HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : לך לך

This week's Haftorah is from the Sefer Yeshayohu
from verse 27 of Chapter 40 till verse 16 of Chapter 41.

1. The Sidra tells of how HaShem commanded Avrohom *Ovinu* (Avrohom our Father) to leave his homeland, to leave his father's house and his birthplace and to make his way to the land then occupied by the Kenaanites and various other clans. The Sidra continues with the account of Avrohom's life story and highlights some of the more momentous events of his life. From all this we see the special person that Avrohom is and why HaShem calls him His "friend" and why we have been taken by HaShem to be His Chosen People, for we are "the children of Avrohom, My friend." (This phrase is more or less the only explicit connexion between the Sidra and the Haftorah.)
2. This Haftorah is part of the message of hope that the Prophet Yeshayohu brings to the Jewish People in exile. However much it might appear to us that HaShem ignores our plight, He has not forgotten us, says the Novvi. On the contrary, history is unfolding according to HaShem's design and the day will come when His People will be seen to be central to HaShem's plan for the nations of the world.
3. Our exile from our Land came about because we failed to live up to our high calling as HaShem's "light unto the Nations." We forgot that HaShem had called us into existence solely to be "His Witnesses" to the world. Indeed, it was to help us in this, our purpose, that HaShem gave us the Land of Israel, not so much that it should be our homeland (though that is part of it, of course) but Eretz Yisroel is to be a part of our equipment, as it were, in our mission to the world. For as a glance at a globe will show, Eretz Yisroel is a land strategically situated. It forms a connecting bridge between the lands of Europe and Africa and is the coastline for all that landmass which extends all the way to China. Eretz Yisroel is called "the middle of the world" (that's what the word "Mediterranean" means) but this refers not only to its spiritual centrality and prominence (of which our Chachommim tell us) but it is meant also quite literally and refers to its physical place on the globe. (Nor is it meant only metaphorically either, that it is always in the spotlight of world events and the centre of the world's attention!) Its strategic importance goes back to the dawn of history and it is no wonder that the world powers of the world, ancient as well as modern, have all wanted it and have fought so hard for it. But it is just because of this strategic importance that HaShem wants this Land to be the geographical base of His People Israel.
4. In the Sidra, HaShem promises this land to Avrohom and his descendants. He wants us, His Chosen People, living in our own country and functioning as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" right there, centre stage of the arena that is the world of the nations. HaShem wants His People to be situated prominently in the midst of the families of Mankind in such a way as to influence their affairs positively and happily, that they shall learn from our example to live their lives righteously and justly, under the Sovereignty of HaShem.
5. All this is perfectly clear from that quite extraordinary, one-off instruction that we were to carry out when we came out of the Wilderness and took possession of Eretz Yisroel. We

For questions, comments or suggestions, or to be included on our e-mailing list and receive these Sheets, send an e-mail to **oyb@seniors.org.uk**

were bidden to set up, on the very day that we came into the Land, twelve great steles, each with six faces, on which we were to inscribe in the seventy languages of the principal nations of the day the essence of the Torah by which we live our lives individually and as a nation. This was our mission statement, as it were, and spelled out who we are and that the design for living that is the Torah of HaShem governs every facet of our lives. There, on those steles, set up at the very entrance to the country, was described our *raison d'être* for everybody who would come to enquire about this unique People which had burst forth upon the world in such a spectacular way. They could all read, in their own language, what it was that made us the People of HaShem and they were to see us as an example for all humanity to emulate.

6. That's why when the Jewish People failed to live up to their great mission, the Land was taken from us and we were driven into exile. Instead of being an example and inspiration to the whole world as a G-dly People living in wholesome happiness settled on our own Land, we would have to teach those ideals of G-dliness when we were dispersed amongst those nations. To a remarkable degree, we have done so. It has cost us rivers of blood and oceans of tears, but the fact is that the majority of Mankind, through Judaism's daughter-religions of Christianity and Islam, do know of HaShem and claim to subscribe to His moral code of justice and righteousness. But there is more to do.

7. All this, incidentally, makes understandable that statement of our Chachommim, that "HaShem is sometimes willing to overlook even the cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality and murder but He will never overlook the sin of *Chillul HaShem*, of the desecration of His Name." For the sin of *Chillul HaShem* negates the whole purpose of the People of HaShem and frustrates the ultimate aim of bringing all Mankind to acknowledge HaShem as the Sovereign of all creation.

8. Interestingly, the fact that much of the non-Jewish world is constantly critical of Jews and of that country that they see as the Jewish state, demonstrates clearly that they do indeed hold us to a higher standard than that of anyone else. Of course, applying this double standard is hurtful and the constant carping criticism of Jews by the non-Jewish world for even minor misdemeanours while ignoring their own gross wrongdoings, is most unfair, but it does show a grudging recognition (and their jealousy) that the Jewish People are G-d's People.

9. Usually, there are some specific points that connect the Sidra and the Haftorah but with this Haftorah, besides the reference to Avrohom mentioned above, there seems to be no real connexion. Yet taking the Haftorah as a whole we can indeed see, if not a connexion, at least a parallel to the Sidra, as follows:

10. The Sidra is the report of how Avrohom set out on his life's mission to make all of humanity aware of HaShem and the Haftorah is a message of comfort to the People of Avrohom who had failed in this task and were therefore sent away from their Land and into exile. But the Haftorah contains also a message of hope to the Jewish People. The long exile will end, says the Novvi, and the day will come when we will once again take up the sacred mission begun by our father Avrohom. Yeshayohu tells us that we will return to our Holy Land. We will resume our high calling and we will be recognized as HaShem's Chosen People, once again settled on our Holy Land, once again benignly instructing, by example and by teaching, all the families of Mankind to acknowledge and serve HaShem, just as our ancestor Avrohom started out to do, so long ago.

For questions, comments or suggestions, or to be included on our e-mailing list and receive these Sheets, send an e-mail to **oyb@seniors.org.uk**