

MESSAGES FROM ISAIAH



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Dear Parents and Children,

Pesach was celebrated this year in its original form. Seder took place on Wednesday night as done originally in Egypt (Rabbi Yossi, Shabbat 86b). We were also confined to our homes as done originally in Egypt: "No person shall leave the entrance of their house" (Shemot 12, 22). It resembled the original Pesach celebrated 3,331 years ago more than any other Pesach throughout Jewish history.

There are 49 days in Sefirat HaOmer and the 50th day is Shavuot. The counting of the Omer started on Thursday night (2nd night Pesach) and Friday was the first day of the Omer. If we count 50 days from Friday, the 50th Day must also fall on Friday. However, the original day of Kabbalat Torah (the receiving of the Torah) was not on Friday, it was on Shabbat. This means that we received the Torah 51 days after Pesach. So why celebrate Shavuot the day beforehand?

The Talmud teaches us that Moshe added a day before receiving the Torah and Hashem subsequently approved. The 50th Day remains the day when Hashem gifted the Torah to the Jewish people. However, a meaningful act of giving requires an eager and appreciative recipient. This is, perhaps, the most important day of all. It is the day we ask ourselves: Where would we be without our beloved Torah?

While this inspirational message applies every Shavuot, it becomes even more pertinent under lockdown. We are unable to assemble in Shuls and schools for Tribe Time or Tikun Leil Shavuot. Nevertheless, the gift of Torah is more powerful than any limitation. We can learn, connect and enjoy the valuable gift of Torah wherever we are or whatever the circumstances.

This year, I felt it would be most appropriate to focus on the prophet Isaiah. Not only because he is one of the most fascinating personalities in Tanach but most importantly, because he delivers a message of Tikvah (hope). While predicting the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and exile of the Jewish people, Isaiah also focuses on revival and recovery. At the most difficult of times he saw Israel's wilderness flourishing and streams running through its deserts. He never lost hope!

I hope these precious extracts from the Book of Isaiah will encourage you to learn Tanach together as a family. Now more than ever, let us take a leaf out of Isaiah's book as we celebrate a Chag full of Simcha and hope.

Chag Shavuot Sameach,
Rabbi Cobi Ebrahimoff
rave@tribeuk.com

ישעיהו הנביא

ISAIAH THE PROPHET

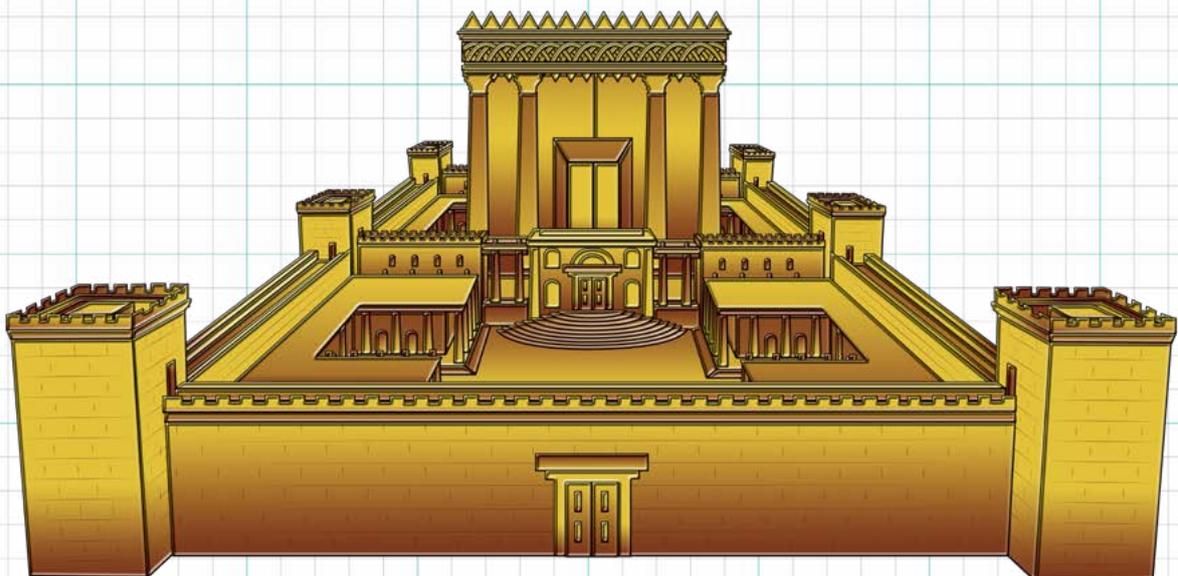
Isaiah (known in Hebrew as Yishayahu) was a Navi (prophet) who lived during the times of the first Beit-HaMikdash (Temple). Isaiah lived in very difficult times because the people of Israel were surrounded by powerful enemies.

The 10 tribes of Israel had been sent to exile (out of Israel) and the remaining tribe of Yehuda (Judah) were living in and around Jerusalem (biblical map attached). Isaiah warned the Jewish people about the forthcoming destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash which was extremely upsetting.

However, Isaiah also delivered a message of hope. His prophecy assured the Jewish people that they will return to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt in its former glory.



What do you think the name 'Yishayahu' means?



ISAIAH'S FAMILY

As well as being an important Navi, Isaiah was also a family man. His wife is mentioned in Yishayahu with two different names: 'Almah' and 'Neviah' (which means a prophetess).

Our Rabbis teach us that Isaiah's wife also had prophecies and she helped Isaiah deliver important messages from God to the people of Israel. Imagine growing up with a mum and dad who shared prophecies every morning over breakfast! They had three boys and a girl. All their children were named after their prophecies with some long, complicated names....

Girl : Heftzi-Ba - "My joy is in her"

Boy (1): Sha'ar Yeshuv - "The remnant return"

Boy (2): Immanuel - "God is with us"

Boy (3): Maher-shalal-hash-baz - "haste, spoil, speed, prey"



What do you think the name 'Yishayahu' means?



HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Isaiah lived during the reigns of four kings in Judah: Uzziah, Yotam, Ahaz, & Hezekiah. We learn about these kings in the second Book of Kings (Chapters 15-19). Uzziah and Yotam are described as righteous (good) kings. Ahaz (the 12th King of Judah) did not follow the Torah and did not listen to Isaiah.

Instead, he formed a coalition (agreement) with the evil King of Ashur (known in English as the King of Assyria). The King of Ashur attacked the tribes of Israel but did not attack Judah because of his coalition with Ahaz.

When Ahaz died and Hezekiah (his son) gained the throne, the evil King of Ashur invaded Judah with a powerful army of 185,000 soldiers. Isaiah was the father in-law of King Hezekiah, who married Heftzi-Ba. King Hezekiah listened to his father in-law and decided to put his trust in Hashem.

The people of Judah destroyed their idols and prayed to Hashem for help. Sennacherib, King of Ashur, besieged Jerusalem at night and prepared to invade the city in the morning. Before dawn, Hashem sent an angel who struck down the entire Assyrian army sending Sennacherib “with shame on his face back to his own land”.



Why did Isaiah strongly oppose the coalition with Ashur?



ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

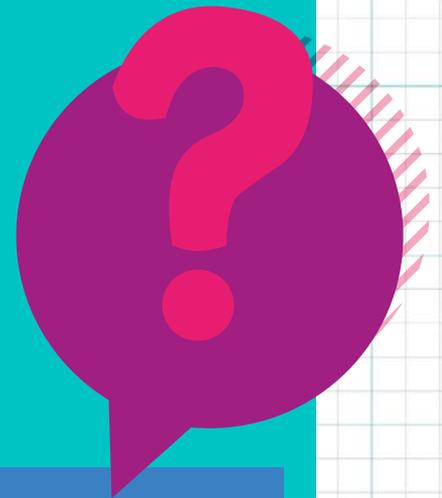
CHAPTER 2

כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וְדִבַּר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַיִם:

*For the Torah shall come forth from Zion
and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*

These words are recited while opening the Aron Hakodesh (the holy ark where the Sefer Torah is kept). The Malbim (19th Century, Ukraine) learns from this Passuk that the ultimate wisdom of Torah can only be revealed in Eretz Yisrael. The Talmud (Bava Batra 158b) teaches us that “the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise”.

A story is told about the Rabbi of Gur who returned from a visit to Jerusalem. His Hassidim asked him: “Rebbe (Rabbi), what new wisdom did you acquire during your visit?” His response was: “In Jerusalem I learnt that true wisdom is knowing when to be silent!”



**Does this apply to all places in Israel or
only to the city of Jerusalem?**



ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

CHAPTER 12

הִנֵּה אֵל יְשׁוּעָתִי אֲבֹטָח וְלֹא אֶפְחָד כִּי עֲזָי
וְזִמְרַת י-ה ה' וְהִי־לִי לְיִשׁוּעָה:

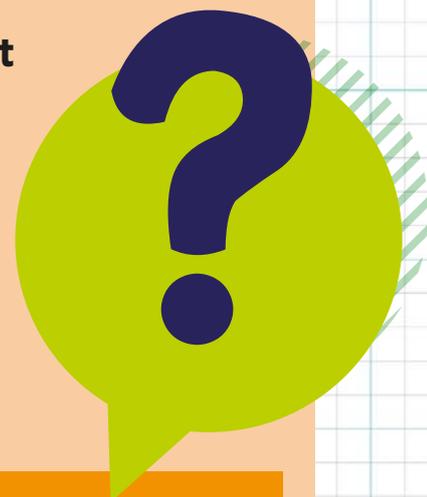
Behold the God who gives me triumph! I am confident, unafraid; For Hashem is my strength and might.

וּשְׂאֲבָתֶם־מַיִם בְּשִׁשׁוֹן מִמַּעֲיֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה:

Joyfully shall we draw water From the fountains of triumph.

The Abarbanel (15th Century, Italy) relates Isaiah's message about drawing water from the fountain to Torah learning. Just like one cannot survive without water, the Jewish nation cannot survive without Torah learning.

Drawing water from the fountain requires effort just as Torah learning requires effort. The 'fountain of Torah' is available to every Jew as we all received the Torah together, united, on Har Sinai.



Why do we recite these words of Isaiah during the Havdalah?



ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

CHAPTER 43

כִּלְהֲגוֹיִם נִקְבְּצוּ יַחְדָּו וַיֵּאֲסֹפוּ לְאֻמִּים מִי בָהֶם יִגִּיד זֹאת
וְרֵאשֵׁנוֹת יִשְׁמְעֵנוּ יִתְּנוּ עֵדֵיהֶם וַיִּצְדְּקוּ וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱמֶת:

All the nations assemble as one, The peoples gather. Who among them declared this? Let them produce their witnesses and be vindicated, That men, hearing them, may say, "It is true!"

Shimon Dubnov, was a Russian historian and a passionate Zionist (Russia, 19-20th Century).

In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, supporting the establishment of a "National home for the Jewish people".

When Shimon Dubnov witnessed these historic events he recalled this verse from Isaiah.

Thirty years later, on the 29th November 1947, the United Nations voted in favour of establishing a Jewish State!



Did the UK support the establishment of Israel in 1947?



ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

CHAPTER 43

עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי לְבַשְׂי עֶזְרָה צִיּוֹן לְבַשְׂי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרְתָּךְ
יְרוּשָׁלַם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ

*Awake, awake, O Zion! Clothe yourself in splendour;
wear your robes of majesty, Jerusalem, the holy city!*

The Metzudat David (Prague, 17th-18th Century) explains the concept of Jerusalem's awakening. Before an exciting Simcha or special occasion, we wake up early, wear our very best clothes and wait with great anticipation for the event.

In the same way, the holy city of Jerusalem 'wakes up', rejoices and waits with great anticipation for the Jewish people to return.

The first two words "Uri Uri" also appear in Lecha Dodi.



How do these words relate to Shabbat?



ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

CHAPTER 58

Our final message from the book of Isaiah truly relates to us all in these difficult times.

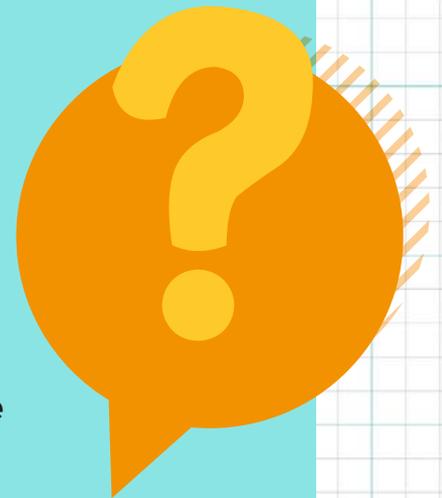
הָלוֹא פָּרַס לָרֶעִב לַחֲמֶךָ וְעַנְיִים מְרוּדִים תְּבִיא בְּיַת כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָלֶיךָ
וְכִסִּיתוּ וּמְבֹשָׁרֶךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

Share your bread with the hungry, and welcome the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, clothe him, and do not ignore your own kin.

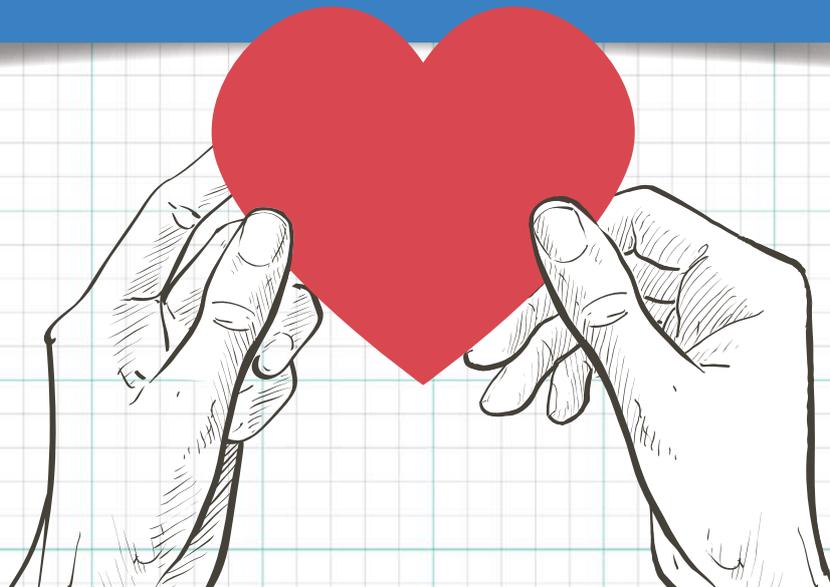
“Tzedakah and Chessed (acts of kindness) are the equivalent of all the mitzvot of the Torah” (Jerusalem Talmud, Pe’ah 1:1). As Jews, we regularly emphasise the importance of giving to charities and performing acts of kindness for others. Very rarely do we take the opportunity to do Tzedaka at home for our family.

The prophet Isaia is teaching us that Tzedaka at home is the most important form of Chessed.

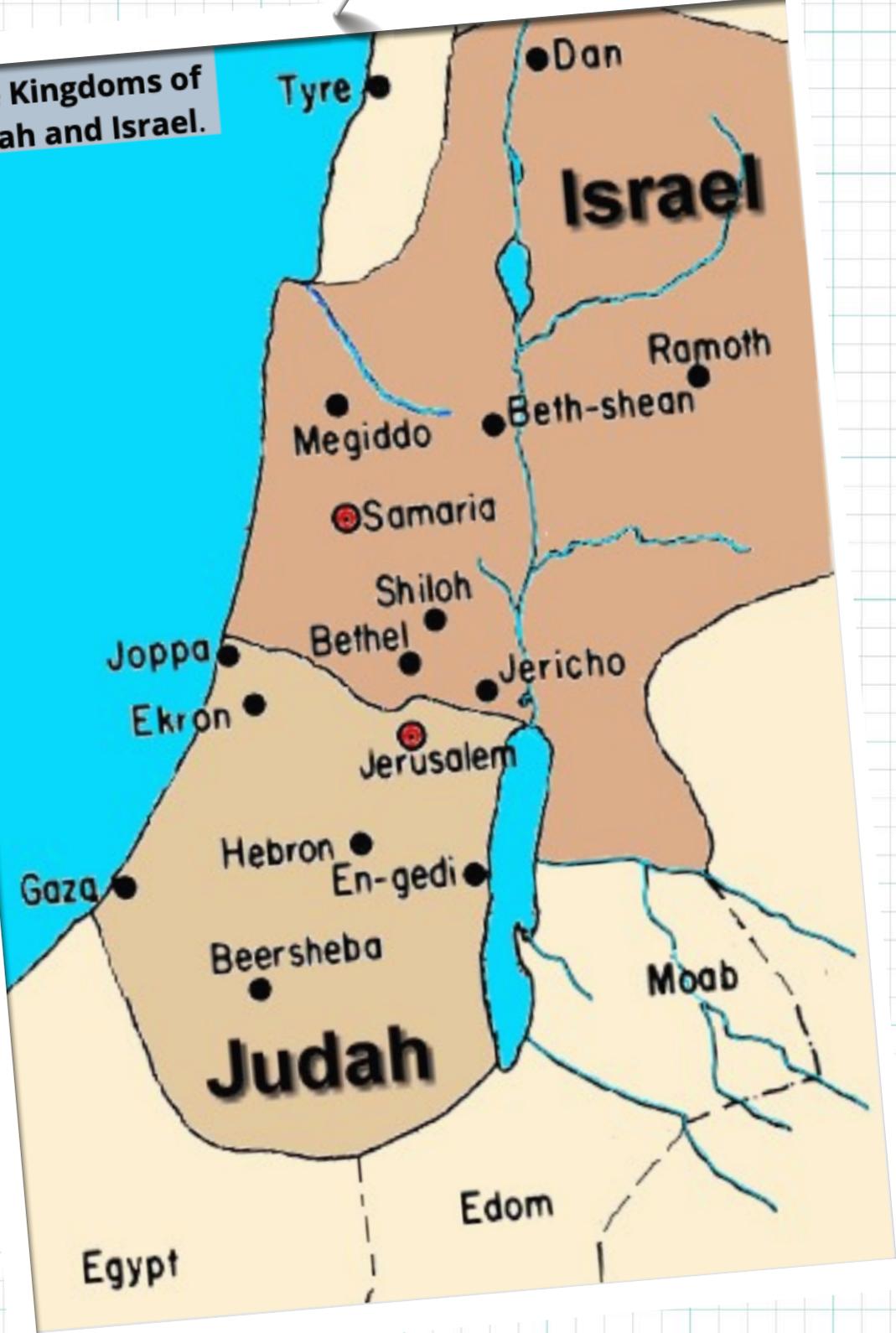
Supporting our parents and helping our siblings, particularly in times of difficulty, is the best Tzedaka of all. A helping hand, a kind word and a loving smile will bring the Simcha of Shavuot to your family and the joy of Torah to your home!



Why is the book of Ruth (Megilat Rut) known as the ‘Book of Chessed’?



The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.



Tyre

Dan

Israel

Ramoth

Beth-shean

Megiddo

Samaria

Shiloh

Bethel

Jericho

Joppa

Ekron

Jerusalem

Gaza

Hebron

En-gedi

Beersheba

Moab

Judah

Edom

Egypt