



RABBI IAN SHAFFER

FACULTY MEMBER, OU MEN'S KOLLEL IN MODIIN

GUEST DVAR TORAH

# Yom Ha'atzmaut and the Missing Haftara

Having spent most of my life in *Chutz La'aretz*, I was always excited when it came to the eighth day of Pesach. The Haftara from Isaiah, Chapters 10 and 11, is a wonderful vision of the remnant of Israel as they separated from their life in exile and returned to Israel. When we came on Aliya four years ago, I discovered that this Haftara is not read in Israel on Pesach. However, I was relieved to find that the official Machzor for Yom Ha'atzmaut has the Haftara as part of the liturgy of the day. The concept of Havdalah - 'separation' is a very important idea in our world and I will show that there is a great link between the words of Isaiah and the prayer and concept of *Havdalah*.

At the end of the Parshat Kedoshim (20:25) the rationale for the laws of *Tuma and Tahara* (ritual separation), is expressed in the following way.

כה והבדלתם בין-הבהמה הטהרה, לטמאה,  
ובין-העוף הטהא, לטהר; ולא-תשקצו את-נפשותיכם  
בבהמה ובעוף, ובכל אשר תרמש האדמה, אשר-  
הבדלתי לכם, לטמא.

*'So you shall set apart the pure animal from the impure, the impure bird from the pure. You shall not draw abomination upon yourselves through that which I have set apart for you to treat as impure[whether] animal or bird or anything with which the ground is alive.'*

In this *Pssuk* we see something curious. When the Torah distinguishes between the 'clean' and 'unclean' animals, it mentions the 'clean' animals first. In discussing the birds, the reverse takes place and the 'unclean' birds are mentioned before the 'clean' ones. Why does the Torah reverse the order for birds from the order mentioning animals?

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein z"l suggested the following answer. In the third Perek of Chullin, the Talmud discusses the different types of animals and birds in the world. The Talmud tells us that there are many more unclean animals than clean ones, whereas with birds, the opposite is true. There are many more clean birds than unclean birds in the world.

Based on this observation, the following suggestion is made. The idea of *'havdalah* – 'separation' is to be understood as separating the smaller group from the larger group. This is why 'clean' animals are mentioned first, as they are a smaller group, whereas with birds, the smaller group is the 'unclean' birds and therefore mentioned first in the Pasuk above.

This now gives a whole new layer of meaning to the Havdalah prayer that we say every Motza'ei Shabbat. There are four recognizable sections:

"Who divides between holiness and the profane' thereby indicating that there is more

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‘profane’ in the world than holiness.

“Who divides between light and darkness” meaning that there is much more darkness in the world than light.

“Who divides between Israel and the Nations”, for as we know we are in a minority in comparison to the rest of the world community. (Rabbi Sacks z”l once pointed out, that in China, where the census has a leeway of error of 15 million, we would not feature at all)

“Who divides between the 7th day and the other 6 days of creation” - Shabbat is a fraction of the weeks’ time frame.

In all four phrases, this beautiful prayer is extolling us to go into the coming week and bring more spiritual holiness and light, that is limited in a very dark world.

We can also add that this prayer impresses upon us to bring to the world the material contributions (‘light’) which we, as Jews have made and will continue to make. This is especially true for the State of Israel, which is in the forefront of so much technological progress in our modern world.

This is a beautiful message as we approach the 78th anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel. This concept of ‘*havdalah*’ teaches us how much we have contributed and continue to do so to the world around us. We ask G-d for the wisdom to continue to do this every week, when we say *Havdalah*, as Shabbat

ends. The achievements of the State of Israel are nothing short of miraculous and it is a gift for the whole world, which we must cherish. Future generations of Jews will hopefully be able to take even more pride in our contributions to the world and in our unique narrative, as represented by the history of the Jewish people and the existence of *Medinat Yisrael* for 78 years.

I believe that Isaiah would have been overwhelmed by our innovations in the world today and the ‘separation’ from the *Golah* back to Israel would have been so inspirational for him to witness. Let us hope that many more Jews around the world will also be inspired to join us in this incredible miracle, which we are experiencing in our homeland. Chag Ha’atzmaut Sameach. ■

**Rabbi Ian Shaffer** came on Aliya with his wife in 2022 after teaching in Stern College in Manhattan for 22 years. Originally from London, UK where he was Deputy Head of Judaic Studies at Immanuel College. He lives in Modiin and gives weekly shiurim in the OU Men’s Kollel as well as a bi-weekly shiur in the community for men and women. He recently published his first Sefer on Shmuel Aleph & Bet – A Companion Volume.



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