“I remember, when you followed me to the desert…”

The Haftarot are Biblical texts from the Prophets, read after the weekly Tora reading, related content-wise to the Parasha of the week. During these three Shabbatot, between the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Ab, we read three special Haftarot which are not necessarily associated with the content of the Parasha but with the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash. God granted the Prophets of Israel messages and visions to warn the people about their misdeeds and inspire them to amend their ways, to avoid destruction and exile. But even in these messages of rebuke, we can see the love that God professes for Israel.

Our Haftara (Jer.1) is a great example of both: the warning and the love. After HaShem appoints Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) as a prophet, He warns Israel of the upcoming danger: if Israel does not come back to God and stop worshipping idols, the enemy will come and conquer Jerusalem.

Despite this harsh words, the Haftara ends (Jer. 2) with a message of hope and the intense love that HaShem has for Israel.

“זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלֹתָיִךְ,
לֶכְתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה”

HaShem says to Israel:

“You are my beloved and I will always remember what you did in your “youth”. You were in Egypt for more than two centuries. In all this time you might have forsaken Me. After all, you might have thought that I had abandoned you…but you did not. Then, I offered to rescue you. To take you to the desert. I offered you freedom, but “freedom in the desert”. A long way from honey and milk. In the most inhospitable place on the

planet. No water, no food, no trees, no place to rest. A dangerous environment with wild animals, poisonous serpents and scorpions. You can't prepare enough supplies of food, and especially water, not even for a short journey in the desert. You did not know where you will sleep, how will you find your way in the wilderness, and how would you protect yourself, your children, your old parents, from unexpected enemies, or from the cold nights or from the inclement and unpredictable weather. (Illustration: In the year 500 BCE, the well trained and equipped army of the Persian emperor, Cambyses, counting 50,000 soldiers, "disappear" in a similar desert, buried under a sandstorm. See this).
And since there was no "natural" way to survive in the desert, escaping to the desert was "suicidal". But You trusted ME. Completely. You responded to my call. You followed Me because you love Me. And I will never forget that."

May HaShem protect Israel and our brave soldiers as He protected our ancestors against all the dangers, animals and enemies, of the unpredictable desert.

May He bless Israel with strength, victory and peace.