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This paper was submitted, in April 2014, as a dissent to "Haftarot for a Triennial Cycle Torah Reading" by Avram Reisner. Dissenting and concurring papers are not official positions of the CJLS.

Rabbi Reisner's paper is as usual well written and compelling. My vote against says nothing about the strength of his argumentation, which is well stated.

Having said that, I want to say a word in favor of the traditional cycle and a full narrative. The triennial reading in general serves a number of laudatory purposes - but it also loses a wholeness to the narrative. Here too, in the case of Haftarot, there is something beautiful about an established set read throughout thousands of years by Jewish communities across the world (notwithstanding some differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi readings). That a bar or bat mitzvah student reads something that is then read elsewhere in the world invites a Jewish connection to the whole Jewish people that this practice risks losing.

There is also implicitly a question here about the length of services. Shabbat is a day for God. Services ought to be compelling and engaging regardless of how long or short they are. These readings are an encounter with the voice of the Divine. The Torah reading reenacts beautifully the moment of standing at Sinai and imagining God's presence in our midst as we hear the Voice of the Holy One. The Haftarah provides a sacred complement to this as we hear the Divine voice refracted through the human experience of the prophet. This seems to me worth making time for.

Ours is a counter cultural message. We are inviting people into meaning. That meaning is found in many ways, but one part is our commitment to a specific set of liturgies and readings. Rarely in the wider culture, if ever, do we hear the recitation of text. Yet Jewish liturgy puts great literal faith in the importance of such recitation. I'd like to see a focus on inviting people into the sacredness of Shabbat and of the meaning filled quality of the Torah and Haftarah readings.