

A New Haftara for Sukkot

Text from The Poet's Bible by David Rosenberg
Set to Haftara trop by Hazzan Jack Kessler

EZRA 3:10-13

The workers had built up the foundation of Adonai's Temple
the original outline was visible again
Cohanim were there in their robes
they blew the trumpets of assembly
Levi'im were there with cymbals and lyres
as Asaph had been directed by David, King of Yisrael in his day
and they sang back and forth to each other antiphonally
"Sing praises to Adonai in psalms
so good it is to be singing"
and the refrain:
"His mercy sings through us to Yisrael
as it has and always will"
Then all the people broke out in song
because the house of Adonai was rising again

but many of the oldest Cohanim and Levi'im
and heads of families
old men who had seen the first house
and who could see it still standing fixed in their memories-
these men broke out weeping loudly, openly
as they stood before this house rising again in their living eyes
many others were shouting joyfully
a great noise was going up people in the distance could hear it clearly
and they could not tell by their ears
the sound of weeping from the sound of joy.

NEHEMIAH 8:5-18

Raised up on a platform in full view of everyone
Ezra opened the book
he was standing above them
as everyone rose when he opened the Torah
and Ezra made a benediction to Adonai, God above all

and everyone answered amēn amēn-
 with hands stretched to the sky
 in a feeling of deep reverence then bowed their heads
 kneeling, until their faces touched the ground their lips to dust
 and Yeshúa, Baní, Shereviáh, Yamín, Akkúv, Shabbetái
 Hodiáh, Maaseiáh, Kelitáh, Azariáh, Yozavád, Hanán, Pelayáh,
 and the Levi'im
 they were the interpreters so all could understand
 the tongue of the Toráh, and the people stood in their places,
 listening as the book was read and translated
 slowly, distinctly, from morning till noon
 with the sense made plain
 to be felt and understood Adonai 's Toráh
 by all the men and women
 then I, Nehemiáh, as governor
 and Ezra the scribe-priest and reader
 and the Levi'im, interpreters to the people said to them all
 this day is a day made holy to Adonai our God---be at peace

we must not mourn, we must not weep
 because everyone was weeping as they listened
 to the sweet words of Torah
 Then Ezra continued: go, celebrate
 with a sumptuous meal, a sweet wine
 and send a portion to those who have nothing ready for themselves
 for this is a holy day to Adonai
 and not for being involved with ourselves
 we must not look so burdened with grief
 today sadness is forbidden
 it is our happiness in Adonai that gives us our very strength
 and the Levi'im also were calming the people
 saying: calm yourselves, be still
 this is a holy day and not for carrying personal grief
 today no sadness is allowed
 then the people went home to celebrate
 to eat and drink and distribute portions for everyone

to make a great festival in the spirit of shared happiness
 an unguarded joy
 because all had heard and understood
 the words openly read to them and felt their sweetness within
 and on the second day all the heads of families
 the Cohanim and teachers - Levi'im -
 gathered before Ezra the scribe
 to look more deeply into the words of the Torah
 and there in the Torah they found written before their eyes
 by the hand of Moshe inspired by Adonai
 that the family of Yisrael will dwell in sukkot
 during the festival of this month-the Sukkot festival
 and when they heard this, together they made a declaration,
 to be read in all their cities not only Yerushalayim, saying
 go to the mountainside gather branches of olive and myrtle
 leafy palm and boughs of willow
 from which to make sukkot as it is written

so the people went out of their cities and towns
 to gather them and make sukkot
 each family made one on their roof or in their courtyard
 or in the courtyard of Adonai's House in Yerushalayim
 and in the avenue leading to the Water Gate,
 and the avenue leading to the Ephraim Gate
 the whole community that had returned from exile,
 returned to make festival sukkot and dwell in them ♦♦
 and since this had not been done so lovingly,
 from the wilderness days of Yehoshua to this day (or so it seemed)
 there was a great happiness a deep joy
 in living the words they were hearing
 and Ezra continued reading from the book
 day by day, each festival day
 continuing in Adonai's Torah for seven days ♦♦
 and on the eighth day --Shemini Atzeret--
 they held a solemn assembly
 a closing celebration---as it is written. ♦♦