

The Haftarah for Yom Kippur Morning By: Rabbi Noah Gradofsky

The Haftarah for Yom Kippur morning comes from Isaiah 57:14-58:14. The prophet speaks of a time after Cyrus conquered Babylon and allowed Jews to return to Israel. It is unclear whether the prophet is speaking to an audience in Babylonia or to people who had already returned to Israel.¹

Translation of the haftarah below is from the 1917 JPS Tanakh (public domain). {S} and {P} denote classical paragraph marks. Note that any other translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

The text is marked to note some key words that are repeated throughout the haftarah (in these cases the key Hebrew word is added to the English translation). This is based on the “Content and Meaning” section of the JPS Torah Commentary’s introduction to the haftarah, though some of the occurrences I highlight are not mentioned by JPS.²

- Phrases using the root דרך (**way/path**) are **bolded**. In the beginning of the haftarah, God calls for a removal of any impediments from God’s people’s ability to follow a proper path. Then, the current path of the people is criticized.
- Phrases using the root חפץ (delight/desire/pursue) are shaded. These occurrences present a contrast between the people’s purported religious search and their actual pursuit of their own financial interests.
- Three words using the letters ענ (afflicting the soul during fasting, the pauper, and God’s “answering”/seeking) are underlined. The implication is that fasting only garners divine response if it is paired with care for the poor.³
- Similarly, occurrences of the root נפש (soul) are double-underlined, as the varied use of that term suggests that only when fasting (=afflicting the soul) leads one to be compassionate toward those in need (וּתְפִק לְרַעַב נַפְשֶׁךָ, to extend one’s soul to one in need) will God provide for your soul’s needs.

Some additional commentary appears in footnotes to the text.

¹ Introduction to hafarah for Yom Kippur Morning in Michael Fishbane, The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarat, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 2002, p. 392. Hereinafter JPS.

² Id.

³ It seems to me that it is also possible that the reference to people treating the Sabbath as ענג, a delight, (58:13) and resultantly becoming a delight (תתענג) to God (58:14) may continue the play on the ענ combination.

14 And He will say: cast ye up, cast ye up, **clear the way (דָּרַךְ)**, take up the stumblingblock **out of the way (מִדְרַךְ) of My people.** {S} 15 For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.⁴ 16 For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit that enwrappeth itself is from Me, and the souls which I have made.⁵ 17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him, I hid Me and was wroth; and **he went on frowardly in the way (בְּדָרַךְ) of his heart.** 18 **I have seen his ways (דַּרְכָיו), and will heal him;** I will lead him also, and requite with comforts him and his mourners. 19 Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near,⁶ saith the LORD that createth the fruit of the lips; and I will heal him. 20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 There is no peace, saith my God concerning the wicked.⁷ {P} **Chapter 58 1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a horn, and declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.⁸ 2 Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways (דַּרְכֵי);** as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God, they ask of Me righteous ordinances, they delight (יִחַצְצוּ) to draw near unto God. **3 Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul⁹, and Thou takest no knowledge?--Behold, in the day of your fast ye pursue (תִּמְצְאוּ) your business, and exact all your labours.**

(יד) וְאָמַר סָלוּ סָלוּ פָּנֵי דָרַךְ הַרִימוּ מִכְשׁוֹל מִדְרַךְ עַמִּי: ס (טו) כִּי כֹה אָמַר רַם וְנִשְׂא שֶׁכֶן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֲשַׁכּוֹן וְאֵת דָּכָא וְשִׁפְלֵי רוּחַ לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׁפִלִים וְלְהַחְיֹת לֵב נְדָכָאִים: ⁴ (טז) כִּי לֹא לְעוֹלָם אָרִיב וְלֹא לְנֹצַח אֶקְצוֹף כִּי רוּחַ מִלְפָּנַי יַעֲטוּף וְנִשְׁמוֹת אֲנִי עֲשִׂיתִי: ⁵ (יז) בְּעוֹן בָּצְעוּ קִצְפִּיתִי וְאִכְהוּ הַסֶּתֶר וְאֶקְצַף וַיִּלְךְ שׁוֹבֵב בְּדָרַךְ לְבוֹ: (יח) דַּרְכָיו רְאִיתִי וְאֶרְפָּאֵהוּ וְאִנְחָהוּ וְאֶשְׁלַם נַחְמִים לוֹ וְלֹאֲבִלְיוֹ: (יט) בּוֹרָא נּוֹב נִיב שְׁפִתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב⁶ אָמַר יְקַנֵּן וְרַפְּאֵתִי: (כ) וְהִרְשָׁעִים כְּפִים נִגְרָשׁ כִּי הִשְׁקֵט לֹא יוּכַל וַיִּגְרָשׁוּ מִימִיּוֹ רֶפֶשׁ וְיִטִּי: (כא) אֵין שְׁלוֹם אָמַר אֶ-לֵהִי לְרַשָּׁעִים: ⁷ ס פֶּרֶק נח (א) קָרָא בְּגֵרוֹן אֵל תַּחֲשֶׁה כְּשׁוֹפֵר הָרֵם קוֹלְךָ וְהִגַּד לְעַמִּי פִשְׁעָם וּלְבַיִת יַעֲקֹב חֲטָאתָם: ⁸ (ב) וְאוֹתִי יוֹם יוֹם יְדַרְשׁוּן וְדַעַת דַּרְכֵי יִחַצְצוּן כְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר צָדָקָה עָשָׂה וּמִשְׁפָּט אֶ-לֵהִי לֹא עָזַב יִשְׁאֲלוּנִי מִשְׁפָּטִי צָדֵק קָרַבַת אֶ-לֵהִים יִחַצְצוּן: (ג) לְמָה צִמְנוּ וְלֹא רְאִיתִי עֲבִינוּ נִפְשָׁנוּ⁹ וְלֹא תִדְעֵהּ בְּיוֹם צִמְכֶם תִּמְצְאוּ חֶפֶץ וְכָל עֲצָבֵיכֶם תִּנְגָּשׁוּ:

⁴ Note the juxtaposition of God as “Lofty” and “dwell[ing] in the high and holy place” but also being “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Similarly, in 58:7 the people are exhorted to “bring the lowly poor into thy house” (translated by JPS as “bring the poor cast out to thy house”).

⁵ Metzudat David explains “Did I not created all the souls; therefore it is fitting for me to have mercy upon them.” The Hertz humash comments: “The verse explains why God is near to the contrite in spirit. Divine anger lasts only for a time, until chastisement had produced the desired purification and humility of spirit. Long continuance of His wrath and judgment would have utterly destroyed the souls He had created.”

⁶ According to the Hertz humash, the “near” is a reference to those who had returned to Jerusalem from exile while the “far off” refers to those who remained in exile. In the Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 34b, however, the terms “far off” and “near” are taken to compare one who repents versus one who has always been righteous. Rabbi Abahu cites this verse as the basis for saying that “צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין” where those who repent stand, the fully righteous (i.e. those who were always righteous) cannot stand,” since this verse mentions those that are “far off” before those who are “near.” Rabbi Yohanan takes the opposite view, arguing that the “far off” in the verse are those that have been distant from sin. Commenting on this verse, Rashi takes a middle ground, writing, “ועבודתי מנעוריו” and one who has drawn close now.”

⁷ Rashi notes that on the heels of informing us that there is peace both for the repentant as well as those who have always been righteous (see footnote 6 above), the prophet tells us there is no peace for the wicked.

⁸ Here, God is addressing the prophet, as noted by Metzudat David. Similarly, in the haftarah of Shabbat Nahamu, God calls on the prophets to comfort the people from the exile destruction of Jerusalem (see Isaiah 40:1 and Metzudat David thereon).

⁹ JPS notes that the phrase “afflicted our soul” is particularly evocative of Leviticus 16:31, which is part of the Torah reading on Yom Kippur morning and says regarding Yom Kippur “וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם” and you shall afflict your souls.”

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and contention,¹⁰ and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict (ענות) his soul (נפש)? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor (עניים) that are cast out to thy house?¹¹ when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of the LORD shall be thy rearward.¹² 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD will answer (יענה); thou shalt cry, and He will say: 'Here I am.' If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedness; 10 And if thou draw out thy soul (נפש) to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted (נענה) soul (נפש),¹³ then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thy gloom be as the noon-day; 11 And the LORD will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul (נפש) in drought, and make strong thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places, thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in. 13 If thou turn away thy foot because of the sabbath, from pursuing thy business (תפציר) on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of the LORD honourable; and shalt honour it, not doing thy wonted ways, nor pursuing thy business (תפציר), nor speaking thereof;¹⁴

(ד) הן לריב ומצה תצומו¹⁰ ולהכות באגרף רשע לא תצומו כיום להשמיע במרום קולכם: (ה) הקצה יהיה צום אבחרהו יום ענות אדם נפשן הלכך כאגמן ראשו ושק ואפר יציע הלצה תקרא צום ויוון ליקוק: (ו) הלוא זה צום אבחרהו פתח חרצבות רשע התר אגדות מוטה ושלח רוצים חפשים וכל מוטה תנתקו: (ז) הלוא פרי לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית¹¹ כי תראה ערם וכסיתו ומבשרך לא תתעלם: (ח) אז יבקע כשחר אורך וארכתך מהרה תצמח והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יקוק יאספך:¹² (ט) אז תקרא ויקוק יענה תשוע ויאמר הנני אם תסיר מתוכך מוטה שלח אצבע ודבר און: (י) ותפק לרעב נפשך ונפש נענה תשביע¹³ וזרח בחשך אורך ואפלתך כצהרים: (יא) ונחך יקוק תמיד והשביע בצחצחות נפשך ועצמתך יחליץ והיית כגן רזה וכמוצא מים אשר לא יכזבו מימיו: (יב) וכנו ממך חרבות עולם מוסדי דור ודור תקומם וקרא לך גדר פרץ משבב נתיבות לשבת: (יג) אם תשיב משבת רגלך עשות חפציה ביום קדשי וקראת לשבת ענג לקדוש יקוק מכבד וכבדתו מעשות דרכיך ממצוא חפצך ודבר דבר:¹⁴

¹⁰ JPS notes the “jarring connection” between “וּמְצָה תִּצְוֹמוּ” you fast (*tatsumu*) in strife and contention (*matsa*) in 58:4. It strikes me that a similar connection could be made in the phrase “בְּיוֹם צִמְמֶכֶם תִּמְצְאוּ חִפְצְךָ” on the day of your fast (*tsomkhem*) you seek out (*timts’u*) your business.” Also note the language “you fast in strife (*lariv*)” which seems to call to mind verse 57:16 “אִי כִי לֹא לְעוֹלָם אָרִיב” (God) will not always strive (*ariv*) with you.”

¹¹ Better “bring the lowly poor into thy house.” See footnote 4 above.

¹² The Hertz humash explains, “i.e. shall encourage and protect you. This is a figurative use of the word. In war the rearward would collect the stragglers and provide protection against surprise attack.”

¹³ In the Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 9b Rabbi Yitzchack refers to this verse and the following verses as proof for the blessings that come from speaking kindly (י [המפייסו בדברים]) when providing for the poor (הנותן פרוטה לעני). C.f. Rashi and Metzudat David on “draw[ing] out thy soul to the hungry.” Thus, the lesson is that tending to the needs of the poor involves tending both to the person’s physical and psychological wellbeing.

¹⁴ The expectations of Shabbat are the same as the expectations of a fast – setting aside personal desires and avoiding wanton ways.

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD, and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.¹⁵ {P}

(יד) אַז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל יְקוּק וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל
בְּמוֹתַי בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ וְהֵאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת
יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִי יְקוּק דִּבֶּר:¹⁵ ס

¹⁵ JPS notes that “for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” is a technical formula that “gives authority to the prophet’s word and is used to cite and reapply an earlier prophecy or instruction.” JPS reads this verse as reflecting Moses’ song at Deuteronomy 32:9 and 32:13 (translations below from 1917 JPS):

דברים לב
(ט) כִּי חִלַּק יְקוּק עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבְלֵי נַחֲלָתוֹ: (יג) יִרְכַּבְהוּ עַל בְּמוֹתַי בְּמַתִּי
אֶרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל תְּנוּבוֹת שִׂדֵי וַיִּנְקֶהוּ דָבֶשׁ מִסֶּלַע וְשִׁמֶן מִחֲלָמִישׁ צוּר:

Deuteronomy 32:
9 For the portion of the LORD is His people, Jacob the lot of His inheritance. **13 He made him ride on the high places of the earth**, and he did eat the fruitage of the field; and He made him to suck honey out of the crag, and oil out of the flinty rock;

ישעיה נח:יד
אַז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל יְקוּק וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל בְּמוֹתַי בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ וְהֵאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת
יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִי יְקוּק דִּבֶּר

Isaiah 58:14
Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD, **and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth**, and **I will feed thee** with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

JPS writes that the “account of divine care” in Deuteronomy “is now transformed into a prophecy of future beneficence – a new settlement in the land, made conditional upon *Shabbat* observance.”