

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : בראשית

***This week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Yeshayohu.
Sefaradim read from Chapter 42, Pessukim 5 — 21,
Ashkenazzim continue till Chapter 43, Possuk 10.***

1. The connexion to the Sidra is seen straightaway in the first Possuk of the Haftorah. The first Possuk of the Sidra — the first Possuk of the Torah — tells us that, “In the beginning, HaShem created the heavens and the earth.” And so, too, the prophet Yeshayohu brings to the Jewish People a message from HaShem “Who creates the heavens and stretches them out, Who spreads out the earth and Who gives life and spirit to the people that live on it.” And at first glance, that seems to be the end of the connexion with the Sidra.
2. But that's only at first glance. The Sidra Berayshis tells of the creation of the world. It also tells of how HaShem charged Man, HaShem's greatest creation, with the task to utilize the world in the service of HaShem and to protect the world from harm, “to work it and to guard it,” and ultimately to make this world a place worthy of the Divine Presence. To achieve his purpose, HaShem endowed Man with huge potential. But Man is not to be a robot: HaShem wants Man to accomplish his task through his own efforts and of his own free will. Therefore, at the same time as endowing Man with his G-dly soul, HaShem has also created in him a strong will to go his own way, what our Chachommim call the “Yetzer HoRa.” But if Man allows this Yetzer HoRa free rein, he will find that slowly but surely his life will be given over to his own uncontrolled urges and passions and it would destroy him. The antidote to this Yetzer HoRa is to follow the instructions of HaShem as given in His Torah. Thus there is built-in into the human being the potential for great goodness but he has also a capacity for doing terrible harm. The one is Man's purpose and leads to his happy fulfilment, the other results in the wreck and ruin of man's happiness. The one is compliance with HaShem's Will as expressed in His commandments to us, the מצוות, the other is the missed target, the sin, the חטא, the transgression, the עבירה, against HaShem's Word.
3. In the same way as the physical and material world was to develop after its creation, and is still being developed today with new discoveries and inventions, all the time improving and striving for perfection, so too Man had to start out on his own to find his way through his moral choices till he, too, attains his purpose. In the same way as a child sometimes has to learn from his mistakes and is trained in the harsh school of experience as he grows up into a responsible adult, so was it with Mankind, too. Mistakes were made at the beginning of the history of Mankind and HaShem, in His goodness, showed Man what corrections were needed. Sadly, when the people did not heed His messages and refused to better their ways, He had to punish them with major disasters. Later, HaShem chose the Jewish

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People that was descended from His friend, Avrohom, that they shall be a “light unto the Nations,” to be the message-bearers from HaShem and show the way that Mankind is to go and progress and in this progress to find true fulfilment and genuine satisfaction.

4. But how sad it is when the message-bearer forgets his message! Considering their high calling, when they deliberately forsake their task, HaShem is greatly disappointed and brings upon them severe retribution until they come back to Him and once again serve as the model nation that HaShem has placed at the centre of the world. The Novvi Yeshayohu tells the Jewish People that HaShem declares, “You are My witnesses,” and this is the rallying call of this week’s Haftorah. It is a fitting introduction and is the mission statement, as it were, of the Jewish People, as we stand at the beginning of the new cycle of Torah Readings, of our rôle in disseminating the Word of HaShem to all the world.