

# Haftarah

*'Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God'*



*I will heal their affliction,  
Generously take them back in love;  
for My anger has turned away from  
them.*

Hosea 14:5

## Connection

In the Jewish liturgical calendar the Haftarah which falls between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur takes a selection from the prophets Hosea, Micah and Joel. In keeping with the liturgical season—the High Holy Days ('Days of Awe')—these readings present a theme of repentance.

[Note: verse numbering may vary slightly]

## Hosea 14:2-10

- *'Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God...'* (14:2). The opening word of the Hebrew text, *Shuvah*, means 'return' and from it comes the word for repentance: *teshuvah*.
- *'They shall blossom like the vine'* (14:8). Imagery of thriving crops and agricultural produce—lily, olive tree, grain, vine, cypress, fruit—is used to depict the joy which is Israel's when reconciled with God; see 14:6-9.
- The *'wise will consider these words'* (14:10). This concluding verse sums up the prophet's conviction that the way of the Lord is the only path that leads to a good and happy life.

## Micah 7:18-20

(This is read if Shabbat Shuva coincides with the reading of Torah portion Vayeilekh)

- *'Who is a God like You, Forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression'* (7:18). God's mercy is unbounded.
- *'He will take us back in love, He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea'* (7:19). The latter half of this verse forms part of the *Tashlich* ritual on Rosh Hashana where traditionally Jews walk to a natural water source and throw coins or bread as a symbol of releasing their sins.

## Joel 2:15-27

(This is read if Shabbat Shuva coincides with the reading of Torah portion Ha'azinu)

- The prophet Joel speaks of a Day of Judgment to come and in the verses preceding this haftarah (2:1-14) describes God's wrath as a plague of locusts causing devastation to the land.
- But from v.15, relief... *'Then the LORD was roused...and had compassion on His people'* (2:18). In contrast to the locusts' damage, the imagery changes to that of a land of rich soil, enjoying abundant rains, bringing forth vegetation, fruit. *'Vats shall overflow with new wine and oil'* (2:24).
- And all this is so that *'you shall know...that I am the Lord your God'* (2:27).

## Share

- Each of the above prophets speaks of divine mercy. Which speaks with particular power to you?

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: NJPS.