

Shabbat Nachamu – A sermon in English and Hebrew

Come Up! – May (July 2025)

This was written for the Bat Mitzvah of May, whose family travelled from Israel, and with special thought for those grandparents who do not speak English. May describes on this Shabbat morning the feeling of being a girl sitting high up in the Ladies gallery of an Orthodox synagogue in another country, and how when she came to the UK, she saw girls called to the Torah. She decided she would be the first in her family to be bat mitzvah with an aliyah.

May you did not know until a few days ago that some very special members of your family were coming here from Israel. That's very exciting. I envy them not only because they are here but *they will go home*. Where they will have opportunity to visit Israel Museum and see with their own eyes the original Great Isaiah scroll which is being shown for the first time since 1968.

מאי לא יודעת שאנשים מיוחדים יהיו פה בבוקר. זה מאוד מתרגשת אותי אבל אני מקנא
כי כשהם יחזרו יש להם הזדמנות לבקר במוזיאון ישראל

וגם לראות ועיניים שלהם הספר ישעיהו הגדול שם במוזיאון ישראל

It is over 2000 years old, and it is the crown jewels of the Qumran scrolls, hidden so long ago and discovered in a cave by a Bedouin Shepherd.

כתוב לפני 2000 שנה ומצא במדבר יהודה מ רואה ציון בדואר

I would love to see it. In fact, I thought I already *had* because there is a scroll on display in the specially built Dome of the Book in Jerusalem; as you approach it the first words you see are the very same words that you read in your haftarah this Shabbat.

אז חשבתי שכבר ראיתי אותו , כי יש

ישעיהו במרכז

היכל הספר בירושלים

במוזיאון בנוי לזכות ספרים

from Qumran

חשבתי שהספר שם זה מקורי אבל למדתי שזה פקסמליה
בירושלים בהיכל הספר ספר ישעיהו תצוגה המילים הראשונים שנראים
שם, המילים הראשונים בהפתרה שלך היום בשבת

כי היום נקרא שבת נחמו

כי השבת הזאת היא השבת

אחרי תשע באב, היום אבל, שאנחנו זוכרים אסון נגד עם יהודי
בכל ההיסטוריה שלנו

שבת נחמו

אז השאלה היא למה

בדיוק המילים האלה בספר לישיעיהו הכי חשוב היום בדיוק בשבת הזאת
המילים שאנחנו קוראים רק בשבת הזאת
המילים הראשונים שרואים בספר ישעיהו הוא

נחמו נחמו עמי

Because this day is called Shabbat Nachamu. It is the first time we come together in a synagogue after Tisha B'Av, the ninth of the month of the Av. The day of grief and the day of mourning. For remembering the Jewish history of persecution. So, what does Isaiah say that is so important and why his words are chosen for us exactly and only on this Shabbat. The words that meet you as you see the copy of that great Isaiah scroll at the dome of the book: **נחמו נחמו עמי**

אמר אליהם

Comfort and comfort my people says your God.

“speak tenderly to Jerusalem and declare to her that her time of service is over that she has paid the price for her sins for she has received double the punishment at her hand, double for all her sins.”

דברו על לב ירושלים

וקראו אליה

כי מלאה צבאה

כי נרצה עונה

Isaiah is speaking to his people in Babylonia and this is his promise. The mountains will flatten the valley floor will raise up and a giant highway opens through the desert for their return. We are fragile, he says, all earthly power is short-lived. The mighty and powerful will lose their grip, and we will be gathered up like a shepherd cradles his lambs. נחמו נחמו עמי

May, your journey to the Torah is especially precious this Shabbat, not only for you and your family but in the context of the journey of our people. Tisha B'Av describes the desolation our people experience, particularly through images of women and girls. Jerusalem is spoken of as a sad and broken woman. But in your haftarah there is a surprising and profound sudden shift.

40:9

Go up, is addressed to the feminine.

עלי לך

מבשרת ציון

Raise your voice with strength

הרימי בכוח ולך

מבשרת ירושלים

הרימי אל תראי

Don't be afraid

אל תיארי

Speak!

אמרי לערי יהודה

It is so extremely unusual to even hear the feminine form of the address as a command in Torah and here it is on your bat mitzvah, it is your haftarah!

הרימי בכוח קולך

מי זאת שצריכה לדבר הרימי בכוח קולך
פרש אבן עזרא שזאת עדה
עם ישראל
אבל אף פעם לא ראיתי בתורה שישראל נקרא עדה היא
כל הזמן אלוהים מדבר עם העם יהודי כשהוא
עברה במל פרש שהיא נבואה לא נביא אבל נבואה עצמה
שאליהם שרוצה אותה לדבר עם עם יהודי
אבל זה לא מצה חן בעיניי
אני חושבת שהיא גם ירושלים גם ציון גם נשים
במגילת איכה וגם בקינות ט באב
למה?
כי במגילת איכה הנשים הן האשמות
הנשים הן הסובלות במיוחד
בחורבן
היום מי זאת
מי היא
היום האם היא מי שיושבת בעזרת נשים בבית כנסת בשקט
הרימי בכוח קולך
מישהי שאחרי 3000 שלושת אלפים שנה ענת את ישעיהו
עלי לך
עלי לתורה
עלי לך עלי לעצמך בשבילך אל תייראי

Who is this female figure that Isaiah is speaking to? Who must raise her voice?

Ibn Ezra, who lived in mediaeval Spain and North Africa says that God is speaking to the Jewish people this **she**

I am not convinced: nowhere else in the whole of the Torah are the Israelite or Jewish people spoken to in this way in the feminine.

Abravanel says that Isaiah is addressing the essence of prophecy itself **נבואה**

The prophetic voice... Am I convinced? Is **she** the one who has to find her voice, the broken spirit of **Jerusalem**, her hope?

Or is this in fact the **women** who according particularly in the *kinnot*, the songs of grief the poetry of morning is only recited on Tisha B'av who are blamed for what happened to Jerusalem?

Or, could it be the girl who sits, above in the ladies gallery, who sits and watches?

הרימי בכוח קולך

Raise your voice with strength

Who, nearly 3000 years after the prophet Isaiah lives, response to that call **עלי לך**

Come up, come up yourself come up as we might say to yourself. Because he would never know he lived long before Jews were called to the Torah that one day someone would respond to that prophetic voice and would say "I too want to go up."

עלי. From the root of the same word meaning what you had today, an **עליה**

When your grandparents return to Israel, their lives will be a little bit different because they have seen you go up. But I am also a little bit envious of them. I want to go and see the great Isaiah scroll for myself and to feel how it must have felt to see those words.

נחמו נחמו עמי

Comfort comfort my people, the time of your suffering must come to an end, the great powers are like grass that weathers and fades and the suffering too will come to an end.

עלי לך Climb up to the heights you who will who will find that voice come all of you generations come out of the silence and do not be afraid.