YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

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Dedicated in memory of Myriam bat Yitele z”l  
whose yahrzeit is Rosh Chodesh Av,  
by family Rueff  
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In Loving Memory of  
Jeffrey Paul Friedman z"l  
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לע"נ יהודה פנחס ז"ל בן הרב שרגא פייוועל נ"י  
כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב  
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**The *Haftara* for *Shabbat Chazon***

The vision [*chazon*]of Yeshayahu son of Amotz, which he saw regarding Yehuda and Jerusalem in the days of Uziyahu, Yotam, Achaz, and Chizkiyahu, kings of Yehuda: Listen, heavens, hear, O earth: the Lord has spoken: I brought up children, raised them; they rebelled against Me. Even an ox knows its owner, an ass its master's trough. Israel does not know; My people does not try to understand. Woe to the sinning nation, a people weighed down with iniquity, seed of the wicked, vicious children, they forsook the Lord, defamed the Holy One of Israel, fell away. Why should you suffer more beatings? Yet you spawn more defiance, your head sickened, all, your whole heart ailing. From sole to crown – nothing is sound; laceration, bruise, and open wound never squeezed or bandaged; never eased with oil: your land is laid waste, your towns burned up in fire; your own land – before your eyes strangers consume it – laid waste: a vision of strangers' overturning. Only daughter Zion stands like the watchman's shack in a vineyard, like the hut in a cucumber field – a town besieged. Were it not for the Lord of Hosts, who left of us a bare remnant, we would have been like Sedom, like Amora – gone. Listen to the Lord's word, you officers of Sedom; hear the teaching of our God, you townsmen of Amora. Why, says the Lord, would I want all these offerings? I am sated with burnt offerings, with rams and fleshy creatures' fat, the blood of bulls and sheep and goats – I do not want them. You come, appear before Me. Who asked all this of you, who asked you for all this: trampling My courtyards? Bring no more your empty gifts – they are foul incense to Me; New Moon and Sabbath, the feast days you proclaim – I cannot endure these sins and assemblies. Your New Moons and festivals, how I hate them; they have become a burden to Me; I am weary, I cannot bear them. When you spread your hands out skyward, I must turn My eyes away; when you pray with such verbosity, I am not listening. Your hands, they are covered in blood. Wash them, be clean now, remove your terrible deeds from My sight; stop bringing about such evils. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct what is cruel. Rule justice for orphans. Fight the widows' cause. Come, let us argue this out; so says the Lord. Though your sins may be like scarlet, they will grow whiter than snow. Though they redden you more than dye worms, they will be clean wool again. If you will it and listen, the best of this earth is yours to eat, but if you refuse and rebel against Me, the sword will devour you; the Lord has spoken. How like a whore is she now, the faithful metropolis. How full she was of justice once; righteousness lodged with her, now murderers. Your silver has turned into dross, your wine is watered down, your ministers are wayward, friends to thieves, loving corruption, all of them, chasing bribes. They do not judge an orphan's case; a widow's claim does not even come before them. And so, says the Master, the Lord of Hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: This woe! – I shall seek consolation, crush My foes, wreak vengeance on My enemies. I shall set My hand against you again, as if smelting, refining away your dross; all your lead will I remove. I shall set up your judges again as first they were, your counselors as long ago. And then you shall be called Righteous City, Faithful Metropolis. Zion will be redeemed by justice, by righteousness – those who return to her. (*Yeshayahu* 1:1-27)[[1]](#footnote-1)

**A. The Connection Between the *Haftara* and Tisha Be-Av**

The Gemara discusses the *haftarot* read on and near Tisha be-Av:

If Rosh Chodesh Av falls on Shabbat, the *haftara* is [the passage containing the verse]: "Your New Moons and festivals, how I hate them; they have become a burden to Me" (*Yeshayahu* 1:14) …

On Tisha be-Av itself, what is the *haftara*?

Rav said: [The passage containing]: "How like a whore is she now" (*Yeshayahu* 1:21) ...

Abaye said: Nowadays the custom has been adopted of reading [on Tisha be-Av itself, from the Torah]: "When you shall beget children" (*Devarim* 4:25), and for *haftara*: "I will utterly consume them" (*Yirmeyahu* 8:13). (*Megilla* 31b)

The Gemara does not mention a *haftara* read on the Shabbat before Tisha be-Av, but it mentions two verses from our *haftara*, "Your New Moons and festivals, how I hate them" and "How like a whore is she now," saying they are read on Rosh Chodesh Av, when it falls on Shabbat, and on Tisha be-Av itself.

The *Tosafot* describe our customary practice, which is different:

We do not do so, but rather we read as the *haftara* from *Yirmeyahu*, "Hear the word of the Lord," and on the Shabbat before Tisha be-Av, "The vision of Yeshayahu."

The reason is that we act in accordance with the *Pesikta*,to read three *haftarot* of calamity before Tisha be-Av, namely: "The words of Yirmeyahu," "Hear the word of the Lord," and "The vision of Yeshayahu." (*Tosafot*, ad loc., s.v. *Rosh Chodesh*)

The *Tosafot* go on to explain that according to Rav, mourning begins already on Rosh Chodesh Av; however, we instead observe mourning only in the week in which Tisha be-Av falls, thus only at the beginning of that week do we read the *haftara* of "The vision [*chazon*]of *Yeshayahu*."

How [*eikha*] like a whore is she now, the faithful metropolis. (1:21)

Three prophesied with the word "Eikha" – Moshe, Yeshayahu, and Yirmeyahu. Moshe said: "How [*eikha*] can I bear alone all your problems" (*Devarim* 1:12); Yeshayahu said: "How [eikha] like a whore is she now" (*Yeshayahu* 1:21); Yirmeyahu said: "How [*eikha*] the city that overflowed with people sits alone" (*Eikha* 1:1).

Rabbi Levi said: This may be likened to a matron who had three friends. One saw her in her happiness, one in her recklessness, and one in her disgrace. Thus, Moshe saw Israel in their glory and happiness and said: "How can I bear alone all your problems?" Yeshayahu saw them in their recklessness and said: "How like a whore is she now." Yirmeyahu saw them in their disgrace and said: "How the city that overflowed with people sits alone." (Eikha Rabba 1)

*Parashat* *Devarim*, in which Moshe exclaims: "How can I bear alone all your problems, your burdens, your troubles" (*Devarim* 1:12), is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha be-Av. Our *haftara*, *Haftarat Chazon*, also contains the word "*eikha*," in the verse cited above (*Yeshayahu* 1:21). Thus, both the Torah reading and the *haftara* anticipate the reading of the book of *Eikha*, three of whose lamentations begin with the word "*eikha*."

In addition to the connection through the word *eikha*, the *haftara* is a severe rebuke to Israel, during a period of near destruction (as will be explained below that questions the very benefit of the Temple – for which we mourn on Tisha be-Av – at a time of such grave sins.

In addition, as will be explained below, the prophecy was uttered on a fast day geared toward repentance; in this, too, it is similar to Tisha be-Av.

Below, we will discuss another reason – in my opinion, the most important reason – for choosing this prophecy as the *haftara* for the week in which Tisha be-Av falls.

**II. The Time of the Prophecy**

The vision of Yeshayahu son of Amotz, which he saw regarding Yehuda and Jerusalem in the days of Uziyahu, Yotam, Achaz, and Chizkiyahu, kings of Yehuda. (1:1)

Our prophecy opens *Sefer Yeshayahu* but is not its earliest prophecy. The book of *Yeshayahu* has a second opening, in chapter 2, which takes us back to the days of Uziyahu, the first of the kings in whose days Yeshayahu prophesied:

The vision of Yeshayahu son of Amotz for Yehuda and Jerusalem. (*Yeshayahu* 2:1)[[2]](#footnote-2)

Our prophecy, in chapter 1, probably refers to the days of Chizkiyahu – when the entire land was under foreign occupation (Assyria), with only Jerusalem left untouched:

Your land is laid waste, your towns burned up in fire; your own land – before your eyes strangers consume it – laid waste: a vision of strangers' overturning. Only daughter Zion stands like the watchman's shack in a vineyard, like the hut in a cucumber field – a town besieged. (1:7-8)

This description does not fit the days of Uziyahu and Yotam. It might correspond to the days of either Achaz or Chizkiyahu, but our *haftara* also goes on to describe the Temple service in its full glory, which does not match the days of Achaz. Achaz renewed the *bamot* (forbidden private altars) in the Valley of Hinnom and later set the altar of the king of Assyria in place of the Temple’s copper altar; the Temple was even closed in his time. All that is left are the days of Chizkiyahu, when the Temple service was at its peak but Jerusalem was isolated and besieged by the king of Assyria:

In the fourteenth year of King Chizkiya, Sancheriv, king of Assyria, marched up against all the fortified cities of Yehuda and seized them. (II *Melakhim* 18:13)

**III. The Temple Service in its Glory**

Why, says the Lord, would I want all these offerings? I am sated with burnt offerings, with rams and fleshy creatures' fat… You come, appear before Me… your gifts… incense… New Moon and Sabbath, the feast days you proclaim… assemblies. Your New Moons and festivals… When you spread your hands out… (1:11-15)

This excerpt skips the verses that describe God's rejection of the sacrifices, leaving only those that describe the central role of the Temple in the people's consciousness as a place of sacrifices, offering, and incense, a place to spread hands in prayer, proclaim feast days, observe Shabbat, assemblies, New Moon, and festivals. All this corresponds to the days of Chizkiyahu and the religious revolution that he led when he purified the Temple from the impurities of Achaz, opened its gates, and returned God's altar to its place (as described at length in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* chap. 29). Chizkiyahu made a covenant with the people with the offering of the *korban pesach* in his first year (ibid. chap. 30), and he eradicated altars established for idol worship as well as those established for serving God outside the Temple. I will cite several verses to illustrate this:

For Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda provided the assembly with a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, the officials provided the assembly with a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep, and the priests had sanctified themselves in great numbers. And there was rejoicing among all the assembly of Yehuda, the priests, and the Levites, all the assembly that had come from Israel, and the outsiders who had come from the land of Israel to live in Yehuda – there was great joy in Jerusalem, for nothing like this had happened in Jerusalem since the days of Shlomo son of David, king of Israel. And the Levite priests rose and blessed the people; their voices rang out, and their prayers reached His Holy abode in heaven. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 30:24-27)

Indeed, Chizkiyahu and his people deserve commendation for the religious revolution, centered on the honor of the Temple and the sacrifices, the unified prayer of the people, the reading of the Torah, and the honor shown to Shabbat and the holidays. The book of *Melakhim*, which deals mainly with the sin of idolatry and replacing it with restored respect for the Temple, does in fact praise their efforts:

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his ancestor David did. He removed the high shrines and tore down the worship pillars and cut down the sacred tree. And he crushed the bronze serpent that Moshe had made, for until that time the Israelites were making sacrifices to it and calling it Nechushtan. In the Lord, God of Israel, he placed his trust; there were none like him among all the kings of Yehuda who succeeded him or those who came before him. He clung to the Lord and never turned away from him and kept the commandments that the Lord had commanded Moshe. (II *Melakhim* 18:3-6)

In contrast, Yeshayahu in our *haftara* does not bestow a single word of praise on Chizkiyahu and his people, but describes the period with a harsh and critical eye.

**IV. The Sin**

In our *haftara*,Yeshayau describes only one sin – the sin of abandoning righteousness and justice, especially towards the weak – but he notes many subsections of this sin. The ideology he expresses brings to mind God's words regarding Avraham, just before the destruction of Sedom and Amora:

"For I have chosen him so that he may direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, that the Lord may bring about for Avraham what He spoke of for him." Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sedom and Amora is great, and their sin is very grave." (*Bereishit* 18:19-20)

In contrast to this projected future for Avraham and his descendants, in the days of Chizkiyahu:

Your hands, they are covered in blood.…

Correct what is cruel. Rule justice for orphans. Fight the widows' cause....

How full she was of justice once; righteousness lodged with her, now murderers. Your silver has turned into dross, your wine is watered down, your ministers are wayward, friends to thieves, loving corruption, all of them, chasing bribes. They do not judge an orphan's case; a widow's claim does not even come before them. (1:15, 17, 21-23)

Bloodshed, violence, thefts, forgeries, bribery, and ignoring the rights of widows and orphans – these remind us indeed of the sins of Sedom and Amora, the opposite of righteousness and justice. As Yechezkel explained the sins of Sedom in his words, primarily about Chizkiyahu's ministers:

This was the sin of your sister Sedom – pride. She and her daughters had enough bread and an easy tranquility and yet did not aid the hands of the poor and needy. (*Yechezkel* 16:49)

It is to this that Yeshayahu compares Chizkiyahu's Jerusalem in our *haftara*:

Were it not for the Lord of Hosts… we would have been like Sedom, like Amora – gone. Listen to the Lord's word, you officers of Sedom; hear the teaching of our God, you townsmen of Amora. (1:9-10)

Another prophet said similar things about Jerusalem during the siege of Sancheriv:

Woe to those who plot wicked deeds, who plan evildoing from their beds; come morning light, they carry it out merely because they have the power. They lust for others' fields and seize them, eye others' homes and assume them as theirs; they exploit men and their households, both man and his estate… My people arise as their own enemy; they strip fine outer garments from passersby; those who felt safe become like hopeless men returning from war. You drive out the wives of My people from their secure and joyful homes, from their young children; you forever remove the honor I gave them… And I say: Listen, heads of Yaakov, rulers of the House of Israel: Is it not for you to know what is just? Haters of good, lovers of evil, you rip off their skin, the flesh from their very bones, you who feast on the flesh of My people, who strip off their skins and crack their bones, carving them like pieces into a pot like meat in a caldron… And I say: Listen now, heads of Yaakov, leaders of the House of Israel, who abhor justice and [who] turn twisted all that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed, Jerusalem with iniquity. Her leaders arbitrate for bribes, her priests will teach for a price, and her prophets for dividends will divine, yet they rely upon the Lord, saying, "Surely the Lord is in our midst; no calamity can befall us." And so because of you Zion will be plowed over like a field; Jerusalem will come to be a mound of ruins and the Temple Mount an overgrown hilltop shrine. (*Mikha* 2-3, scattered verses)

As mentioned above, Yeshayahu does not have a word of praise to say about Chizkiyahu and his people regarding the religious revolution and the service of God in the Temple, and he even calls upon them to stop bringing sacrifices, offerings, incense. and prayers. This approach expresses an unequivocal judgment which says, in my understanding, that the service of God includes two levels, both of which are precious and essential. The first level is righteousness and justice and everything that goes along with them, and the second level is the Temple service and accompanying prayers. It is impossible to establish the second floor without the first floor below it. Avraham as well was initially assessed in the realm of following “the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just," and only afterwards was he put to the test at Mount Moriah. *Chazal* expressed this in a *midrash* on the verses that describe the closing of the Garden of Eden:

"To guard the **way**…" (*Bereishit* 3:22) – this is proper behavior [*derekh eretz*,lit., "the **way** of the land]." This teaches that proper behavior comes before everything.

"…[to] the tree of life" (ibid.) – the tree of life is nothing but the Torah. (*Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu* 1)

**V. Resolving the Contradiction**

How is it possible for there to be such a disconnect between the commandments on the first tablet and the commandments on the second tablet, between *derekh eretz* (proper behavior) and Torah? How is it possible for people to devoutly serve God in the Temple and pray to Him, and at the same time, be "officers of Sedom" and "townsmen of Amora," violating righteousness and justice and ignoring widows and orphans? Moreover, is it possible that Chizkiyahu, who is recognized in the book of *Melakhim* and in the words of *Chazal* as a righteous king, committed the sins of Sedom and Amora?

I wish to propose two different answers, which may complement each other.

In the first answer, there can indeed be such a gap between the *mitzvot* of the Temple and the *mitzvot* of executing righteousness and justice. This gap was the result of an almost impossible situation: the terrible siege of Jerusalem, a period of unbearable hunger, as described by Rav-Shakeh, the messenger of the Assyrian king, in his speech to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

"But it was to the very men who are stationed on the wall, who will have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine along with you.” (II *Melakhim* 18:27)

This great distress led many people to a response that was entirely a struggle for survival, with no moral boundaries. In desperate times, righteousness, justice, orphans, and widows all disappear; each person acts only by the power of the will to survive, for himself and his family. He is not necessarily a bad person, and therefore he serves God in His Temple, but in a quarrel for a piece of bread or for a roof among the ruins, he will fight for his life and nothing else.

The crisis was the result of Chizkiyahu's rebellion against Assyria, a rebellion that Yeshayahu had opposed:

For this is what the Lord God has said, the Holy One of Israel: In stillness and in peace shall you be saved; in quiet and in trust, your might will be, but you did not wish it. You say, "No, we will speed away on horses," and so you will flee. "We will mount the swiftest steed," and so, swift will your pursuers be. (*Yeshayahu* 30:15-16)

Therefore, responsibility for the shameful situation that led to an immoral battle for survival falls on Chizkiyahu and his ministers.

The second answer, on the other hand, is based on an assumption that such a contradiction between the different commandments of God is impossible. Thus, we must assume that the contradictory portrayals in fact relate to two different factions who were competing for hegemony in Jerusalem. One – Chizkiyahu and his company – controlled the Temple and its surroundings and behaved as appropriate in God’s eyes, while the other – the corrupt faction of Shevna who was in charge of the Temple – controlled the streets of Jerusalem, which were filled with the tears of the oppressed.

Let us expand a little on Shevna's faction, beginning with the words of *Chazal*:

Shevna expounded [the law] before thirteen myriads, whereas Chizkiyahu expounded it only before eleven. When Sancheriv came and besieged Jerusalem, Shevna wrote a note, which he shot on an arrow [into the enemy's camp, declaring]: Shevna and his followers are willing to conclude peace; Chizkiyahu and his followers are not. Thus it is written: "For lo, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string." So Chizkiyahu was afraid, and said: Perhaps, Heaven forfend, the mind of the Holy One, blessed be He, is with the majority; and since they wish to surrender, we must do likewise! Thereupon the prophet came and reassured him: "Say you not a confederacy, concerning all of whom this people do say, ‘A confederacy’"; it is a confederacy of the wicked, and as such cannot be counted [for the purpose of a decision]. (*Sanhedrin* 26a)[[3]](#footnote-3)

Shevna is referred to in accordance with his role, "in charge of the house":

So says the Lord God of Hosts: Go; go to this minister, to Shevna in charge of the house. (*Yeshayahu* 22:15)

The one "in charge of the house" is the head minister, the second highest position after the king. When Pharaoh appoints Yosef to be his viceroy, he says to him: "You shall be over my house" (*Bereishit* 41:40). Shevna's faction was large, and apparently stronger than that of Chizkiyahu, who at that stage followed the prophet Yeshayahu. Yeshayahu criticized Shevna's faction harshly, mainly for their desire to hand over Jerusalem, to surrender to the king of Assyria, and for their covenant with him – "And so, hear the word of the Lord, you cynics, you leaders of this people in Jerusalem. 'We have forged a covenant with death,' you say, 'we have reached a seers' agreement with Sheol’" (*Yeshayahu* 28:14-15) – and it is indicated almost explicitly in many places that they were responsible for the corruption in Jerusalem, and for the ways of Sedom and Amora that filled it. Indeed, Yeshayahu demanded that Chizkiyahu replace Shevna and his faction with upright and God-fearing ministers, headed by Elyakim son of Chilkiyahu:

It will be on that day: I shall call upon my servant, Elyakim son of Chilkiya. I shall dress him in your tunic, with your breastplate will protect him. I shall give over your rule into his hand, and he shall be father to the people of Jerusalem, the House of Yehuda. I shall put the key to the House of David upon his shoulder; what he opens, none will close; what he closes, none will open. (*Yeshayahu* 22:20-22)

Chizkiyahu acted accordingly:

He then sent Elyakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shevna the scribe, and the senior priests, covered in sackcloth, to the prophet Yeshayahu son of Amotz. (II *Melakhim* 19:20)

Replacing the government was probably the step with the greatest weight in changing God's decree – from the attribute of judgment, imposed on the people in our *haftara* and in the words of Mikha cited above, to the attribute of mercy:

Mikha the Morashtite would prophesy in the days of Chizkiyahu, king of Yehuda. He addressed all the people of Yehuda, saying, “This is what the Lord of Hosts said: Zion will be plowed over like a field, Jerusalem will come to be a mound of ruins, and the Temple Mount an overgrown hilltop shrine.” Did Chizkiyahu, king of Yehuda, and all of Yehuda put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and beseech the Lord, so that the Lord reconsidered the evil that He had spoken concerning them? (*Yirmeyahu* 26:28-19)

Elyakim son of Chilkiyahu and his officers repaired the social and legal injustice of the previous regime, and therefore God saved them. It seems that this is also what Yeshayahu is referring to at the end of our *haftara*:

I shall set up your judges again as first they were, your counselors as long ago. And then you shall be called Righteous City, Faithful Metropolis. Zion will be redeemed by justice, by righteousness – those who return to her. (1:26-27)

It is also possible that both answers are correct: during that time of hardship, most officers of Jerusalem partnered with Shevna in a war of survival that also dictated surrender to the king of Assyria; fewer preserved what they could of morality, righteousness, and justice, and took a deep breath and waited for the fulfillment of the prophet's promise of redemption. These were Chizkiyahu and his faction, including Elyakim son of Chilkiyahu.

**VI. Tisha Be-Av and Yom Kippur**

When you spread your hands out skyward, I must turn My eyes away; when you pray with such verbosity, I am not listening. Your hands, they are covered in blood. Wash them, be clean now, remove your terrible deeds from My sight; stop bringing about such evils. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct what is cruel. Rule justice for orphans. Fight the widows' cause.

Come, let us argue this out; so says the Lord. Though your sins may be like scarlet, they will grow whiter than snow. Though they redden you more than dye worms, they will be clean wool again. (1:15-18)

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There never were in Israel greater days of joy than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days, the daughters of Jerusalem used to walk out in white garments, which they borrowed in order not to put to shame anyone who had none…. The daughters of Jerusalem came out and danced in the vineyards. (Mishna, *Taanit* 4:8)

The comparison between the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur includes a number of elements.[[4]](#footnote-4) The connection between the days relates to the end of Yom Kippur and the people's boundless joy after the scarlet thread, representing the sins of Israel, would turn white as a sign of pardon and forgiveness.

Thus, there is also a connection between Tisha be-Av, which is the opposite of the 15th of Av, and Yom Kippur before the scarlet thread turned white, or in a case where the goat to Azazel was thrown from the cliff but the scarlet thread did not turn white.

It seems that this is what our prophecy is about. The scarlet thread did not turn white on Yom Kippur, because of the sins of Israel – an explicit statement that the Temple service will not atone for sins against righteousness and justice if they are not corrected immediately.

There is also another prophecy in the book of *Yeshayahu* that seems to relate to a scarlet thread that did not turn white on Yom Kippur (many years later). This was on Yom Kippur of a Jubilee year when the worshippers had not set their slaves free:[[5]](#footnote-5)

"Why do we fast and You not see it, oppress ourselves and You acknowledge it not?" But even on your fast days, you press your interests, extort a profit on all that you own. Contending and fighting each other, you fast while you beat with the fist of evil. The fast you perform today will not carry your voice on high. Is this the fast I have chosen, a day for man to oppress himself? To bow his head like a rush in the wind, to lay his bed with sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, "a day for the Lord's favor"? No! This is the fast I choose: Loosen the bindings of evil, and break the slavery chain. Those who were crushed, release to freedom, and shatter every yoke of slavery. (*Yeshayahu* 58:3-6)

A passage in the *Yerushalmi* may also (though it is not a conclusive proof) connect our *haftara* to Yom Kippur, or at least to a public fast day, with the *Ne'ila* service – an “extra” prayer, which does not correspond to any sacrifice:

From where [de we derive] the *Ne'ila* prayer? Rabbi Levi said: "When you pray with such verbosity" (*Yeshayahu* 1:15) – from here we see that anyone who increases his prayers will be answered. (*Yerushalmi*, *Berakhot* 4:1)

Let us return to the connection between the *haftara* and preparing for Tisha be-Av. Our *haftara,* which says unbearably severe things but whose words were not fulfilled, as Jerusalem was saved, has great significance: the purpose of prophecy is not to be fulfilled, but to prevent its fulfillment by heeding its warning and repenting, as happened in the days of Chizkiyahu. Every Tisha be-Av can thus turn into a day of salvation, if we know how to correct our ways.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Unless specified otherwise, all Biblical references are to the book of *Yeshayahu*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We will not discuss here the disagreement among *Rishonim* as to whether chapters 2-5 preceded chapter 6 or not, but I have hinted to my position on the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In other words, Chizkiyahu was afraid that God would incline after the majority, i.e., after the faction of Shevna, and decree that Jerusalem will be destroyed, but the prophet Yeshayahu came and dismissed his fear. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See my book of essays, *Ha-Mikra'ot ha-Mitchadshim* (Alon Shevut 5775, eds. R. Gafni and A. Cohen), "*Meh Chari ha-Af ha-Gadol ha-Zeh*," especially pp. 123-129. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., "*Cherut ha-Eved ve-Da'aga le-Ani* – *Haftarat Yom Kippur*," pp. 421-425. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)