

הַפְטֵרָה לְשַׁבַּת רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ

HAFTORAH FOR SHABBOS ROSH CHODESH

The Haftorah is from the end of Sefer Yeshayohu, Chapter 66 verses 1 — 24.

1. The reason this Haftorah is read instead of the Haftorah of the week is so as to serve as an announcement that today, this Shabbos day, is also Rosh Chodesh. Obviously, therefore, there can be no connexion between any particular Sidra of the Week and this Haftorah.
2. This last Chapter from Yeshayohu is chosen as the Haftorah because the penultimate Possuk of the Sefer speaks of Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos (both mentioned together, like today is both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh) when all living beings will acknowledge HaShem as the G-d of all Mankind and they will all come and worship HaShem at His holy Beis HaMikdash. This Haftorah gives us an opportunity, therefore, to explain a little about the message of the natural phenomenon of the New Moon which the event of Rosh Chodesh commemorates.
3. As is known, the Jewish calendar is a lunar-solar calendar. That is, it is a calendar with its Yommim Tovim fixed according to the lunar dates but with adjustments made according to the solar calendar. So the dates of the Yommim Tovim are fixed according to the lunar calendar and since the seasons come about through the sun, the Yommim Tovim will thus invariably and consistently be in their respective seasons: Pessach is in the spring, Sukkos is at the end of the summer, and so on. HaShem has decreed that the Jewish People's national life shall thus be fixed according to the moon, but adjusted in accordance with the sun, that is, the phases of the moon dictate when the Yommim Tovim shall occur in the annual solar cycle, each Yom Tov with its particular message to the Jewish People.
4. But why should the Yommim Tovim be fixed according to the moon? The answer is that the moon itself teaches a lesson to the Jewish People. This lesson is restated each time we take our bearings from the moon to consult our calendar in the sky and that message is the message of rejuvenation and renewal. It is noteworthy that this lesson of rejuvenation is so important that in fact the Mitzvah of proclaiming Rosh Chodesh is the very first Mitzvah that HaShem commanded the Jewish People as a People. Indeed, this Mitzvah was commanded to Moshe our Teacher even before we had been given permission by Par'o the King of Egypt to leave his land. It is as if this Mitzvah was, as it were, a precondition to our Deliverance from Egypt by HaShem. (See **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : ב.ג.**)
5. The moon continually wanes and waxes; it decreases and increases; it even disappears completely but then it reappears, growing again, and these phases of the moon are to serve as a model to us humans. As follows: In the same way as the moon waxes and wanes, so too, can the human, individually or as part of a community, find himself or herself

spiritually progressing or regressing, rising or falling, “waxing or waning,” indeed sometimes even disappearing completely but then reappearing and growing again to the full human potential. This lesson of the great human potential for spiritual growth is proclaimed to all mankind by the example of the Chosen People of HaShem. The Jewish People are to proclaim this sense of higher purpose by their regular מוֹעֲדִים, their “Times of Meeting” with HaShem, in their Divinely-ordained Yommim Tovim.

6. Our Chachommim tell us that the Torah is like the blueprint, the architect’s plan, as it were, of the world, that, (זוהר, תרומה, קס”א:) **”קִוְדָשָׁא בְּרִידָא הוּא אִיסְתַּבֵּל בְּאוּרֵייתָא וּבְרָא עֲלֵמָא”** — “the Holy One looked into the Torah and according to it, He created the world.” This is literally a fundamental teaching, it is the foundation upon which we base our whole perspective of everything that makes up this whole universe. What it means is this: In the ordinary way of things, one would have said that we have a physical world and the Torah instructs us how to use it, how to utilize its various parts. The world was here and the Torah’s instructions to us tell us how we are to make the most of a world which predates the Torah. But our Chachommim teach us that this is a mistaken perspective. They tell us that the truth is to the contrary. HaShem used the Torah as a blueprint from which to create the world. Therefore, the instructions of the Torah are not merely how best to use the world, that the world is a given and the Torah helps us come to terms with a situation, as it were, that exists. Not so. If there is anything in the world, if there exists a phenomenon, it is there precisely because the Torah calls for it to be there and that’s why it is there, that’s the reason for its being in existence.
7. To take our case in point: It’s not that there is the phenomena of our solar system and our moon and the Torah uses these physical realities to regulate our lives, to use the moon to fix our Yommim Tovim, for instance, or to use the sun to regulate our daily Mitzvos, and so on. Exactly the opposite. In the Torah it says, that is, HaShem’s wisdom dictates, that there are to be certain commemorative events (including what we know as the Yommim Tovim) and that these events are to be regulated through the lunar calendar. This calls for a moon. That is, there needs to be a moon. Therefore, HaShem created the moon.
8. To take another example: children and their parents. It’s not that children are born from their parents and the Torah commands that children shall honour their parents, as if the procreation of children is a given and the Torah simply commands how children and parents are to relate to each other. That is, that the Torah reacts to a situation. To the contrary. HaShem in His Wisdom wished that there shall be such a concept as parents and children and that those children shall honour their parents. When HaShem later transformed and transcribed this notion of His Wisdom into the actuality of the Torah, to be practically carried out, the idea is translated in His Torah into the command, “Honour your father and your mother.” This commandment therefore necessitates that children are to come about through a father and mother whom the children shall honour. HaShem, as it were, looking into His Torah where it commands, “Honour your father and your mother,” therefore saw a need for there to be children born from parents and therefore He created in His world that human children come about through a father and

mother. That is, it is the Torah commandment, “Honour your father and your mother” that calls for, necessitates, that children shall be born from father and mother. (*We might return to this particular example another time, in connexion with another completely different Torah discussion.*)

9. Perhaps this all helps us to see the opening verses of this Haftorah in context. Everything that exists is the creation of HaShem and can teach His intelligent creatures (that is, us humans) about Him. The Creator of All has a reason for creating every single thing that He created, and whatever that reason is, it is all needed in His scheme of things. “So says HaShem,” says Yeshayohu, “the heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool” — the heavens and the earth all serve to teach those who want to learn about HaShem. Through HaShem’s creations, Man can realize and acknowledge his Creator and his G-d. But not only are all physical phenomena from HaShem — and here is perhaps the climax of the whole Sefer Yeshayohu — but everything is under HaShem’s control. Even the events of history, the events of the present and the events of the future — all is under His supervision and control. Even if they seemingly happen independent of HaShem, nevertheless every thing is supervised by Him. He will reward every good deed done by each nation and by every folk and by each individual in every folk, and He will punish every deliberately evil act committed by each individual and each nation. But especially severe, warns Yeshayohu, will be the retribution that He will bring upon those who ever harmed His Chosen People.
10. Therefore, this closing chapter of the Sefer Yeshayohu proclaims how HaShem will reward good deeds and will punish each and every deed done with evil intent. The day will come, says Yeshayohu, when all of Mankind will come to HaShem’s holy Beis HaMikdash, the place dedicated solely to the Glory of HaShem, and will worship and pay homage and respect to HaShem, the G-d of All, on those two recurring occasions that He has embedded into His world for this purpose. Firstly, on the Shabbos, the special day of the seven-day week set aside to acknowledge HaShem as Creator of the world. And secondly on Rosh Chodesh, the monthly reminder that is created for man to contemplate his own potential, to see an example — from the world of nature that HaShem has created in the phenomenon of the ever waxing and waning moon — the example of rejuvenation, that a person can renew himself in his sacred task on earth, to serve HaShem by living his life in accordance with the purpose intended by HaShem and commanded by Him in His Torah.