignore the fire when it is not at one's own doorstep. And yet, we know that, if allowed to spread unabated, the fire will eventually reach our home. How can we, then, not respond with a sense of urgency when we see the flame?

The prophet Amos sees all the signs of a fire burning and spreading. He is compelled to speak out to a society that would much rather just let the flames spread. He knows that ultimately an entire society will be consumed if its citizens do not change their behavior, combat the injustices and take responsibility for all members of all classes. Even so, there are those who choose not to hear. And many who choose not to speak.

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news, the one to share the gloomy forecast. But when we can smell the smoke, we know there is a fire burning somewhere.

**How can we, as responsible human beings, not inquire about its source?**

**How can we not warn our neighbors?**

From our most intimate circles to our local neighborhoods to our society on a national scale, we are empowered--like never before--to be heard, to advocate for change, and to make a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged. Amos reminds us that we have the obligation to speak out on social issues, to challenge the inequalities that exist, and to advocate for those who can't do so for themselves, regardless of whether such injustices affect our own homes. Ultimately, we will all be burned by our failure to do so.

*From the editors: Add your answer to the questions raised in this week's Unraveller. Join the discussion of these questions and the commentary in Mentschen, the FJMC's online forum.*

*This week's Unraveller was written by Rabbi Craig Scheff of the Orangetown Jewish Center in Orangeburg, New York. After practicing law for 3 years, Rabbi Scheff decided to enter the rabbinate. In the fall of 1995, he arrived at the Orangetown Jewish Center. Just having commenced his third year of Rabbinical School at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi Scheff took the position of Cantor at the OJC, and was determined to make the OJC his home. After serving the OJC for 2 years as Student Rabbi, he was ordained in 1998.*