



Parsha Yitro
Isaiah 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6 (Ashkenazim)
Isaiah 6:1-13 (Sephardim)
January 17, 2014 / 16 Shevat 5774

What are our responsibilities as Jews?

The Parasha gives us the answer and the Haftarah explains its fulfillment. God calls upon each of us at Sinai to be part of a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Exodus: 19:6. God tells Isaiah to speak to the People about God's word continuously and without end. Isaiah 6:11. In the Parasha we are given the message for the world. It is the Torah revealed at Sinai, symbolized most specifically by the Aseret Hadibrot (the 10 Utterances or Commandments.) Exodus 20:1-14. In the Haftarah it is the Shema-"Shemu. Shamoah...," Isaiah 6:9, that incorporates the Mitzvoth of the Torah.

As a holy nation, each of us is to be an Isaiah, acting as a prophet does in bringing a message to our co-religionists. To help us, our Sages incorporated famous words from this week's Haftarah into our daily liturgy, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. God's presence fills all the Earth!" Isaiah 6:11. Daily, we reenact the chorus of heavenly beings speaking of God's greatness. But how can we impart that message and do so with the perseverance and fortitude of an Isaiah and how can we do so publicly and loudly?

Nobody ever said it would be easy. However, the fact that you are reading this drash says you care and that being Jewish is important to you. Moses questioned his skills and abilities and so does Isaiah in exactly the same way. Isaiah 6:5. So, if you are asking, you are in very good company. Hopefully, you feel pride, derive pleasure, and experience satisfaction and fulfillment from your personal relationship with God and your religious life. Perhaps you feel a sense of belonging. Wouldn't you love for all Jews to feel the way you do? Do you happen to know any Jews who don't feel that way or don't feel it as strongly as you?

The task of being a messenger may be a difficult one. The beauty of Judaism is that our faith does not require the completion of a task or mitzvah. Success is in making the actual physical effort toward an outcome. God tells Isaiah that the people may not listen or understand. Isaiah 6:8. How frustrating that must have seemed to Isaiah and how frustrating that may seem to us as we reach out to others to experience the joys of Judaism and love of God that we feel and experience. Recent demographic studies tell us that the time for effort, innovation and creativity is perhaps more important now than ever.

Isaiah asks, "Ad Matai, Adoshem?" (How long, my Lord?) 6:11. Have you ever asked that question? God does not expressly give Isaiah hope that ultimate success will come in his lifetime, but that is not the point. The point is the effort. The point is the faith and belief that there will ultimately be redemption brought about because of our efforts as ambassadors of God's holy nation. Isaiah 9:6. The joy of the effort and being an example for this and future generations is its own reward.

Questions for a deeper understanding of the Haftarah:

1. What could the verses of the Kedusha mean when stating that God's presence fills all the earth when the earth itself is made of matter? Isaiah 6:3
2. What are the traditions for the davening of the Kedusha and how do they relate to the manner in which it is recited in the holy court? Isaiah 6:2
3. What do we learn from Moses and Isaiah and their hesitance at accepting leadership responsibility? Isaiah 6:4
4. What is the irony in the method in which Isaiah's disability is cured? Isaiah 6:6
5. What are the similarities between God's personal revelation to Isaiah 6:4 and God's revelation to B'nai Yisrael? Exodus 19:16-18

Questions to help ambassadors of God's holy nation:

1. What are the best ways that you can help your Temple/Synagogue with your personal time?
2. Have personal discussions with your religious leaders been helpful to you?
3. How many others do you invite for your periodic lunches with your cantor or rabbi?
4. When you tell others what you are most proud of as a Jew or about what you most enjoy about being Jewish, are their responses similar?
5. Do you know of any Jews who are not members of a Temple/Synagogue? If so, does your Temple/Synagogue have a good outreach process, program or strategy you can use?
6. How might you use Shabbat or Yom Tov to bring friends together?
7. What feelings would you like your non-affiliated acquaintances to have about affiliation and what steps can you take to facilitate them?

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