



Parashat Yitro
Isaiah 6:1-7:6
February 7, 2015 / 18 Shevat 5775

I recently saw the movie, Whiplash. It is the story of a young man who is driven to be the best musician possible and the complicated and often destructive relationship he has with his mentor. This aspiring artist is willing to sacrifice everything, including friends and potential lovers to achieve his desires. That's the short version. On another level, the film is about artists seeking spiritual experience. Artists, whether they be musicians, actors, dancers, composers, are people who need to create, to work with their hands, walk and listen to a different beat than what most of us experience. The career and life decisions they make are not driven by a desire for comfort or in some cases even family and community. Their motivations are different. Perhaps, like a prophet.

The haftarah for Yitro is only partially about prophets. It begins with Isaiah receiving his commission, (realizing) that he has a calling, or shall we say, has been called. He, like the artist or others who have callings, questions himself, wrestles with himself because he realizes the nature of the commitment he is about to make will shape future relationships with friends, family and persons of stature. Even though most of us lack "callings", the lesson is clear. Every decision we make has implications and will shape future actions.

The second part of the haftarah is about us. It is about the interactions of people. It's about the tension we experience when we encounter potentially highly charged situations. And we are reminded that the way to handle complicated personal/political situations is to be calm and to be firm. Not to be threatened by hot heads and irrational threats and, most of all, to believe. The belief referred to in the text is a foretelling of the birth of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a great King who brought peace and justice to the land. He is the one to whom Handel refers to in his great work, The Messiah.

In the film, the aspiring musician understands that in order for him to become the person he hopes to be, that sacrifices will have to be made. For those of us who lack callings and seek to find meaning in other important ways, the haftarah offers the same message. The ability to believe in our tasks and our missions can guide us into a better future.

The prophet speaks and we the people are charged to listen. For those of us who hear that drumbeat there is much to be learned.

This week's Haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of numerous books, including "Understanding the Haftarah: An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership". [Both of these books are available in the FJMC on-line store.]