



Parashat B'midbar
Hosea 2:1-22
May 23, 2015 / 5 Sivan 5775

I started rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1986. I mostly attended the minyan there, including Shabbat. I was even the gabbai for a couple of years. In January of 1987 I got a new roommate who invited me to the Conservative Shabbat services at Columbia University.

It was a great thing that I went. The services were nice, but the best part was that I met the woman I knew I would spend the rest of my life with. She turned out to be a childhood friend of my new roommate. She and I chatted a while, and I was smitten. Without going into too much detail, we got engaged six weeks later, and will be celebrating our 25th anniversary May 29th.

We were pretty young when we got engaged, and I was the first of my friends to do so. The first thing my friends said when they heard the news was, "We cannot believe you are getting tied down to the same person for rest of your life." They made it sound like I had volunteered for prison. I have found though that marriage has been the most liberating thing for me. It has given me purpose, meaning and some really wonderful daughters.

The reason I am sharing this story is not just because it makes me happy to do so, but because it ties in directly to our Haftorah this week, which comes from the Book of Hosea.

The overall theme of Hosea is that of loyalty, primarily loyalty of the Jewish people to God. God is angry that the people have been worshipping other gods, gods who had done nothing to liberate them. I do not think that God is angry for His own sake. God knows that the reason the people engaged in idolatry was to find a way out of their responsibilities in life. They wanted someone to magically take away all their problems and sorrows and challenges without having to do things themselves.

The God of Israel was demanding; demanding that we take responsibility for our actions and that we would find a way to help others, even those we did not know or love. The Haftorah is teaching us that loyalty to each other and to our tradition and to God is what makes us fully human. It is what liberates us from fear and delusion.

The Haftorah ends with one of the most beautiful verses in our tradition:

I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice,

In lovingkindness and in compassion,
And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.
Then you will know the LORD.

This is the verse we say as we tie our hands with Tefillin each weekday morning. It reminds us that when we wrap ourselves in the tefillin that we are to use our physical, intellectual and moral strength to help ourselves and our communities to live healthier, safer and happier lives. We tie ourselves to them, and liberate ourselves by doing so.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for May 10, 2013 by Rabbi Aaron Bergman of Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills, MI. Rabbi Bergman is a Detroit native and graduate of the University of Michigan. He was ordained at the JTS, and pursued additional graduate work in Jewish Folklore at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was part of the educators program at the Shalom Hartman Institute. Rabbi Bergman served as a rabbi at Congregation Beth Ahm and was Rabbi-in-Residence at Hillel Day School. He was the founding Director of Jewish Studies at the Frankel Jewish Academy.