

Rav Schwab on YESHAYAHU

The teachings of
RABBI SHIMON SCHWAB זצ"ל
on the Book of Isaiah

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וְשָׂאג [וְיִשְׂאֵג ק'] כַּכְּפִירִים וַיִּנְהָם וַיֵּאָחֵז טְרָף וַיִּפְּלֵט וַאֲיִן ה' / ל
 ל מְצִיל: וַיִּנְהָם עָלָיו בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כְּנִהְמַתִּים וְנִבֵּט לְאָרֶץ
 א וְהִנֵּה-חֹשֶׁךְ צָר וְאֹר חֹשֶׁךְ בְּעֵרִיפִיהָ: בְּשָׁנַת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ ו / א
 עֲזִיָּהוּ וְאֶרְאָה אֶת־אֲדֹנָי יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂא וְשׁוּלְיוֹ

30. ביום ההוא — *On that day, probably the day of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.*

וְנִבֵּט לְאָרֶץ — *And upon looking down at earth.* The word הִבִּיט means “to look down from above,” as in ה' מִשָּׁמַיִם הִבִּיט ה', *Hashem looks down from heaven (Tehillim 33:13).* The picture here is that of one looking down upon earth from above and seeing only darkness, etc.

וְאֹר — *And curse, from אָרוּר, curse.*

בְּעֵרִיפִיהָ — *In the imminence of its heavy downpour, from עָרַף, pouring down, related to עֲרָפֶל, intense darkness, as before a heavy rainstorm. An illustration of total destruction.*

In this chapter, Yeshayahu, using heavily veiled language, prophecies about the future catastrophes which were looming ahead for Yisrael. These prophetic visions, the *d'var Hashem*, which he received through *Ruach HaKodesh*, allowed him only to allude to these tragedies and not to disclose the details. While it is clear that he is describing horrible episodes of national tragedies, it is unclear which one of these episodes he is referring to in which *pasuk*. Nor is it known which specific occurrences he describes in terms of “roaring lions,” “loud sounds of young lions,” or the “noise of the roaring ocean.”

In general, though, we have suggested that Yeshayahu first alludes to the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Sancheiriv; and then to the Babylonian conquest of *Eretz Yisrael* and the subsequent exile of its people by Nevuchadnezzar; and finally, to ביום ההוא, *that tragic day*, which we have taken as being the day of the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

6.

In this chapter — which is familiar to us from the *Haftarah of Parashas Yisro* — Yeshayahu *HaNavi* describes his first *nevuah* revelation. For reasons unknown to us, those who redacted *Sefer Yeshayahu* placed the previous five chapters of this *sefer* before this description of Yeshayahu's first *nevuah*. This non-chronological placement of subject matter is quite common in the Torah and other holy writ. It is known as the rule of בְּתוֹרָה וּמֵאוּחָר וּמֵאִתְּרָם מִקְדָּמָה, *the order of the placement of subjects in the Torah does not necessarily follow their sequence.* (See *Rashi 6:1*.)

1. בְּשָׁנַת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ עֲזִיָּהוּ — *In the year of the death of the King Uziyahu.* Yeshayahu describes his first *nevuah* experience as having occurred in the year of the “death” of King Uziyahu. However, King Uziyahu died a prolonged death. We learn in *Divrei HaYamim* that Uziyahu was struck with *tzaraas* when he attempted to bring an offering of *ketores* on the *Mizbeach*, a clear violation of the law since he was not a *Kohen*. The *Chachamim* tell us that the “death” of King Uziyahu here refers to that incident (*Rashi*

5/30 he roars and makes loud sounds as do young lions, and he seizes prey and carries it away, and there is no one that can save.³⁰ On that day, there will be a roar over him as loud as the noise of the roaring sea; and upon looking down at earth, behold there is darkness, oppression, and curse. It [the earth] has become dark in the imminence of its heavy downpour.

6/1 ¹ [In the year of the death of the King Uziyahu I saw my Lord sitting on a high and elevated throne; and its lower edges

here). And since *מְצוֹרֵעַ הַשּׁוֹב בְּמָוֶת*, One who is stricken with *tzaraas* is considered as dead (*Nedarim* 64b), our *pasuk* refers to him as having died. Although officially in power for fifty-two years, he reigned actively only until the twenty-seventh year, when he became afflicted with the *tzaraas*. Afterwards he remained in seclusion for the last 25 years of his life, and his son Yosam carried out his duties. (See *Il Melachim* 15:5; *Il Divrei HaYamim* Chapter 26; *Moed Kattan* 7b, *Tosafos* s.v. לֹא הָיָה לוֹ יוֹרָם.)

King Uziyahu was one of our greatest kings. He was a *tzaddik* and a *talmid chacham*, and highly regarded by the rulers of neighboring countries. He was successful in whatever he undertook, religiously, politically, and militarily. He conducted a wise agricultural policy, and beautified Yerushalayim and other cities with great towers. He assembled a powerful military and equipped it with innovative new weapons, fortified many cities, and defended Yisrael against all its enemies.

However, unfortunately, Uziyahu's great success went to his head. In some obscure way, he deduced from the Torah that a *melech Yisrael*, a Jewish king, has the right to act as a *Kohen* and offer incense on the *Mizbeach* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. While this was untrue and a blatant violation of the law, there was no stopping him. He entered the *Heichal* with a raised firepan in hand, against the vehement protests of the *Kohanim*, and was about to offer the *ketores* on the *Mizbeach HaKetores*. Suddenly, a white spot of *tzaraas* appeared on his forehead. The moment this was brought to his attention he immediately relented, and was rushed out of the *Heichal* in deference to the Torah law prohibiting a *metzora* from being in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The *tzaraas* remained with him for the rest of his life and, in accordance with the laws of *tzaraas*, he lived out his years in seclusion in a specially built house.

Another momentous event occurred at the time the *tzaraas* appeared on Uziyahu's forehead: a powerful earthquake shook the *Beis HaMikdash*. The quake was felt throughout *Eretz Yisrael*, causing the people to be terrified and run for their lives. This event is mentioned in *Zechariah* 14:5: וְנִסְתָּם בְּאֶשֶׁר נִסְתָּם מִפְּנֵי הָרָעַשׁ בַּיּוֹם מְלֶכֶךְ-יְהוּדָה, *You fled, as you fled because of the earthquake in the days of Uziyahu King of Yehudah*. The earthquake is also mentioned in the opening *pasuk* of *Sefer Amos*, and it is alluded to in *pasuk* 4 below. (See *Avos D'Rabbi Nassan* 9:3; *Rashi* to *Zechariah* 14:5.)

[Ed. note: According to the calculations in our "Historical Background," these two simultaneous events, and Yeshayahu's first *nevuah*, occurred when he was 34 years of age: 120-86 = 34.]

□ וַיֵּרְאֵהוּ אֶת-יְהוָה — *I saw My Lord*. This must be explained. *Moshe Rabbeinu* wanted to "see" *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* but was told, לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת-פָּנָי כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי,

You cannot see My Face, for man cannot see Me and live (Shemos 33:20). So how could Yeshayahu “see God?” The *Chachamim* tell us that Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* communication with, and perception of, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was בְּאַסְפֵּקְלָרְיָא הַמְאִירָה, as if seen through “a clear viewing glass.” [See *Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah* 7:6.] He was therefore told that it is impossible for a human being to see more than that which he had already “seen.” However, God’s communication with all other *neviim* was as if through בְּאַסְפֵּקְלָרְיָא שְׂאִינָה מְאִירָה, an “unclear pane of glass.” So whatever Yeshayahu “saw” here was an unclear, clouded vision, of a revelation of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. (See *Yevamos* 49b and *Rashi* there; *Malbim* here.) It is for this reason that the ineffable name, יְהוָה, is not used here.

[Ed. note: *Maharsha* in his comments to the above-quoted *Yevamos* 49b, cites *Aruch*, who explains בְּאַסְפֵּקְלָרְיָא שְׂאִינָה מְאִירָה as being analogous to “to that of an aged person with poor vision who ‘sees double,’ or who sees low objects as if they were high.”]

The vision which Yeshayahu describes here is known as מְעֵשָׂה מְרֻבְבָה, *the narrative of the Heavenly Chariot*. It is shrouded in mystery and is highly esoteric. In the opening chapter of *Sefer Yechezkel*, and in several following chapters, the *navi* also tells of a “Godly vision” of מְעֵשָׂה מְרֻבְבָה, and describes the various types of *malachim* and the fires of the “Heavenly Chariot.” But *Yechezkel* describes the scene in much greater detail than that which is described here by Yeshayahu. The *Gemara* explains that Yeshayahu, too, saw all of these details. But Yeshayahu describes only a small part of them because he was analogous to one who lives in a capital city and has frequent sightings of the royal entourage and thus becomes accustomed to it.

Yeshayahu *HaNavi* lived during the existence of the *Beis HaMikdash* when *Nevuah* was still in full bloom, so even before he became a *navi* he was already accustomed to the world of *Nevuah*. His father was a *navi* before him, and he had also been exposed to other *neviim*. To Yeshayahu, the vision of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* sitting on a high throne attended by *malachim* was not so new that he had to give a full detailed description of it. However, *Yechezkel’s* *nevuah* came to him in Babylonia, in the land of the *Kasdim* (*Yechezkel* 1:3), after the *Churban Beis HaMikdash* where *Nevuah* was not at all commonplace. He was analogous to “a small town visitor to the capital” who, upon seeing the royal entourage passing by, gives a full description of every detail (*Chagigah* 13b). When *Yechezkel* spoke his *nevuah*, he was exposed to the exciting new experience of seeing the “Royal Entourage,” so he described it in full detail.

The *malachim* that Yeshayahu describe here have “six wings,” while those described by *Yechezkel* have only “four wings.” The *Gemara* tell us that Yeshayahu perceived the angels as having their full complement of six wings because his vision took place during the existence of the *Beis HaMikdash*, while *Yechezkel’s* vision took place after the *Churban Beis HaMikdash*, so he saw only four wings (*Chagigah* *ibid.*).

Rambam in his *Moreh Nevuchim* (Part 1, Chapter 49), explains that “wings” and “flight” here are meant as metaphors to convey the idea that these are spiritual beings who, despite their being incorporeal, “have movement,” are alive. They have been created by God to accomplish a purpose which God has set for them. So “flight” is used here to indicate real life, albeit spiritual, to dispel the notion that these creatures exist only in the mind.

The six wings of the *Seraphim* seen by Yeshayahu correspond to the six words, בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מְלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, *May the Name of the Honor of His Kingdom be blessed forever and ever*. The *Chachamim* tell us that these six words are used by the *malachim* in praising *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*Midrash Rabbah Devarim* 2:25). Accordingly, some say that these “wings” are a metaphor for the means by which the *malachim* express the praises of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*Tosafos to Sanhedrin* 37b, s.v. מכנף הארץ).

Based on this, it is very fitting that on *Yamim Tovim* when we pray for the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* and restoration of the *Avodah*, the *tefillah* reads, אָבִינוּ מִלְכֵנוּ, גְּלוּהָ כְבוֹד מְלְכוּתְךָ עָלֵינוּ. This alludes to בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מְלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, with its six words that correspond to the full complement of the “six wings” of the *malachim* which will return after the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

[Ed. note: See *Rav Schwab on Prayer* pp. 311-318 for a fuller treatment of the subject בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מְלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.]

Interestingly, according to the unique *Minhag Frankfurt* which is followed in our *kehillah*, the words עַל יַד נְבִיאֶךָ are omitted from the introductory *piyut* directly before *Kedushah* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The introduction, according to our *minhag*, consists only of the six words, ... בְּכָתוּב וְקָרָא זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאָמַר. (from *pasuk* 3 below), corresponding to the six wings of the *malachim* described by Yeshayahu, which exist only when there is a *Beis HaMikdash*, for the restoration of which we place special emphasis on those days.

All of these explanations notwithstanding, we understand very little of this. We do not know what a *malach* is; nor do we know the differences between the kinds of these spiritual entities called *Seraphim*, *Chayos*, *Ophanim*, or *Chashmalim* described by Yeshayahu and Yechezkel. And we certainly do not know what “God’s Throne” means. We understand as much about this as do blind people referring to “yellow,” “red,” “green,” or “black” colors. Since they have never seen colors, they cannot really know what they are, nor what the differences between them are. Given the highly esoteric nature of this knowledge, the *Chachamim* tell us that the details of this material are to be taught only to individual, highly select, qualified individuals who have a deep insight into the secrets of the Torah. Even some of the greatest *Amoraim* were reluctant to teach, or to receive, the secrets of *Maaseh Merkavah* (*Chagigah* 11b; 13a-b). But Yeshayahu and Yechezkel understood as much about these things as the human mind can comprehend.

□ יֹשֵׁב עַל־בֵּסֵא רָם וְנֹשֵׂא — *Sitting on a high and elevated throne*. This phrase is familiar to us from the *tefillah* of *Shacharis* on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Although — as said earlier — we have no knowledge of the meaning of “God’s High and Elevated Throne,” however, since *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is called the מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, *The King of kings of kings*, the vision here is that of a king sitting on a high throne in all its splendor.

The term הַבְּכוֹד, in various forms, appears frequently in *Tehillim* and in our *tefillos*. While we do not know the meaning of הַבְּכוֹד, we do know that the idea conveyed by its use is that before “God’s Throne of Glory” everything is equal. The *Chachamim* tell us that God created the הַבְּכוֹד, *The Throne of Honor*, before He created the world (*Pesachim* 54a). The distinction between large and small came about with the creation of the world when *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* created some objects larger in relation to smaller ones, and vice-versa. Before the creation of the world, however, everything was only “in the planning stage,” so to speak, so there was complete equality before God.

ב מלאים את-ההיכל: שרפים עמדים | ממעל לו שש
 כנפים שש כנפים לאחד בשתים | יכסה פניו ובשתים
 ג יכסה רגליו ובשתים יעופף: וקרא זה אל-זה ואמר

In the *berachah* of אָשֶׁר יָצַר, which is said after having performed our bodily functions, we emerge and give thanks to God for allowing our body — with its many different but interrelated systems — to function normally. In this *berachah*, we say גְּלוֹי רָךְ, *It is revealed and known before Your Throne of Glory*, etc. What we mean by this is that we recognize that no matter who we are, large or small, rich or poor, important or unimportant, before כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדָךְ, God's Throne of Glory, we are all equal in that we were all created by Him. Similarly, in our Rosh Hashanah *tefillah* of *Zichronos*, in which we ask *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to remember us mercifully, we acknowledge that אין שְׂכַחָה לְפָנֵי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדָךְ, *There is no forgetting before Your Throne of Glory*. No matter how small our deeds — a fleeting evil thought, or the smallest kind of *mitzvah* which take merely a second — they are remembered equally as much as the largest most important deed or misdeed. All man's deeds, large and small, are equally known and judged לְפָנֵי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדָךְ, before "God's Throne of Glory."

□ וְשׁוּלוֹ מְלֵאִים אֶת-הַהֵיכָל — *And its lower edges filled the sanctuary*. Only the bottom part of the throne, its legs, filled the *Heichal* sanctuary. *Rav S. R. Hirsch* explains that what Yeshayahu saw here was God's Presence in the process of departing from the *Beis HaMikdash*, and only its lower edges were still present there.

God's plan for the *Beis HaMikdash* was for it to be the place where the Jewish nation shows its total dedication to the letter and spirit of the Torah which is enshrined in its *Kodesh HaKodashim*. Consequently, it was to be the place on earth where God's *Shechinah* would be palpable. Indeed, the *Chachamim* tell us that the *Beis HaMikdash* was to be a reflection of the "Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*": בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁל מַעְלָה מְכוּוֵן כְּנֶגֶד, *the Heavenly Beis HaMikdash is placed directly above the one below*. (See *Rashi*, *Shemos* 23:20, based on *Midrash Rabbah Shemos* 35:6, *Terumah*.) The *Beis HaMikdash* was intended to be a manifestation of כְּבוֹדוֹ, God's presence filling the entire universe, which the *malachim* are about to announce. So long as the *Beis HaMikdash* serves this purpose, it will stand and God's Presence will remain there. It will be a place where נִסִּים וְנִפְלְאוֹת, miraculous events, will occur, as manifestations of God's Presence there: וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכָם, *And they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will be present among them* (*Shemos* 25:8).

However, in this *nevuah*, Yeshayahu sees God in the process of removing His *Shechinah* from the *Beis HaMikdash*, סְלוּךְ שְׂכִינָה, because the people no longer utilized it for its main purpose: that of expressing their complete dedication to fulfilling God's Will as taught by the Torah in, and outside of, the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Uziah *HaMelech* had defied the holiness of the *Beis HaMikdash* by attempting to bring an offering on the *Mizbeach* despite the fact that he was prohibited from doing so because he was not a *Kohen*. By this action, Uziah showed that he, too, was a part of the generation which Yeshayahu *HaNavi* was castigating for denigrating the holiness of the *Beis HaMikdash*. So in this vision, Yeshayahu connects the "death" of King Uziah with his vision of seeing the Throne of *HaKadosh Baruch*

filled the sanctuary. ² Seraphim were standing above Him; six wings, six wings, for each one. With two he covers his face, and with two he covers his feet, and with two he flies. ³ And one called to another, and said,

Hu departing from the *Beis HaMikdash*, with only its last vestiges, “its lower edges,” still filling the sanctuary.

He continues to describe the vision:

2. שְׂרָפִים — *Seraphim*. There are various types of spiritual creatures which we call with the generic term, “*malachim*.” One of these are the *Seraphim*, “creatures of fire,” which means they consist only of “fire” without physical matter because fire consumes matter. We have no understanding of what these creatures are.

שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ — *Seraphim were standing above Him*. The *Seraphim* were awaiting the ascension of God’s throne back to Heaven.

בְּשֵׁתִים יִכְסֶה פָּנָיו וּבְשֵׁתִים יִכְסֶה רַגְלָיו וּבְשֵׁתִים יְעוֹפֵף — *With two he covers his face, and with two he covers his feet, and with two he flies*. No human being has ever understood the meaning of the “person” of a *malach*. Their “bodies” are “covered”; they are incomprehensible to the human mind. *Rav S. R. Hirsch* explains the idea of the covering of their face and feet, and their flight, as follows:

When one of the hosts of heaven who serves in the Kingdom of God is perceived by a human being, he sees him only with “two wings covering his face, two wings covering his feet, and flying with two wings.” For no mortal has ever seen such a being; no mortal eye has ever seen its physical shape. Mortal man can become aware only of the soaring of its wings on the way to accomplish God’s will (*Collected Writings*, Vol. 4, p. 8).

Rashi in his commentary on our *pasuk*, based on the *Midrash*, explains that the *malachim* cover their faces to avoid looking toward the *Shechinah*; and they cover their feet, their bodies, out of modesty in the presence of the *Shechinah*. Although their “bodies” are only spiritual, nevertheless, they cover themselves in modesty before the presence of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, before Whose grandeur they are ashamed to appear uncovered. Thus, all the *navi* sees of their “bodies” is their wings, as they “fly” in the performance of their assigned duties.

The description continues.

3. These words are familiar from the *Kedushah*, “*Prayer of Holiness*,” which we recite three times during our morning *tefillah*. At *Kedusha D’Amidah*, “the standing *Kedushah*,” so-called because it is recited while standing, we introduce it with, נִקְדַּשׁ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ בְּעוֹלָם כְּשֵׁם שְׁמֹקְדֵי שַׁיִם אוֹתוֹ בְּשִׁמְיָ מְרוֹם. This is an invitation from the *shliach tzibbur* to the assembled to sanctify God’s Name in the physical world just as the *malachim* do in the heavenly world using the very same words that they do: קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה’ צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כְּלֵהָ אֶרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ. And while responding with these words of the *malachim*, we indicate our desire to emulate them by elevating ourselves slightly on our toes during the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, alluding to the “flying” of the *malachim* in their service of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר — *And one called to another, and said*. “They called each other” means they called each other by name, as an expression of mutual love and respect.

But, we also use קָדַשׁ when we speak of the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*, the sanctification of God's name. While this certainly includes the ultimate *Kiddush Hashem*, the overcoming of one's ultimate desire, to live, by giving up one's life for the sake of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, it also means "making a *Kiddush Hashem*," the public demonstration of the beauty of life lived in accordance with God's will. Also, we use the term מְקַדְּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת, that Hashem sanctifies the *Shabbos*, etc. So, while the word קָדַשׁ generally conveys the idea of separation, we see that is very difficult to give an exact translation of קָדַשׁ. It is one of those words which have a very broad connotation, but its exact meaning changes in accordance with the context in which it is used, where we feel what it means. Here, as already said, it expresses the idea that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is totally removed from the comprehension of any of His creatures, physical or metaphysical-spiritual.

□ צְבָאוֹת — *Master of Legions*. This is the name by which the *malachim* address *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. This is usually translated as *Master of Legions*. צְבָא is a large organized gathering of people or objects; the most common example of this is an army where every soldier has his function and rank. It is not the multitude of people that defines an army, but rather, it is the organization and division of duties and functions under one command which make it into an army. Without a unified command and control structure, it would be impossible for a mass of soldiers, no matter how large, to successfully conduct a battle. The *malachim* here see all of God's creations, physical and spiritual, as members of an organized "army," in which every "soldier" has his place and function. In the cosmos, as well as on earth, every one of the billions of God's creatures has a purpose and a "name"; they are not simply masses of matter and people. *Tehillim* 147:4 expresses this as, מוֹנֵה מִסְפָּר לְבוֹכְבִּים לְכֹלֵם שְׁמוֹת יִקְרָא, *He Who fixes the number of stars calls all of them by name*. Similarly, the Jewish nation which is called צְבָאוֹת ה', *legions of Hashem* (*Shemos* 12:41), is an organized national group with each member having his or her own function and purpose for being here in this world. And in the spiritual world, too, the *malachim*, the דְּרֵי מַעְלָה, the denizens of the "upper" world, the spiritual world, have their own division of purposes and duties. In this phrase, the *malachim* are talking about their own world.

But then they add, מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ, *The entire earth is filled with His glory*. The word "earth" means anything which is below their level, meaning the entire physical universe.

In Kabbalistic writings we find references to three "worlds." The first is our earth, the so-called עוֹלָם הַשְּׁפָל, *the low world*; the second one is the עוֹלָם הַגְּלוּלִים, the universe, with its billions of stars, galaxies, suns, moons, and planets, of which our earth is a part; and the third is the עוֹלָם הַמְּלָאכִים, *the spiritual world of the malachim*, or "angels," and of the *Kisei HaKavod*, "the Most Honored Throne." We know very little about this latter world. And the reason our world is called עוֹלָם הַשְּׁפָל is because it is the only world, of all existence, in which *reshaim* can exist. Conversely, it is also the only world in which *tzaddikim* exist, because it is the only world in which בְּחִירָה, freedom of choice, exists. Nowhere else in God's creation, physical or spiritual, does freedom of choice exist; no other creature but man has the choice of whether or not to abide by God's will.

Although our world is called שְׁפָל, *low*, because things can happen upon it which are not the will of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, nevertheless, if man utilizes his freedom of choice in doing God's will — if he does a *mitzvah* although he had the ability not to do the *mitzvah*, or avoids an *aveirah* although he had the desire to commit it —

קְדוּשׁ | קְדוּשׁ קְדוּשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ: ד וַיִּנְעוּ אַמּוֹת הַסְּפִיִּים מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרָא וְהַבֵּית יְמֵלֵא עֲשׂוֹן:

he rises to a higher level than the *Malachim*, because they have no such freedom of choice and are compelled by their nature to abide by their Creator's will.

The lack of freedom of choice of *malachim* is alluded to in Yechezkel *HaNavi's* description of them: וְרַגְלֵיהֶם רֶגֶל יְשָׁרָה, *And their (two) feet are one straight foot* (Yechezkel 1:7). *Malachim* have no choice to go “right” or “left”; they can go only יְשָׁרָה, *straight*.

Therefore, just as we talk in great awe and wonderment of the world of the *malachim*, they, too, are just as much in awe of our world. What heaven is to us, our world is to the *malachim*. Just as we are in awe of the world of the *Seraphim*, *Eilim*, *Keruvim*, *Ophanim*, *Chayos HaKodesh*, and *Chashmalim*, etc., who attend the *Kisei HaKavod*, these spiritual beings are in awe of our world with its human beings who have the ability to rise to enormous heights because of their freedom of choice. And the *malachim's* awe is heightened by the fact that among these בְּעֵלֵי בְּחִירָה, there are especially distinguished human beings, the *Am Yisrael*, who are God's holy nation, in whose midst there exists the *Beis HaMikdash*, with its *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the place where “God dwells” on earth.

So when the *malachim* say, קְדוּשׁ קְדוּשׁ קְדוּשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת, in the highest spiritual spheres, they look at the universe with its planet earth containing human beings who freely choose to do God's will, and say: מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ. The entire universe is filled with God's glory because His *kedushah* has been brought into it by people who have freely chosen to do His will. Although our earth is but a tiny dot in the cosmos, it is the “center of the universe” because it is the only place where בְּעֵלֵי בְּחִירָה exist. It is for this reason that the *mitzvos* can be kept only in this world, and that the eventual *Techiyas HaMeisim* will take place in this world. It is a world sanctified by men who have freely chosen to abide by God's will.

Indeed, the purpose of the entire Torah is to bring *kedushah* to the world, as is evidenced by its oft-repeated commands such as, בִּי קְדוּשׁ, *Sanctify yourselves, and you shall become holy, for I am holy* (*Vayikra* 11:44); אָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, *You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your God, am holy* (*Vayikra* 19:2); וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָנִי ה' מְקַדְּשֶׁכֶם, *Let Me become sanctified in the midst of the children of Yisrael, I am Hashem Who hallows you* (*Vayikra* 22:32); or, וְלִהְיִתְךָ עַם-קָדֹשׁ לַה', אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּאִשֶׁר דִּבֶּר, *That You be a holy nation to HASHEM your God, as He has said* (*Devarim* 26:19), etc.

Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel renders the thrice-repeated קְדוּשׁ here in descending order, and we quote it daily in the third of our *kedushos* each morning, the so-called *Kedushah D'Sidrah*, in the *tefillah* of לְצִיּוֹן וּבָא לְצִיּוֹן, *U'va LeTzion: הַקְדוּשָׁה בְּשָׁמַי מְרוֹמָא עֲלָא, Holy in the highest heights of heaven, the abode of His Presence*; then, בֵּית שְׁכֵנֹתֵיהּ, *Holy in the highest heights of heaven, the abode of His Presence*; then, קְדוּשָׁה עַל אַרְעָא עוֹבֵר גְּבוּרַתֵיהּ, *Holy on earth, the creation of His power*; and finally, קְדוּשָׁה לְעֵלְמָא וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֲלְמֵיָא, meaning that this *kedushah* is not a one-time manifestation of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, but, rather, that He is *Holy forever and for all of eternity*.

[Ed. note: For the meaning of עֲלְמֵי עֲלְמֵיָא, see *Rav Schwab on Prayer*, page 254.]

“Holy, Holy, Holy is HASHEM, Master of Legions, the entire world is filled with His glory.”⁴ And the doorposts shook from the sound of the call and the house filled with smoke.

By the way, while we are on the topic, I wish to point out here that the *Chachamim* tell us that the recitation of *Kedushah D’Sidrah* in וּבָא לְעִיּוֹן is one of our most important *tefillot* (*Sotah* 49a). This is why an *avel* or a *yahrtzeit* is given the opportunity of being the *shliach tzibbur* at least for this *tefillah*. It is therefore very important for the *shliach tzibbur* to lead it properly. *Kedushah D’Sidrah* is “the ordered *kedushah*” which is said together with its Aramaic translation.

When the *shliach tzibbur* reaches the first *pasuk* of the *Kedushah*, וְקָרָא זֶה אֶלְיָהוּ, וַיֹּאמֶר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה’ צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ, he raises his voice and leads the congregation in saying it together out loud. This is followed by the Aramaic translation which is said quietly. Then, when he reaches the second *pasuk*, וַתִּשְׁאַנֵי רוּחַ וְאִשְׁמַע אֲחֵרֵי, קוֹל רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל בְּרוּךְ כְּבוֹדֵהּ מִמְקוֹמוֹ (*Yechezkel* 3:12), he again raises his voice and leads the entire congregation in saying it together out loud. This is, in turn, followed by the Aramaic translation which is said quietly.

If there is no *minyán* present while saying these *pesukim* of *Kedushah* in וּבָא לְעִיּוֹן or during the *Shacharis* יוֹצֵר בְּרַכַּת יוֹצֵר they are to be said quietly in a tune similar to that of the reading of *Tanach*.

[Ed. note: For more on *Kedushah*, including an insightful explanation of the differences between Yeshayahu’s “קְדוֹשׁ” and Yechezkel’s “בְּרוּךְ,” see *Rav Schwab on Prayer* pp. 273-280.]

We return to our text. As we explained, this *nevuah* is taking place during the year that Uziyahu *HaMelech* was stricken with *tzaraas* as he was attempting to bring an unlawful offering on the *Mizbeach*. Yeshayahu’s first vision is that of the *Shechinah*, God’s *Shechinah*, in the process of withdrawing from the *Beis HaMikdash*, and with only its “lower part” still being present there. He then hears the *malachim*’s call of קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה’ צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ. As we explained, this means that the *Beis HaMikdash* was to be focal point. But since, as we have learned, the *Beis HaMikdash* did not live up to its ideal and it lacked that *kedushah*, Yeshayahu sees the *Shechinah* departing from it.

Now he sees the entire building shaking and about to collapse:

4. The *malachim*’s proclamation וּבָא לְעִיּוֹן demanded the opposite of what was going on in the *Beis HaMikdash* during this period. Besides the general decline of the holiness of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we have here the *Melech Yisrael*, overcome with his own sense of power defying the *halachah* and about to bring *ketores* on the *Mizbeach*. Suddenly, besides the *tzaraas* which sprouted on his forehead, the entire *Beis HaMikdash* begins to shake from the force of the great רַעַשׁ, earthquake, which struck at that moment — to which we have made reference earlier.

□ וַהֲבִית יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן — And the house filled with smoke. Yeshayahu sees the *Beis HaMikdash* filling with smoke and about to burn down; he is envisioning the beginning of the end. It took a long time before this happened, but eventually it did come true.

ה וְאָמַר אֲוִי־לִי כִי־נִדְמִיתִי כִּי אִישׁ טָמֵא־שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי
 וּבִתְוֹךְ עַם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יִהְיֶה
 ו צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי וַיַּעַף אֵלַי אַחַד מִן־הַשְּׂרָפִים וּבִידֹו
 ז רִצְפָה בְּמִלְקָחַיִם לָקַח מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיִּגַע עַל־פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר
 הִנֵּה נִגַע זֶה עַל־שִׁפְתֶיךָ וְסָר עֲוֹנֶךָ וְחִטְאתֶךָ תִּכַּפֵּר:

[Based on our “Historical Background,” this *nevuah* took place some 200 years before the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.]

Since this was Yeshayahu’s first *nevuah*, he is awestruck by it:

5. נְדַמִיתִי — *I must be silent*, from דָּם, *silence*. This could mean “silent forever”: death. Seeing the *Beis HaMikdash* shaking and filling with smoke, he thought this was the end of him because he had had a glimpse of the the *Kisei HaKavod* but had failed to cover his eyes as Moshe *Rabbeinu* had done (*Shemos* 3:6).

Alternatively, “silence” here could mean literally that as a human being he was condemned to be דוֹמֵם, to remain silent forever and never repeat the words of holiness that he had just heard from the *malachim*. As a mortal human being, who at some time in his life used his lips for trivial talk — one does not have to assume that he is referring to forbidden talk — he considers his lips “unclean.” He feels unworthy of repeating the words of pure holiness which he had just heard from the *malachim*, בְּשִׁפְהָ בְרוּרָה וּבְנִיעִימָה, in their purity of language, from “lips” that had never uttered anything “unclean.” Moreover, after he hears the *malachim* praising *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, he feels unworthy of ever uttering *any praise* to Him with his “unclean” human lips.

□ וּבִתְוֹךְ עַם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב — *And I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips*. “When I think of my people, I realize that I am, unfortunately, living amongst a nation of people with unclean lips.” Although the Jewish people regularly attended the *Beis HaMikdash* and would pray to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, nevertheless, outside the *Beis HaMikdash* they did not live in accordance with Torah and *mitzvos*. Their prayers were therefore uttered with insincere and “unclean lips.”

The *Chachamim* say that Yeshayahu was punished for saying this. While a *navi* may certainly chastise and criticize the people directly in the name of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, here Yeshayahu talks pejoratively *about* them, not *to* them — and for this he was punished. (See *Yevamos* 49b, *Rashi* there.)

He continues describing his vision:

6. רִצְפָה — *Burning coal*, related to רֶשֶׁף, *a hot coal*.

As we said earlier, the earthly *Beis HaMikdash* is a reflection of the “Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*,” בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁל מַעְלָה מְכוּוֹן כְּנֶגֶד בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁל מַטֵּה. These two *Batei Mikdash* are alluded to by the *dagesh* in the *kuf* of יְדִירָךְ (*Shemos* 15:17), causing it to be pronounced “*mikkedash*,” or “a double *mikdash*.” So just as there is a *Mizbeach* in the earthly *Beis HaMikdash*, so is there a spiritual *Mizbeach* in the “Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*,” and it was from that *Mizbeach* on high that the *Seraph* took the burning coal and was bringing it to Yeshayahu.

6/5-7 ⁵ So I said, “Woe is to me that I must be silent, for I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, *HASHEM*, Master of Legions.” ⁶ And one of the Seraphim flew towards me, and in his hand there was a burning coal, with tongs he took it from the altar. ⁷ And he touched it upon my mouth and he said, “Behold, this has touched upon your lips and your sin has been removed, and your iniquity has been forgiven.”

במלקחים — With tongs, or pliers. The Seraph did not take the hot coal from the Mizbeach with his hands. Although he is made of fire, nevertheless, the fire of the מזבֵּחַ שֶׁל מִעֲלָה, the Mizbeach on high, is so hot that even a Seraph would burn himself if he touched it.

7. ויגע על-פי — And he touched it upon my mouth. The malach touched this coal — which was too hot for him to handle — to Yeshayahu’s lips; ויאמֵר could mean *and he* (a malach) said, or it could be, *and He said*, meaning *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was speaking.

In this vision Yeshayahu sees his lips being touched by a hot coal, and is told that now his sin had been forgiven. He is shown by this vision of a hot coal touching his lips, that his sin was not merely that of uttering trivialities, a minor infraction, but that of committing a serious sin with his lips. What was this sin?

Before Yeshayahu became a *navi*, he had witnessed the moral decline of the Jewish people all around him, but he had remained silent and had not preached against it. The *Chachamim* tell us, כָּל מִי שֵׁשׁ בְּיָדוֹ לְמַחֹת וְאִינוֹ מוֹחָה וְעֵנֵשׁ עָלָיו, *Whoever has the ability to protest and does not do so is punished for it* (*Avodah Zarah* 18a). But the malach now tells him that with his elevation to the level of *Nevuah*, his past sins committed with his lips are now forgiven and are behind him, as he begins to transmit God’s words of *Nevuah* to the Jewish people.

וְסָר עֲוֹנֶךָ וְחַטָּאתֶךָ תִּכָּפֵר — And your sin has been removed, and your iniquity has been forgiven. Your sins of omission are now removed and are forgiven. You have been forgiven for עָוֶן, knowingly neglecting to speak out to chastise the people (בְּמִזִּיד), and for חֲטָא, your inadvertently keeping silent (בְּשׁוּגָג); or, as we said earlier, your having spoken trivialities.

What Yeshayahu learned at this moment of the initiation of his prophecy was that a human being, a Yisrael, with his power of free choice, can transcend even the level of the *malachim*. He had seen a Seraph taking a hot coal from the Heavenly Mizbeach, which was too hot for even this spiritual creature to handle, and touch it to his lips, and yet his lips were not burned. He had learned that the lips of a human being, who is אֵל בְּחִירָה, who possesses freedom of choice, are hotter even than that of the spiritual coal which even the *malachim* cannot touch. When human lips speak truth when they could have spoken untruth, when they utter words of kindness or constructive chastisement when they could have spoken hurtful words or kept silent when forthright speech was necessary, they are greater even than the lips of *malachim* who praise *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* saying קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' יְצַבֵּאות מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ.

Yeshayahu continues his report. “After this episode ...”

וְאֶשְׁמַע אֶת־קוֹל אֲדֹנָי אֲמַר אֶת־מִי אֶשְׁלַח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ-
 לָנוּ וְאֲמַר הַנְּנִי שְׁלַחֲנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לָעָם
 הַזֶּה שָׁמְעוּ שְׁמוּעַ וְאֶל־תִּבְיִנוּ וּרְאוּ רְאוּ וְאֶל־תִּדְעוּ:
 הַשָּׁמַן לְבֵהָעָם הַזֶּה וְאֶזְנִיו הַכֶּבֶד וְעֵינָיו הַשַּׁע פֶּן־
 יִרְאֶה בְּעֵינָיו וּבְאֶזְנָיו יִשְׁמַע וּלְכֹכּוּ וּבִין וְשָׁב וּרְפָא לוֹ:

8. וְאֶת־מִי אֶשְׁלַח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ — “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” The *Gemara* tells us that the three *neviim*, Hoshea, Amos and Michah, also prophesied during Yeshayahu’s time (*Pesachim* 87a). However, they were not respected by the people, and were even vilified. Michah was slapped in the face, and Amos was ridiculed because he had a speech impediment (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10:2). *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* asks here, “Who will accept the task of chastising the people in spite of the possibility that they might be rejected by the people?”

לָנוּ — For us. “Us” could mean either *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* using the “majestic plural,” or it could mean *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and the *malachim*. “Us,” then, would reflect God’s aspect of *anivus*, humility, similar to וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם, And God said let us make man, etc. (*Bereishis* 1:26; see *Rashi* there). In any event, with לָנוּ came the call: “Who will demand of the people, on our behalf, that they return *kedushah* to Yisrael?”

וְאֲמַר הַנְּנִי שְׁלַחֲנִי — And I said, ‘Here I am, send me.’ Yeshayahu accepts the call with great enthusiasm. The *Midrash* says that Yeshayahu was rewarded for this enthusiastic acceptance of God’s call — in spite of the people’s rejection of the *neviim* — by being the *navi* to whom most of the *nevuos* of *nechamah*, comforting prophecies for the Jewish people, were given; and many of these were expressed in a “double measure of comfort.” (See *Vayikra Rabbah* 10:2; *Yalkut Shimoni* here #408.) These *nevuos* of *nechamah*, envisioning the restoration of the Jewish people to its land, and the delights of the future world of *Mashiach* and *Olam Habah*, comprise the majority of this *sefer*. No other *navi* had the *zechus* of delivering so many *nevuos* of hope and comfort as did Yeshayahu. This, because of his enthusiastic response, הַנְּנִי שְׁלַחֲנִי.

[Ed. note: Interestingly, the *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 14b) characterizes the subject matter of *Sefer Yeshayahu* as consisting of בְּוֵלִיָּה נְחֻמָּתָא, all comfort. *Maharasha* (ad loc.) takes this to mean “consisting mostly of words of comfort.” MLS]

Now we are given a glimpse into the initiation of a *navi*, “a spokesman” for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. Yeshayahu’s first mission as a *navi* was to say the following to the people:

9. “You have heard the words of the *neviim* countless times, and, historically you have seen and experienced *nissim* and *niflaos*, miraculous events, and you know how we suffered when we violated God’s will. You are a very intelligent people. You hear the words of chastisement of the *neviim*, you are shown *nissim* and *niflaos*, and yet, all this seems to make no impression on you. Why is this so?

“I will tell you why.”

6/8-10 ⁸ Then I heard the voice of My Lord saying, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here I am, send me.” ⁹ And He said, “Go and tell this nation: ‘You hear and you hear, but you do not understand; and you see and you see, but you are not mindful.’ ¹⁰ Because the heart of this nation has been fattened, and its ears have become deafened and its eyes fixed; lest it would see with its eyes, hear with its ears, and its heart would understand, and it would repent.”

10. השמן לב-העם הזה — Because the heart of this nation has been fattened. A similar expression is found in the Torah: וישמון ישראל ויבועט, *Yeshurun (Yisrael) became fat and it felt privileged (Devarim 32:15)*. But here it is causative: “Has fattened,” meaning the Jewish nation has caused itself to become fattened. This process starts from earliest youth when the children are pampered and spoiled and given the best of everything, with no luxury being too much. And their parents and role models set poor examples for them with their endless pursuit of a luxurious life filled with every imaginable unnecessary pleasure of this world. This lifestyle “fattens” the heart and makes it insensitive to the word of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and even to the *nissim* and *niflaos* which He shows.

□ פן-יראה בעיניו ובאזניו ישמע ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו — Lest it would see with its eyes, hear with its ears, and its heart would understand, and it would repent. This could be understood ironically: “You really do not want to pay attention to the words of the *neviim*, ‘lest’ — because if you would take their words to heart — you may do *teshuvah* and be spared the terrible sickness that awaits you.” But most probably, it means simply, “For if you would only see the light, and listen to their words and allow them to penetrate into your hearts, you would understand their message, do *teshuvah*, and be healed.”

What Yeshayahu is saying here is as follows.

“The reason the words of the *neviim* have made no impression on you is because your lives are so overfilled with an abundance of pleasures and luxuries that your minds have lost the capacity to react. The *neviim*’s words of chastisement cannot penetrate your thickened heart and your fat-stopped ears, and your eyes glaze over when they try to show you the light.”

The attraction of the “good life” is the work of the *yetzer hara*, man’s powerful drive to gratify himself with the pleasures of life. David *HaMelech* battled mightily with it until finally he could say: וְלִבִּי חָלַל בְּקִרְבִּי, *My heart has become dead within me (Tehillim 109:22)*. The *Chachamim* comment on this that David “prosecuted” his *yetzer hara* and “killed it,” or, that he fasted so many *tanneisim* until he “killed” his *yetzer hara*. (See *Berachos* 61b; *Bava Basra* 17a — see *Rashi* there; *Yerushalmi Berachos* 9:5.)

However, the Jew also has within him a *yetzer hatov*, a powerful desire to do good, which gives him no rest until he performs this or that *mitzvah*. This drive is just as strong as the *yetzer hara*. But just as one can “kill” his *yetzer hara* by fasting, so can one “kill” his *yetzer hatov* by overindulging in eating and other physical pleasures. To be sure, one can still have a desire to do *mitzvos* and other good deeds, but the יצר, the drive to pursue *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*, is lost with over-indulgence in luxurious behavior.

ו/י-יא יב
 יא וְאָמַר עַד-מָתִי אֲדַנֶּי וַיֹּאמֶר עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם-שָׂאוּ עֲרִים
 מֵאֵין יוֹשֵׁב וּבָתִּים מֵאֵין אָדָם וְהֵאֲדָמָה תִּשָּׂאָה שְׂמָמָה:
 יב וְרַחֵק יֵהוּה אֶת-הָאָדָם וְרַבָּה הָעֲזוּבָה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

Yeshayahu's first mission as a *navi* was to tell the people that their luxurious lifestyle was at the root of their problems and would eventually cause their downfall. By overindulging in life's physical pleasures, they had lost the ability to react to the admonishments of the *neviim*; they had become blase towards them at best, and some even reacted violently towards them as we have learned. The hearts, the consciences of the Jewish people had become "fattened" by their luxurious lifestyle and they thus became immune to the chastisements of the *neviim*. Their ears no longer heard anything. They were so preoccupied with all kinds of unnecessary things, that the words of Torah and *mussar* of the *neviim* no longer penetrated them. Their eyes were unfocused; they just stared straight ahead, and lost the ability to look to the right or left, up or down, and value things properly. Had their eyes not been dulled by their opulent lifestyle, they would have seen the *nissim* and *niflaos* all around them in *Eretz Yisrael* and especially in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The *Gemara* tells us that there were many thousands of *neviim* among the Jewish people, but only those *nevuos* which were necessary for future generations were recorded in *Tanach* (see *Megillah* 14a). So we can assume that during Yeshayahu's time too there were other *neviim* [besides Hoshea, Amos and Michah, referred to earlier] who chastised the Jewish people. However, their words of *mussar* must have been meant only for their contemporaries so they were not made a part of *Tanach*. However, Yeshayahu's *nevuos* — as well as those of all the other *neviim* which are recorded in *Tanach* — have relevance and contain lessons for all future generations to this very day.

Yeshayahu's timeless mission was to teach the Jewish people — those in his time as well as those of all future generations — that although one may suffer from the religious infirmity of having been "fattened" and desensitized to the words of Torah, this illness is not irreversible. If one makes an effort, he can overcome his lethargy and insensitivity toward Torah and *mitzvos* and activate his *yetzer hatov*, his drive to perform *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*. For example, *Rambam* offers the following advice for one who wishes to achieve the *mitzvah* to love and fear God:

When a person gives thought to God's wondrous acts and great creations, from which he sees His great intelligence which cannot be conceptualized and which is limitless, one immediately loves and praises Him, and has a great desire to know the Great Name, as King David said, צְמָאָה נַפְשִׁי לֵאלֹהִים לְאֵל חַי, *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God* (*Tehillim* 42:3). And when he thinks about these particular things, מִיָּד הוּא נִרְתַּע לְאַחֲרָיו, he is immediately thrown back in shock and is overcome with fear, knowing that he is but a tiny and lowly dark creature standing with his tiny and frail mind before Him, תְּמִימִים דְּעֵימ, *the Perfection of All Intelligences* (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2).

¹¹ So I said, “Until when, My Lord?” And He said, “Until the cities are desolate without inhabitants and the houses without people, and the soil will become desolate and wasteland.” ¹² And HASHEM will distance man, and the forsakenness will be great in the midst of the land.

But with the “fattening” of our people, we have become insensitive to such religious stimulation, much like the loss of the sense of pain when one has been anesthetized and feels nothing when the dentist drills into a nerve. Today, something huge has to occur before we become awakened. But, says Yeshayahu, the Jewish nation is basically a healthy people who have become sick by their indulgence in luxury, but this disease is curable. The Jew has, in his core, the *yetzer hatov* and it can become a “drive” to keep Torah and *mitzvos* if only it is given a chance. Yeshayahu tells all Jews for all time, פֶּן יִרְפָּא לוֹ, that the Jew can be influenced by the truth and has the power to overcome all artificial barriers if only he makes an effort to so.

Yeshayahu, having seen lethargy all around him and fearing the worst, now turns to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and asks when this re-awakening of the desire to do *teshuvah* will occur.

12. He receives the sad answer that the people’s *teshuvah* will occur only after the complete destruction of the country and the exiling of its inhabitants. Only then will their attitude change.

Julius Hirsch, the son of *Rav S. R. Hirsch*, in his commentary on Yeshayahu, based on the teachings of his father, offers a beautiful explanation of this last *pasuk*. He says our *pasuk* means that with the punishment of the Jewish people, the destruction of its homeland, and the exile of its people, הָאָדָם, *mankind* in general will be distanced and forsaken. (See *Tosafos* to *Sanhedrin* 59a s.v. אלא האדם.) The mission of the Jewish people as given to it by God, at the time of the giving of the Torah, was to become מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ, *A kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (*Shemos* 19:6). The Jewish people was to be an example and light to the world to bring mankind close to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. So if we failed in our mission and are punished and exiled, not only do we suffer, but הָאָדָם, all mankind suffers by being distanced from God by the loss of its ideal and example.

When Shlomo *HaMelech* built the *Beis HaMikdash*, his hope was that in making it the place of *Hashroas HaShechinah*, and focal point of the Jewish people’s *avodas Hashem*, it would also become the capitol of the world to which all decent people from the entire world would be attracted to come and worship *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*I Melachim* 8:41-43). He hoped that this would grow into the universal recognition of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* as the One and Only God, as was later envisioned by the *navi*, and to which we are still looking forward: וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, *Then HASHEM will be the King of the entire world, on that day HASHEM will be One and His name One* (*Zechariah* 14:9). In fact, Shlomo’s kingdom and his world-renowned fame made his reign as close to that of *Mashiach* as we have ever come. There was one more time in our history when we came close to Messianic ideals, and that was during the reign of *Chizkiyahu HaMelech*, who had all the qualifications to become *Mashiach* (see *Sanhedrin* 94a).

וְעוֹד בִּיהַ עֲשֵׂרֶיָהּ וְשִׁבְעָה וְהִיתָה לְבַעַר כְּאַלֶּה וְכְאֵלֹן ו/יג
 אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁלֹכֶת מִצְבֹּתָם בָּם זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ מִצְבֹּתָהּ;
 וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי אָחִיז בְּנֵי-יִוְתָם בְּנֵי-עֲזִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה עַלֶּה א/ז

But this ideal was never realized, and by punishing the Jewish people and exiling them from its land, וְרַחַק ה' אֶת-הָאָדָם, God had removed mankind very far away from Him. For thousands of years mankind has been removed from its goal of the universal recognition of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* because we, the Jewish people, have failed in our mission to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and attract mankind to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

In accordance with most *meforshim*, we have taken רַבָּה to mean *great*, and וְרַבָּה וְהָאֶרֶץ to mean *and the forsakenness will be great in the midst of the land*, referring to the vast areas of desolation in *Eretz Yisrael*, or as some take it, “the desolation will last for a great amount of time.”

While this explanation is certainly true, Julius Hirsch (based on the teachings of his father) takes רַבָּה to mean *greatness*, and accordingly, he takes our phrase as a comforting reference to Jewish life in *galus*, as follows:

הַעֲזוּבָה, the Jewish exiles in the world, will not merely suffer and flounder helplessly, but they will become רַבָּה, *great*; the exiles will accomplish great things בְּקֶרֶב הָאֶרֶץ, wherever they may find itself in their exile throughout the world.

During the years of our עֲזוּבָה-*galus* we became רַבָּה, *great*. As far as *kedushah* is concerned, we accomplished much more בְּקֶרֶב הָאֶרֶץ, in exile throughout the world, than we accomplished in *Eretz Yisrael*.

[See *Collected Writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch*, Vol. 4, p. 20, on which this interpretation is based. See also his commentary to *Devarim* 29:27 regarding Israel’s role as the words *great lamed, teacher*.]

The *navi* continues:

13. עֲשֵׂרֶיָהּ — *One tenth*, a combination of עֲשֵׂרִי, *a tenth*, and יְהוָה, *God*. This is similar to הָעֲשֵׂרִי יְהוָה-קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה, *The tenth will be holy to Hashem (Vayikra 27:32)*. Notwithstanding all of this destruction and exile, the Jewish people will always retain *maaser*; a “tenth,” or a holy core of its people, who will always remain faithful to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

□ וְשִׁבְעָה וְהִיתָה לְבַעַר — *That, too, will fall prey to destruction*. And this remainder of the Jewish people will be afflicted with destruction throughout the generations; but over and over again, “a tenth of it,” a holy core, will always remain faithful.

Yeshayahu prophesies here that though the Jewish people may suffer enormous devastation and destruction again and again, it will never be completely destroyed; a faithful core, “a tenth,” will always remain. For this nation is similar to the trunk of וְאֵלֶּה וְאֵלֹן, varieties of oak trees, אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁלֹכֶת, that while they may shed their leaves and twigs, and even branches that are too weak to survive, nevertheless, מִצְבֹּתָם בָּם, they still retain their trunk. Similarly, no matter the extent of its destruction, זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ, מִצְבֹּתָהּ, the Jewish people will always retain a “trunk with holy seed” from which it will rejuvenate.

6/13 ¹³ And if one tenth remain in it, that, too, will fall prey to destruction. But like the oak and the terebinth, though they shed their leaves the trunk remains in them; its trunk is holy seed.

7/1 ¹ And it was in the days of Achaz, son of Yossam son of Uziyahu, king of Yehudah, that Rezin king of Aram [Syria]

During the course of our history, we have lost many millions of Jews both physically and spiritually. This began with the *galus* of the Ten Tribes, during which very few of them survived as Jews. Later during the time of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*, great inroads were made by the *Tzeddokim* and later by the Judeo-Christians. Later we suffered losses to the *Karaim*, and during the Middle Ages we suffered great losses to the Crusaders, the false *Mashiachs* and the Chmielnizky massacres. This was followed by the Reformers; after which came Nazism and Communism. But despite these enormous losses to our people, the dropping off of so many branches, there always remained, and always will remain the “trunk” which contains the *נֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ*, the holy seed, the *עֲשָׂרִיָּה*, from which our people continues to grow to this very day. This is the great hope that Yeshayahu prophesies to his people.

7.

This chapter is set during the reign of the Judean king, Achaz, a descendant of David *HaMelech*. Beginning with the reign of Rechavam — Shlomo’s son and successor — the Judean Kingdom of *Eretz Yisrael* was governed for some 238 years by a succession of kings who were generally *tzaddikim*, although they did commit some *aveiros*. But Achaz, son and successor of the great *tzaddik*, Yosam, was the first Judean king to become a real *rasha*. He was responsible for bringing the *Baal* worship to Yehudah, which had never been done previously. He also offered his son to the *Molach* worship in Gei Ben Hinnom near Yerushalayim. (See *II Melachim* 16; *II Divrei HaYamim* 28.)

Beginning with Rechavam’s reign, the northern 10 tribes of Yisrael seceded from the Davidic kingdom and formed their own kingdom, *Malchus Yisrael*, or the Northern Kingdom. Their first king was Yeravam Ben Nevat, who was one of the worst *reshaim* in our history. This chapter takes place hundreds of years later, when the king Pekach Ben Remalyahu of the Northern Kingdom of Yisrael allied with the Syrian king, Retzin of Aram, and launched an attack against the Kingdom of Yehudah to conquer it. Achaz sought the help and protection of the king of Assyria, Tiglas Pileesser, paying him a huge amount of wealth from the Temple treasury.

But before the Assyrians could come to help, the allied armies of Pekach and Retzin ravaged the land. They conquered most of the province of Yehudah, killing 120,000 people in one day alone, and capturing 200,000 women and children (*II Divrei HaYamim* 28:6-8). The only major objective left was the city of Yerushalayim and the seat of the government of *Malchus Yehudah* itself. Our chapter opens as these allied armies are marching towards Yerushalayim and are threatening to capture the capital and bring down *Malchus Yehudah*.

1. אַחָז בֶּן-יוֹסָם בֶּן-עֲזַיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה — Achaz, son of Yossam son of Uziyahu, King of Yehudah. The reason Achaz’s father and grandfather are named here is because

רָצִין מִלֶּךְ־אֲרָם וּפָקַח בֶּן־רַמְלִיָּהוּ מִלֶּךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל
 ב יְרוּשָׁלַם לְמִלְחָמָה עָלֶיהָ וְלֹא יָכַל לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ; וַיֵּגֶד
 לְבֵית דָּוִד לֵאמֹר גָּחָה אֲרָם עַל־אֶפְרַיִם וַיִּנְע לִבָּבוּ
 ג וּלְבָב עַמּוֹ כָּנוּעַ עֲצִי־יַעַר מִפְּנֵי־רוּחַ; וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־
 יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ צֹא־נָא לְקִרְאת אַחָז אֲתָה וּשְׂאֵר יִשׁוּב בְּנֵה
 אֶל־קִצֵּה תַעֲלֵת הַבְּרֶכֶה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה אֶל־מַסְלַת שְׂדֵה
 ד כּוּבֶס; וְאִמְרַתְּ אֲלֵיו הַשְּׁמֵר וְהִשְׁקֵט אֶל־תִּירָא וּלְבַבְךָ
 אֶל־יָרֵךְ מִשְׁנֵי וְנִבּוֹת הָאוֹדִים הָעֹשְׂנִים הָאֵלֶּה בַּחֲרִי־אֶף
 ה רָצִין וְאֲרָם וּבֶן־רַמְלִיָּהוּ; יַעַן כִּי־יַעַץ עָלֶיךָ אֲרָם רָעָה
 ו אֶפְרַיִם וּבֶן־רַמְלִיָּהוּ לֵאמֹר: גַּעֲלֵה בִיהוּדָה וּנְקִי־צִנָּה
 וּנְבַקְעָנָה אֵלֵינוּ וְנִמְלִיךְ מִלֶּךְ בְּתוֹכָהּ אֶת בֶּן־טַבְּאֵל:

Achaz was saved from destruction, as we will learn below, only in the merit of his father and grandfather. Yosam was a renowned *tzaddik* (*Succah* 45b and *Rashi* *ibid.*), and Uziyahu was, for the most part, also a *tzaddik* (*II Melachim* 15:3).

וְלֹא יָכַל לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ — *But they could not prevail militarily against it.* וְלֹא and יָכַל are in the singular, to indicate the unity of the allied armies. This phrase tells us in short that their planned conquest of Yerushalayim was unsuccessful. The next few *pesukim*, through 17, are set in the time immediately prior to the planned attack.

2. לְבֵית דָּוִד — *To the house of David; to Achaz, “a descendant of the royal House of David.”* His name is not used because he was a *rasha*, unworthy of being saved in his own merit.

אֶפְרַיִם — *Ephraim.* The Northern Kingdom of Yisrael was also known as “Ephraim” because its first king and founder, Yeravam, was from this tribe, and the leading tribe within the Northern Kingdom was Ephraim.

Despite Achaz’s past arrogance, at this point he was beset with great fear and panic. He had been outmaneuvered. Here was a Jewish army, allied with the forces of an avowed Jew-hater, who had already conquered most of his kingdom, marching inexorably forward to conquer and destroy him and what was left of *Malchus Yehudah*.

3. שְׂאֵר יִשׁוּב — *Shear Yashuv.* Yeshayah had a son whom he called Shear Yashuv, “a remnant will return.” By this name he made known his *nevuah* that even if most of the country and its people were destroyed, a small remnant would eventually return. His name evokes hope.

תַעֲלֵת הַבְּרֶכֶה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה — *The canal of the upper cistern.* The water supply of Yerushalayim was stored in giant cisterns. The one referred to here was the upper cistern. The protection of the city’s water supply was of utmost importance, for if the supply were to be interrupted, the city could never withstand any siege. Apparently, Achaz set up a strategic military defensive position at the outer edge of the city’s water supply to protect it from attack, and that was where he could be found.

ה בִּיְיָ יִלְדֵנוּ בֵּן נִתְּנָנוּ וְתָהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עַל־
 שְׁכֵמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוּר אָבִי־
 וְ עַד שְׁר־שָׁלוֹם: °לְמַרְבֵּה ק] הַמְּשָׁרָה
 וְלִשְׁלוֹם אֵין־קֵץ עַל־כֶּסֶף דָּוָד וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ
 לְהַכִּין אֶתְּהָ וְלִסְעָדָהּ בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבִצְדָקָה מֵעַתָּה
 וְעַד־עוֹלָם קִנְיַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה־זֹאת:

5. בִּיְיָ יִלְדֵנוּ בֵּן נִתְּנָנוּ — *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us.* This child, Chizkiyahu, who had already been born at the time this *nevuah* was spoken, was לָנוּ, *ours*. He was to be considered a son of the entire Jewish nation.

□ הַמְּשָׁרָה — *Authority*, from שָׂרָה, שָׂר, *rule*, “governmental authority.”

□ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוּר אָבִי־עַד שְׁר־שָׁלוֹם — *And He — Who is marvelous of counsel, the Almighty God, the father of all eternity — will call him the prince of peace.* In our translation, we have followed *Targum* and *Rashi* and taken these three phrases as referring to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Radak makes the point, however, that these phrases could just as well be taken as a description of Chizkiyahu, the future king: פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ, a man of marvelous intellect and counsel; אֵל גְּבוּר, a powerful ruler [as in יֵשׁ לְאֵל יָדַי, *It is within the power of my hand* (*Bereishis* 31:29)]; אָבִי עַד, the father of eternity, in the sense that, ideally, with his rule the epoch of *Mashiach* would begin, and this would last for the duration of the existence of the world.

□ שְׁר־שָׁלוֹם — *Prince of peace.* Chizkiyahu *HaMelech* is called “the prince of peace.” He was a peaceful king; we do not find him fighting any wars during his reign. Furthermore, as *Targum* explains, “peace will increase in his time,” meaning that in his intended role as *Mashiach*, he would have caused peace to spread first throughout Yisrael, and then throughout the entire world. The next *pasuk* expounds on this:

6. לְמַרְבֵּה [לְמַרְבֵּה] הַמְּשָׁרָה — *To increase the authority.* As *Mashiach*, his authority will increase; it will start with Yisrael and eventually extend throughout the world.

The *Chachamim* comment that the unusual use of the “closed,” or “final,” *mem* in לְמַרְבֵּה — instead of the ordinary לְמַרְבֵּה — is an allusion to the “closing,” or the non-realization of Chizkiyahu’s potential to become *Mashiach* for the reasons given in the *Gemara* — which are extremely difficult to understand. (See *Sanhedrin* 94a.) With the loss of this opportunity, the coming of *Mashiach* was postponed for a future time — which has now turned out to be thousands of years — for which we are still waiting.

□ וְלִשְׁלוֹם אֵין־קֵץ — *And to peace there is no limit.* The peace which *Mashiach* will bring will not be limited to Yisrael, but will extend to the entire world. During the reign of Shlomo *HaMelech*, hitherto Yisrael’s most successful king, there was peace in Yisrael, but there was no peace in many other parts of the world. But with the advent of the reign of *Mashiach*, there will be peace throughout the world. It is for

⁵ For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the authority will rest on his shoulder, and He — Who is marvelous of counsel, the Almighty God, the father of all eternity — will call him the prince of peace.
⁶ To increase the authority, and to peace there is no limit, on the throne of David and on his government, to establish it and to fortify it with justice and charity from now until eternity. The zeal of HASHEM, Master of Legions, shall do this.

this limitless, “great peace” that we pray in *Kaddish*: יהא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא, *May there be great peace from Heaven*.

□ **בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבְצִדְקָה** — *With justice and charity*. The hallmark of כְּסֵא דָּוִד and מְמַלְכֻתּוֹ, the Davidian throne and its eventual world-governance, will be the administration of מִשְׁפָּט, strict justice, tempered with צִדְקָה, the mild form of justice. King David himself is described as עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה לְכָל עַמּוֹ, *One who does justice and kindness to his entire people* (II Shmuel 8:15). The *Gemara* tells us, for example, that after finding one party liable (*mishpat*), David would pay the judgment out of his own pocket (*zedakah*) if the litigant was unable to do so (*Sanhedrin* 6b).

□ **קִנְיַת הַ צְבָאוֹת** — *The zeal of HASHEM, Master of Legions*. The usual translation of קִנְיָה is *jealousy*, describing one who begrudges another’s possession of something. It is related to קָנָה, *ownership*; thus קִנְיָה is the demand to obtain what is rightfully one’s property. Therefore, a man who suspects his wife of having an affair with another man is said to קָנָא אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ (Bamidbar 5:14), assert his rights as the קִנְיָה; he jealously demands what is rightfully his: exclusive rights to his wife’s person (*R’ Hirsch*). Therefore, as applied to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, the meaning of our phrase, קִנְיַת הַ צְבָאוֹת, is that God’s “zealous” assertion of His ownership of all that exists in the face of those who deviate from Him, תַּעֲשֶׂה זֹאת, will accomplish all of this: the eventual establishment of *Malchus Shamayim* throughout the world through the *Melech HaMashiach*.

These last *pesukim* have been completely mistaken by Christian theologians as a “prophetic reference” to the central figure of their religion. Nothing could be farther from the truth, because Yeshayahu says specifically כִּי יֵלֵד יֵלֵד לָנוּ, *that this child had already been born* when he spoke these words.

[Ed. note: יֵלֵד definitely means “was born,” there are numerous examples of this in *Bereishis* and elsewhere.] A simple calculation of historical data will show that the central figure of the Christian religion lived some 500 years after the death of Yeshayahu. (See “Historical Background.”)

The *Chachamim* who selected the *Haftaros* for the Shabbasos saw fit to conclude the *Haftarah* of *Parashas Yisro* — according to *Minhag Ashkenaz* — with the previous *pasuk*, ending with קִנְיַת הַ צְבָאוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה זֹאת, which indicates that they considered this to be the end of the subject matter at hand, a description of the kingdom of *Mashiach*.

The following introduces a new subject, and is actually an introduction to the next chapter: the prophetic message concerning the impending destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Yisrael.