

list the forty-eight prophets? Just in case we're tempted to dismiss the stories as minor and insignificant, the Gemara informs us of the difference between these specific fifty-five prophets and prophetesses and all of the myriad Biblical-era prophets. These prophecies are relevant for all time, not just the period in history when they occurred.

I was once sitting on a plane when I overheard two girls behind me discussing the Bible. One asked the other if she'd read the "Good Book." The other responded that she had indeed read it a number of times. The first one was impressed because she was only two thirds of the way through her reading of the Old Testament. When I heard that, I was overwhelmed with feelings of humility. Here are these two young ladies who were familiar with most of our Tanach, and I, a rabbi, hadn't made my way through even once! I immediately resolved to start learning Tanach on a regular basis.

The reason many of us are not conversant in the Bible is that we read through it, and we find it arcane and complex, and we perceive it to have been written to an audience thousands of years ago. We read the prophecies of Yirmiyahu and we think he was talking to the Jews prior to the destruction of the First Temple. We read the Book of *Ezra* and we think it's a story of the return from Babylonia, something that happened long ago, sometime in the distant past.

But the Gemara teaches that any prophecy that is recorded in Tanach is "needed for all future generations"! The challenge for us is to read the Tanach with enough depth and concentration, together with our classic commentators, to develop insights that enable us to apply the prophets' messages to our lives today. Torah comes from the word *horaah*, meaning instruction or lesson. The Torah is not a storybook; it is an instruction manual for how we are to live. The *Torah She'bichsav*, the Written Torah, consists not just of the Chumash, but of the entire Tanach—the Torah, *Neviim*, and *Kesuvim*. It's all relevant; the lessons and instructions throughout Tanach were recorded for posterity because they contain an important message for all generations. But if you rarely read and familiarize yourself with the Tanach, it's impossible to hear the message.

It's time to start learning Tanach. Start by taking an English copy and devoting ten minutes a day to simply reading through it. You will finish it in less than a year. Next year, read some of it each day in the Hebrew. After that you can add commentaries to ensure you are getting the accurate meaning. But, most importantly, after you've read it, may you be inspired to think about the message of the prophecy you've read and how it is relevant to your life today!