

Neither Day Nor Night

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The haftarah of the first day of Sukkos

The Haftarah That Reads Like the News

Armies bent on annihilation gather against Yerushalayim. A local conflict turns global. Enemies do things to civilians that decent people can't repeat.

It sounds like this morning's headlines. It's also a *nevuah* written over 2,500 years ago by Zechariah HaNavi, and we read it as the *haftarah* on the first day of Sukkos.

Zechariah was one of the last of the nevi'im, a member of the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah. The second half of his sefer deals mostly with Yemos HaMashiach and what leads up to it, and the last chapter is about Milchemes Gog Umagog — a final confrontation over Yerushalayim, the city attacked and suffering, and then Hashem stepping in directly, which is where the *Geulah* begins.

That's what we read on Yom Tov.

Two Armies, and Us in the Middle

Most of the Rishonim understand Gog Umagog as a nation, or an alliance of nations, coming after Klal Yisrael. But the Abarbanel reads it differently. To him it's a war between two non-Jewish powers — Edom on one side and Yishmael on the other — with the Jews caught in between.

Most readers can fill in the names, but it's worth saying out loud in case some can't. Edom, in the way most of our meforshim use the word, is Western civilization, and the strongest of the Western powers is America. Yishmael is the Muslim world, and the leading power in that camp for a while has been Iran.

What We Are Not Able to Say

Before going further, a caution.

Rav Yisroel Reisman, in his wonderful shiurim on Nach, takes up this chapter. He says, “Of course, there are many people on the internet who can tell you exactly what will happen. Don't expect me to tell you exactly what will happen. But one thing I'm absolutely certain of is that Hashem did not use the internet as His source of *nevuah* in our days.”

So matching *pesukim* to news reports is not our work. Taking the lessons the *nevuah* holds out to us is.

The Mountain Splits

The central picture of the chapter is a mountain coming apart:

“On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Yerushalayim on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward” (Zechariah 14:4).

According to the Abarbanel the whole picture is figurative. Rav Reisman puts it this way: Hashem is standing on Har HaZeisim, splitting it in half. On one side of the mountain, the children of Edom are massed while on the other side of the mountain the children of Yishmael are massed. And while this epic battle rages a valley opens between them. That valley is really a path — a path for Klal Yisrael to come back to Yerushalayim.

Now, this could mean that physically the war is generating *aliyah*. And it is. Rising anti-Semitism across the globe is causing many Jews to move, or at least think about moving, to Eretz Yisrael — helping the way a friend who shoves you out of the path of an oncoming car is helping. In a

deeper way, though, it could mean that the frightful events are causing Jews to return to their hearts, their roots, their identity as Jews.

“In the end, after all this has happened to you — the blessing and the curse that I have set before you — you will take it to heart while in the midst of the nations where Hashem your G-d has scattered you” (Devarim 30:1).

The arrayed forces are opening up the path of *teshuvah*.

There’s a *pasuk* a few lines later that, Rav Reisman says, Rav Pam, zt”l, returned to often. It describes a day that is “*lo yom v’lo layla* — neither day nor night” (Zechariah 14:7).

In those times, there will be signs of enormous light — things happening that our grandparents would have called impossible, such as the buildup of Torah throughout the world, especially in Eretz Yisrael. At the same time, there will be darkness — real fear, real losses, real threats (external and internal). A person cannot tell whether he is watching the light of the *Geulah* or another dark chapter of *Galus*. It will be confusing.

Then the *pasuk* finishes: “*V’haya l’eis erev yihyeh ohr* — And it shall be that at evening time there will be light.” The light comes at evening. That’s the hour a person expects the light to fade away, when everything he knows says the next thing is night. If light is shining at that hour it doesn’t come from the sun, or anything natural — it can only come from Hashem.

Two *pesukim* later, the Navi paints the image of “living waters” flowing out from Yerushalayim “in the summer and in the winter.” The streams flow even in the summer, during the dry season. And, as Chazal say, there’s no water but Torah. Torah and mitzvos will flow out of Yerushalayim into a spiritually dry, arid world soaked in darkness, in materialism. By every natural measure it shouldn’t be flowing at all. That’s a miracle similar to the miracle of the light. The season says stop, but it doesn’t.

So the broad message is: Just when things look darkest look for light. At that hour even a small ray, a little sparkle, isn’t small, because it isn’t natural light at all. It’s the hour when a small thing is worth more than it looks — one mitzvah, one Shabbos, one shiur, one time a person holds his tongue when he has every right to answer back, when one person takes one small step back to come close to Hashem.

Are We Listening?

Rabbi Joey Haber, speaking shortly after the Simchas Torah attacks in Eretz Yisrael, illustrated it this way. On his way to give a speech in Boston, a man he didn’t know picked him up from the

airport. As they were driving, the man handed him his phone. On the screen was a photograph of six or seven soldiers standing together.

“That’s my son, all the way on the left,” the man said.

Rabbi Haber looked at the picture. One of the soldiers in it was wearing a tallis and tefillin.

“Is that your son?” he asked, pointing to one of them.

“No, no, no,” the man said. “My son wears tallis and tefillin every day. He’s a religious kid. But every day now my son shares his tefillin with others, because so many people want to put them on.”

Then Rabbi Haber comments: “Maybe our job at this dark, terrifying time is to open our eyes — not to be judges but to be learners. Not to be reason-givers — but to be people who take lessons to heart, who listen and hear.”

Listen. Look. That’s our job. Listen for the sound of water flowing. Look for a ray of light, however small. The times call for it. In fact, they demand it.

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