

**Parshat Ki Tavo**  
**Wake Up, Your Mourning has Turned to Dawn**  
**Neesa Berezin-Bahr - Class of 2025**

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*In the cracks of light*

*I dreamed of you*

*To get me through*

*The violence of the dog days*

*Out on waves being tossed*

*And I couldn't be sure*

*I had a feeling so peculiar*

*This pain wouldn't be for evermore*

*–Taylor Swift, Evermore*

We find ourselves at the penultimate of the *shiva d'nehemta*, the seven *haftarot* of comfort that *Hazal* implemented to follow Tisha B'Av, the culmination of national mourning for the loss of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Temple.

I find myself just weeks after my father's first *yahrzeit*, the culmination of a year of personal mourning, searching for words of *nehamah* in this week's *haftarah*. With *siata d'Shmaya*, God's guidance, the first words of the *haftarah*, read from Isaiah chapter 60, jumped right out at me.

קוּמִי אֲרִי כִּי בָא אֹרֶךְ וְכָבוֹד ה' עֲלֶיךָ זָרַח:  
(ישעיהו, ס:א)

Arise, shine for your light has dawned, the Presence of God has shone upon you  
(Isaiah, 60:1)

These words were later incorporated into *Lecha Dodi*, the quintessential poem of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service.

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי. כִּי בָא אֹרֶךְ קוּמִי אֲרִי.  
עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי שִׁיר דְּבָרֵי. כָּבוֹד ה' עֲלֶיךָ נִגְלָה.



Wake up! Wake up! For your light has come, rise up and shine;  
Awaken, awaken, utter a song, the glory of HaShem is revealed upon you.

I am immediately transported back to the hospital room, my family and I surrounding my father who was in a comatose state. It is Friday night and we are singing the Psalms of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, hoping my father is somehow experiencing this moment with us. We sing *Lecha Dodi* and as we begin the line “הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי...”, first arising in my soul and then in my voice, comes this prayer to the *Ribono shel Olam*, that my father wake up, and this plea to my father, “Abba, wake up, wake up.” I attempt to convey to him that we have arrived at the auspicious *tekufa*, time period, following *Tisha B'av*, said to be the time that will bring *Mashiah*, when God’s light will shine on us ... wake up, wake up.

Every Shabbat since my father’s passing, when others are נְרִיעָה לְצוֹר יִשְׁעוֹנוּ, calling out joyously to the *Abishter*, my heart is breaking. We arrive at that verse of *Lecha Dodi*, and my emotions overwhelm me, “... עוֹרְרִי עוֹרְרִי”, “awaken, awaken.” I cannot help but tear up. The only comfort to be found is the promise of light, of redemption, of תְּחִית הַמֵּתִים, revival of the dead.

As those of us who have experienced personal *aveilut* (mourning) know, there is no magical snap of the fingers when the year is up and all is well. *Hazal*, in their deep understanding, designated three weeks of mourning and then seven weeks of *neḥama*, knowing that the process of reintegrating to normative society or functionality is not quick; it cannot be tied up in a neat little bow. It takes time and then more time and that is not even enough. The loss is still everpresent. Time does not heal but with time we are gifted tools to aid in coping with our loss.

ויאמר אלקים יהי אור. ירמוז על ימות המשיח שהזכיר בו הכתוב (ישעיהו ס'א') קומי אורי כי בא אורך  
וכבוד ה' עליך זרח. (רבנו בחיי, בראשית א'ב:ד')

"God said: 'let there be light.'" This is an allusion to messianic times. The period of the kingdom of the Messiah is alluded to in Isaiah 60:1 "Arise, shine, for your light has dawned; the Presence of God has shone upon you." (Rabbeinu Bhaya, Bereshit 1:2:4)

As Rabbeinu Bhaya points out, this Shabbat, we read one of the most beautiful chapters to describe the period of redemption, of ultimate *neḥama*. I want to highlight two powerful *aggadot* from the Yalkut Shimoni, a compilation of *aggadot* (narrative exegesis) on Tanakh.

א"ר יוחנן משל למהלך בדרך עם דמדומי חמה בא אחד והדליק לו את הנר וכבה ובא אחד והדליק לו את הנר וכבה, אמר מכאן ואילך איני ממתין אלא לאורו של בקר, כך אמרו ישראל לפני הקב"ה אעשינו לך מנורה בימי משה וכבתה, בימי שלמה וכבתה, מכאן ואילך אין אנו ממתנין אלא לאורך שנאמר כי עמך מקור חיים באורך נראה אור, וכן אמר הקב"ה קומי אורי כי בא אורך.  
(ילקוט שמעוני תצ"ט)



Rabbi Yochanan brings a parable of one who is walking on the road at twilight. A passerby comes and lights a candle for him but it blows out. Another one comes by and lights a candle for him but that too is extinguished. He says, "From now on, I will just wait for the light of morning." So too, Israel says to God, we made you a *menorah* in the times of Moshe Rabeinu and that was extinguished. [We no longer have the *Mishkan*.] And in the time of Shlomo, that too was extinguished. [The Temple was destroyed]. From now on, we are just going to wait for Your light ... Therefore God says now, "Arise, shine, for your light has dawned." (Yalkut Shimoni 499)

One can feel the emotional exhaustion in the voice of the Jewish people. As if they are saying, "We have been trying to find the light in the darkness, but HaShem, we need you to take up the mantle." The loss is too much for human beings to carry on their own. In my experience, when I would search for the light but the loss was too heavy, the only thing to do was to ask God to bring in the light. When we are in mourning, when we are in the *Golah*, exile, we have these temporary moments of light, temporary moments of joy, of connection with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, but here, in our *haftarah*, HaShem is gifting us the promise of a forever light, a light reflected from God, from the *Shekhina*. Ultimately, HaShem will announce to us that the light has dawned and salvation has arrived.

א"ר אחא נמשלו ישראל לזית שנאמר זית רענן יפה פרי תאר קרא ה' שמך, ונמשל הקב"ה בנר נר (אלקים) [ה'] נשמת אדם מה דרכו של שמן לינתן בנר והם מאירים שנייהם כאחת, כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל הואיל ואורי הוא אורכם וארכם הוא אורי אני ואתם נלך ונאיר לציון שנאמר קומי אורי כי בא אורך. (ילקוט שמעוני תצ"ט)

Rabbi Aha says, Israel is compared to an olive ... and HaShem is compared to a candle and just as is the way of olive oil to be given a wick and they burn together as one, so HaShem says to Israel, "My light is your light and your light is my light, together we will go and illuminate Zion. Like it says, "Arise, shine for your light has dawned." (Yalkut Shimoni 499)

HaShem needs us, the oil and the wick together, to burn bright. This vision of *Yemot HaMashiah*, describes a Messianic time when both we and our world are so intimately connected to God that only together can we create light. HaShem craves this closeness with us. My father, *z"l*, emphasized this by asking why it took 40 days for the *Abishter* to transmit the Torah to Moshe when God easily could have zapped it or downloaded it into him in a second. God is God, after all. He responded that many of the *mefarshim* (commentators) say that HaShem was showering Moshe with love, both for him and for *B'nei Yisrael*. God wanted more time to hang out with Moshe. We should never forget that God loves us like a parent loves their child and desires to be close to us.



This *haftarah* brings us visions of a messianic time where peace and love prevail, where violence and hatred are abolished.

לא־ישָׁמַע עוֹד חֲמֹס בְּאַרְצֶךָ שָׂד וְשָׂבָר בְּגִבּוֹלֶיךָ וְקִרְאֵת יְשׁוּעָה חוֹמֹתֶיךָ וְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ תִּהְיֶה:  
(ישעיהו, ס:ו)

Violence shall no more be heard in your land, waste nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (Isaiah, 60:18)

I pray and bless us that the words of the *navi*, the prophet, Yeshayahu, are actualized in our day:

לא־יִהְיֶה־לְךָ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לְאֹר יוֹמָם וּלְנֶגַהּ הַיָּרֵחַ לַאֲיֹר לָךְ וְהַיְהִי־לְךָ ה' לְאֹר עוֹלָם וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ לְתִפְאַרְתְּךָ:

לא־יָבֹא עוֹד שֶׁמֶשׁךָ וַיִּרְחַךְ לֹא יֵאָסֵף כִּי ה' יִהְיֶה־לְךָ לְאֹר עוֹלָם וְשִׁלְמוֹ יָמֵי אַבְרָהָם: (ישעיהו, ס: יט-כ)

The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but HaShem shall be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.

Your sun shall no more go down; nor shall your moon withdraw itself: for HaShem shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. (Isaiah, 60: 19-20)

And in the words of my father, z"l, "May we all feel closer to the *Abishter* by *Havdalah*."

Shabbat Shalom!



Neesa Berezin-Bahr is a student in the Core Semikha Program. She worked at Drisha for nearly a decade, where she was the Director of Student Engagement. She created and implemented educational programming for hundreds of college students, young professionals and rabbinical students. Neesa was a 2020-2021 Masa Teaching Fellow in Jerusalem. She worked for the OU's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus. She also worked for Dorshei Torah v'Tzion, the slate spearheaded by Rabbi Avi Weiss in the WZC. Neesa holds a BA in Linguistics and Anthropology from NYU. She studied in the Drisha Kollel in NYC and at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem. Neesa has organized women's megila readings in NYC, Tel Aviv, and on Zoom since 2013. She tutors conversion students and bnei/bnot mitzvah, including teaching her nephews the leining for their bnei mitzvah. Neesa also enjoys thinking about ways Torah can speak to everyday matters and issues

that she is passionate about. She has given shiurim on topics including body image, yoga, and even shoes. Originally from New York City, Neesa currently lives in Florentin, a vibrant neighborhood in South Tel Aviv.