



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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Restoring Leadership, Rebuilding a Nation

Each day, multiple times a day, in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, we ask Hashem:

השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה ויועצינו כבתחלה,

Restore our judges as at first and our advisers as at the beginning.

This request, which we often say automatically, is in fact a quotation from a pivotal verse in this week's haftarah — *Chazon Yeshayahu*, the third and final haftarah of calamity (*Shalosh D'Paranuta*) leading into Tisha B'Av. In perek 1, the Navi proclaims: ואשיבה שופטין כבראשונה ויועצין כבתחלה, אחרי כן יקרא לך עיר הצדק, קריה נאמנה, *I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as at the beginning; afterward you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city.* (Yeshayahu 1:26).

It's a vision of redemption — not through military strength or political success — but through just, wise, and righteous leadership.

In his commentary *Rav Schwab on Prayer*,

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that this bracha is a tefillah for communal teshuvah. It follows our prayer to gather in the exiles, תקע בשופר, and leads us toward national moral repair, על הצדיקים — through the return of leadership grounded in Torah values.

Rav Schwab distinguishes between *shoftim*, judges who ensure justice in society, governing relationships *bein adam l'chaveiro*, and *yoatzim*, spiritual advisors who guide us *bein adam laMakom*, in areas of faith, growth, and return. He emphasizes that *yoatzim* like Eliyahu and Elisha are needed to stir the soul, while *shoftim* right wrongs and build order. Both are vital. Together, they reflect the infrastructure of a Torah-driven society.

Rav Schwab draws our attention to the continuation of the very same bracha: הסר ממנו יגון ואנחה — *Remove from us sorrow and sighing*. He notes that this phrase is not an unrelated plea but the natural outgrowth of the earlier request: השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה ויועצינו כבתחלה. The sorrow and sighing we experience — nationally and personally — are rooted in the absence of righteous leadership. Without the presence of trustworthy judges and inspired counselors, we are left confused, fragmented, and spiritually adrift. Rav Schwab teaches that it is precisely this vacuum that breeds despair. Thus, the tefillah for restored leadership flows directly into a

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plea for emotional and communal healing — a recognition that without guidance, we grieve; with guidance, we can begin to heal.

As we enter the Nine Days, the words of the haftarah and of our daily tefillah meet in a shared vision: a rebuilt people requires rebuilt leadership. If we restore integrity and seek wise guidance, then we will fulfill the prophetic promise that concludes the verse *השיבה שופטך כבראשונה ויועצך כבתחלה אחר* — *Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city*. The return of justice and counsel is not only the path to healing — it is the key to reclaiming who we are meant to be. ■

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