



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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Preparing the Path

YESHAYAHU 61:10-63:9

Elul invites us to think about where we want to go in the year ahead, but identifying the destination is often easier than reaching it. How do we create a path from the person we are today to the person we hope to become?

In our haftorah, Yeshayahu describes the journey home from exile through the image of an actual road — and the careful work required to make it passable: עָבְרוּ עָבְרוּ בְּשַׁעְרִים, פָּנּוּ דֶּרֶךְ הָעַם סְלֹו סְלֹו הַמְסָלָה, סָקְלוּ מֵאֲבָן *Pass through the gates; clear a path for the people. Pave the road; remove its stones.*

The Malbim explains that each phrase describes another stage in preparing the road. First, פָּנּוּ דֶּרֶךְ — clear away the trees and other large obstructions. Next, סְלֹו הַמְסָלָה — raise and prepare the roadway. Only then, סָקְלוּ מֵאֲבָן — remove the individual stones that remain underfoot that could cause someone to stumble. The Malbim is describing the physical road upon which the Jewish people

will return from exile. Yet the deliberate sequence he identifies offers a powerful model for the work of Elul. A path forward is not created all at once. It is cleared, strengthened, and made passable one stage at a time.

Sometimes we already know the direction in which we want to move. We want to daven with greater focus, speak with more care, make more time for Torah, or be more present for the people around us. The road is not hidden; it is obstructed. Something — a habit, distraction, resentment, or recurring pattern — repeatedly causes us to stumble.

This is part of the practical work of Elul: identifying the stone that stands in our way. What repeatedly prevents me from moving in the direction I genuinely want to go? Is it a particular habit? A distraction? A resentment I continue to carry? A commitment that remains too vague to become real?

Elul does not demand that we rebuild the entire road at once. It gives us the opportunity to clear what is blocking us, prepare the path, and make the next step possible. As the year draws to a close, we can borrow the haftorah's imagery and ask ourselves one focused and practical question:

What is one stone I can remove now to clear the way for the year ahead? ■

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