



PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER
FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Two Haftarot for A “One-Day” Holiday: Rosh HaShanah

As we begin the new year, we expect to find that this year’s lu’ach will not be identical with last year’s – or the next one – for, as our calendar follows both the lunar and solar cycles, no year is identical to the last or the following one. One year might include a solar leap day, while another might have a lunar leap month. When we include the fact that the Hebrew months can vary from 29 to 30 days, we fully understand why succeeding calendars are never identical.

So what? Simply put, this reality explains why our haftarot are not *always* repetitive, as the same parshot might require a different prophetic selection than what was read on the past year. The days

of Rosh Hashanah are, however, somewhat unique. Although both days are, primarily, identical – in fact, in contrast to the additional day of Yom Tov in the Diaspora [יום טוב שני של גלויות], the second day of Rosh HaShanah



Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein

is not a rabbinic “addition”, as are other holidays, but is considered to be part and parcel of the first day, a **יומא אריכתא**, regarding Rosh HaShanah to be a one-day holiday! And, while the two Torah readings on the two days are but a continuation one to the other, we might wonder why Chazal chose two **different** haftarot **from two**

different nevi'im (Shmuel and Yirmiyahu), to be read on this, supposedly, **יומא אריכתא**!?

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein takes an interesting approach in explaining the necessity for including two different haftarot for this ‘one-day’ holiday, by first clarifying that the themes of both readings are clearly different. He reminds us that the haftarah of the first day of Rosh HaShanah, taken from the opening perek of Sefer Shmuel A, relates the story of an **individual**, Channah, the barren wife of Elkana, and the miraculous birth of Shmuel. Rav Lichtenstein emphasizes that this story is



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one of the **past**, detailing the events of a saintly woman, her painful years of bareness and her heartfelt pleas to G-d. Channah's years of belief in Hashem's mercies, her depth of sincere prayer and the sacrifice of her long-awaited son to be a servant to G-d, is more than appropriate reading for Rosh Hashanah. Clearly, Rav Lichtenstein states, the overriding theme of this story of sacrifice and surrender to the Almighty, it is most fitting for the **יום הדין**.

The second-day haftarah, however, focuses on the **future** of a **nation**. Yirmiyahu's directed his prophecy to his generation of the churban, people whom he had cautioned numerous times of the approaching destruction and inevitable exile. Likewise, earlier prophets had also cautioned the previous generations of the coming downfall - but they too turned a deaf ear to Hashem's warnings and threats. Surprisingly, this second day haftarah of Rosh HaShanah contains neither visions of devastation nor promises of punishments. Yirmiyahu, the "prophet of doom" does not speak of destruction or ruin in this message! Instead, he shares a vision of redemption and freedom with Israel, a nevu'ah of when Hashem would see Israel, as a **עם שרידי חרב**, 'a nation who has survived the sword', the navi's opening words!

And those words are extremely important, for it brings an essential message for all of us on this new year day, and, for that reason, it taught a different message than does the first haftarah.

And, I would like to expand upon the approach of Rav Lichtenstein:

The opening haftarah challenges the **individual** to strive and reach the elevated level of the remarkable Channah. "Can I pray to the Almighty with the proper intent and feeling as she did?" "Could I build such belief and faith

in G-d as Channah had?" "Would I be able to accept the disappointments and tribulations placed upon me, as did she?"

Certainly, all fitting and crucial questions for us to ponder on such a day!

The second haftarah is directed to the **nation** – to the **עם שרידי חרב**, the nation who survived the sword of the Crusaders, the exile of the Romans, the torture of the inquisitionists, the banishment from England, France, Spain, Portugal, Vienna, Cologne, Nuremberg, Sicily, Sardinia, Naples, the pogroms, the ghettos, the concentration camps. We are the **עם שרידי חרב** who wonder on Rosh Hashanah what we need to do to return to Hashem's graces!! So Yirmiyahu tells us "You need not worry!!" Read the haftarah carefully, this **יום הדין**, read how the navi opens his message by promising **הַלֹּךְ לְהַרְגִיעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל** – G-d will lead you to tranquility.

The message of the prophet is not one of glorious redemption, of natural miracles or of atonement of sins. He promises...calmness, serenity, calmness. Simple things, but things denied to Israel. This is the hope for us at the beginning of the year.

So, I urge you, this year don't worry about the passage of time, don't read all the commentaries and don't rest your eyes. This year, use your haftarah time to read and understand the text well. Study it, ponder over it, be inspired from it.

Certainly, I hope to do so too! ■

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Mazel Tov to
Zach & Naama Kfare and family
on the birth of their daughter

