

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Shoftim / פרשת שופטים

Awaken, Arise, Yerushalyim

Our haftorah is taken from Yeshayahu's beautiful prophecies of the final redemption. In addition to his evocative and moving descriptions, however, these prophecies also encode lessons for us about how to best prepare and usher in the actualization of Yeshayahu's vision.

In the verses immediately prior to this week's haftorah, the Jewish people cry out to God to "remember" his former strength:¹

Awaken, awaken, dress yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord, awaken, awaken like days of old, generations of yore; are you not the one that hewed Rahab and slew the sea monster? Are you not the one who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep? Who made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed ones to pass?

After recounting God's great feats of the past, the Jewish people continue to pray that God similarly use his Might to return them to Yerushalayim:²

And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and they shall come to Zion with song, and [with] everlasting joy on their heads; gladness and joy shall overtake them; sorrow and sighing shall flee.

A few verses later, we seem to encounter God's response:³

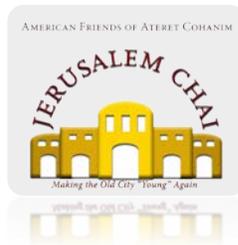
Awaken, awaken, arise, Yerushalayim, for you have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath; the dregs of the cup of weakness you have drained.

Just as the Jewish people cried out to God that *He* should awaken his strength of old, God asks Yerushalayim to awaken as well. What is the meaning of this parallelism?

¹ Yeshayahu 51:8-9. Translations are from Chabad.org.

² Ibid, 51:10.

³ Ibid, 51:17.



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The Malbim offers a powerful suggestion:

[God says:] ‘You, instead of telling Me to ‘awaken and dress yourself in strength,’ I respond ‘Awaken, arise Yerushalayim.’ For the matter depends on you.

The Jewish people want God to redeem them and reunite them with their ancestral city. God, however, responds that the Jewish people must take the initiative, and only then will He help them in their quest for redemption.

While this is a penetrating and powerful interpretation, it seems to leave us in the grey. The verses and the Malbim do not seem to offer any practical recommendations of what this awakening consists. God calls upon *us* to take the first step, but does not delineate what that step is other than a general call to “awaken?”

Rav Yo’av Uriel⁴ suggests that this is exactly the point. The first step in the process of redemption is simply for Yerushalayim/the Jewish people to awaken from their slumber. We need a shift in consciousness from the limited exilic consciousness to the exalted grandeur of a redeemed Yerushalayim. We need to remember the glory days of Yerushalayim and conjure up the image in our minds that we will certainly return to such a time and even surpass it. This “awakening” is the key paradigm shift that will be the foundation of all of the practical work of settling the land and rebuilding our holy city.

⁴ Available at <https://www.bneyzion.co.il/%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%A8%D7%A9/%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%93%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%93%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%90%D7%94-%D7%9C%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9D/>