

Torah Table Talk

Gathering and Return: Isaiah And the Zionist Dream

Parshat Shemot

Exodus 1:1 – 6:1 / Isaiah 27:6 – 28:13



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.
"He was the perfect child."*

*Do you have thoughts, comments or questions on Table Torah Talk?
Please share them with me at Haravmark@Optonline.net*

Today's *Haftarah* contains alternating visions of hope and despair. On the one hand Isaiah speaks of the inevitable punishment of the people for being sinful. They are guilty of breaking their covenant with God and acting immorally. On the other hand the Prophet encourages the people by telling them that their kingdom will be renewed and that both the southern and northern kingdoms will be gathered together again.

Why was this particular chapter chosen as the *Haftarah* for the first *Parshah* in the book of Exodus? As we begin the story of the Exodus, we read the words of Isaiah who presents a vision of a future ingathering of the people to the Promised Land. In a sense, he expresses here one of the earliest Zionist visions. Similarly, the opening word of the *Haftarah* echoes the opening words of the *Parshah*. *Haba'im* means "(in days to) COME." The opening verse of the *Parshah* is "These are the names of the children of Israel WHO CAME (*haba'im*) to Egypt..." The literary echo of these two words was a natural connection between *Torah* and *Haftarah*.

Isaiah 27: 13

And in that day a great ram's horn shall be sounded; and the strayed (*ovdim*) who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled (*nidachim*) who are in the Land of Egypt shall come to worship the Lord on the holy mountain, in Jerusalem

Siddur

Sound the great ram's horn to herald our freedom; raise high the banner to gather our exiles. Gather our dispersed from the ends of the earth. Praised are You, who gathers our dispersed.

Pirke Rebbe Eliezer 31

R. Hanina ben Dosa said: The ram that was created at twilight on the sixth day of creation--not a part of it was without purpose. The ram's ash was the foundation for the altar within the Temple Hall; its sinews provided the ten strings for the harp David played on; its hide became the leather girdle on the loins of Elijah, ever remembered on good occasions; its two horns were made into Shofarot --the left horn is the one the Holy One blew on Mount Sinai; and the right horn, larger than the left one, the Holy One will blow in the time-to-come, as is said, "And it shall come to pass on that day, that a large horn shall be blown" (Isaiah 27:13).

Bereshit Rabbah 70:6

"So that I come back to my father's house in peace, [and it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) that He be a God unto me]" (Gen. 28:21). R. Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: The Holy One took the words used by the patriarchs and made them a key for the redemption of their descendants. Thus the Holy One said to Jacob: You said, "And it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) that He be a God unto me." By your life, all boons, blessings, and consolations I will give to your children, I will bestow with this very expression, as is said, "And it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:8); "And it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) in that day, that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His

people" (Isaiah 11:11); "And it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) in that day, that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine" (Joel 4:18); "And it shall come to pass (*ve-hayah*) in that day, that a great horn shall be blown," etc. (Isaiah. 27:13).

Babylonian Talmud Makkot 24a

R. Yose bar Hanina said: Our teacher Moses pronounced four adverse decrees against Israel, but four [subsequent] prophets came and nullified them. Moses said, "Israel dwelleth in safety, alone, in Jacob's abode" (Deut. 33:28). But Amos came and nullified it when he prayed to God, "Refrain! How will Jacob survive [alone]? He is so small" (Amos 7:5). We are told in the next verse, "The Lord relented concerning this" (Amos 7:6). Moses said, "Among those nations you shall find no peace" (Deut. 28:65). But Jeremiah came and said, "The people that were left of the sword . . . Israel . . . I go to give him peace" (Jeremiah 31:1). Moses said, "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Exodus 34:7). But Ezekiel came and nullified it: "The soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). Moses said, "Ye shall be lost [perish] among the nations" (Lev. 26:38). But Isaiah came and said, "It shall come to pass on that day, that a great horn shall be blown, and they shall come that were lost," etc. (Isaiah 27:13).

Around the Table

1. The prophet, Isaiah, uses the image of "The great *shofar*" as a way of announcing the ingathering of the exiles and the return to the land of Israel. In what other contexts do we speak about using the *shofar*? What is the connection between the *shofar* and return/reuniting the nation?
2. The verse above speaks about the strayed (*ovdim*) and the expelled (*nidachim*.) How are these two terms different from one another? What is the connection between this verse and the one which appears in the Haggadah and Deuteronomy, chapter 26: *Arami Oved Avi*, "My father was a wandering Aramean?"
3. What is the Midrash teaching us when it says that every part of this special ram which was created at twilight on the sixth day of creation was used for some special historic and religious occasion? What is the connection between *Matan Torah*, the revelation at Sinai, and the coming of the Messiah?
4. How does Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin connect the lives of the patriarchs with the redemption of the Jewish people and their return to the land of Israel?
5. The prophets are often seen as people who chastise and condemn the Jewish people. How does the Midrash contrast the words of Moses with those of the prophets?
6. Political Zionism is an ideology which was founded toward the end of the nineteenth century in Europe. Is it fair to talk about Isaiah being a Zionist? What elements of Zionism are expressed above in this verse and what elements of Zionism are not expressed above?
7. Now that there is a Jewish state do you think it is important to speak about being a Zionist? Do you consider yourself a Zionist? Why or why not? Is modern day Zionism a product of hope or despair?

Torah Table Talk is a weekly e-publication of Rabbi Mark B Greenspan sponsored by the Oceanside Jewish Center on Long Island, New York. If you would like to subscribe to Torah Table Talk please send an e-mail to Tabletalk@oceansidejc.org. To remove your address from this list, send a blank email to tabletalk-unsubscribe@oceansidejc.org. To see an archive of Rabbi Greenspan's sermons and TTT go to <http://www.oceansidejc.org/rebmark/RabbiGreenspan.html>.

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and a desire to grow a Jewish soul."*