



Parashat Ekev 5772 - #244

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

Visit our blog: www.ravaviner.com

On the Haftarah...

Meeting Anew

[Yeshayahu 49:14-51:3]

During the period after Tisha Be-Av we read seven Haftarot known as "Shiva De-Nechemta" – the Seven Haftarot of Consolation. These portions, all from the prophet Yeshayahu, encourage us not to despair and tell us of the final, future Redemption – the beginning of which we see today.

"But Zion said: Hashem has forsaken me, Hashem has forgotten me" (Yeshayahu 49:14). Is it possible to understand the Nation of Israel's despair? After all, our history, more than that of any other nation, is filled with oppression and persecution. It is difficult to understand how we were able to withstand all of these trials. How did we survive both the destruction of our kingdom and two periods of exile? How did we remain a Nation after so much suffering?

We need only recall that when Napoleon left Germany in the years 5597-5600, the Jews were left to systematic attacks by those filled with hatred. Their inciting call was: Hep, Hep – the acronym of "Hieronolima est Perdita" – Jerusalem is lost. And how can we fail to mention the indescribable horrors of the Holocaust?

We can understand how the Nation would have despaired in the face of all of this suffering: "Hashem has forsaken me, Hashem has forgotten me!" But we must stand strong, as the Rambam wrote in his "Igeret Teiman" (Letters to Yemenite Jews). During that period, cruel non-Jews were oppressing the Jews of Yemen, and the Rambam filled them with courage and hope. By the way, the subtitle of that letter is "Petach Tikvah" (lit. the beginning of hope, and the name of the first settlement built upon our return to Zion).

The Rambam wrote that Yeshayahu told us that, because of our lengthy Exile, we might think that Hashem has abandoned us and removed his kindness from us, G-d forbid: "But Zion said: Hashem has forsaken me, Hashem has forgotten me." He therefore tells us: "Can a mother forget her nursing baby? Withdraw from compassion for the child of her womb? Though she

may forget, I will not forget you!" (ibid. v. 15) (Igrot Ha-Rambam, Mossad Ha-Rav Kook edition, pp. 169-170). We obviously knew of this Divine promise long before the words of Yeshayahu since Moshe Rabbenu, the first Divine messenger of the Nation of Israel, said: "For Hashem your G-d is a merciful G-d, He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He swore to them" (Devarim 4:31).

It sometimes happens that when there is great distress a mother forgets her baby. But this does not happen with our Creator: "Can a mother forget her nursing baby? Withdraw from compassion for the child of her womb? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! I have engraved you on the palms of My hands" (Yeshayahu 49:15-16). We should point out here that Hashem is not only our Father but also our Mother. When Moshe Rabbenu turned to Hashem, he sometimes spoke to Him in the feminine (see Bemidbar 11:15). Hashem obviously supersedes all concepts of male and female, but He sometimes reveals Himself in one way and at other times in another way. Mystical Torah Sages know well that one description of Hashem is as a Father and another is as a Mother.

There are two different types of crisis: an objective crisis and a subjective one. An objective crisis occurs contrary to the will of a person and contrary to the will of all people. For example, a person breaks his foot, receives a cast, and becomes limited and physically challenged. And he then experiences the subjective crisis – how will I respond to what has occurred? The objective crisis is sometimes quite insignificant, and the response out of all proportion. And sometimes it is the opposite: the crisis is truly great while the response is minimal. Both of these are not good. If a person's close relative dies and he does not sit "Shiva," does not mourn and does not eulogize him – he is emotionally unhealthy. But sometimes people make a huge commotion over nothing. Regarding our history, despite the horrible suffering we have experienced, we have always succeeded in withstanding the trials and retaining our deepest joy and optimism. How can we understand that after the Holocaust, when we lost more than a third of our Nation, we arose from the ashes and renewed our collective self? The courage and joy never cease, despite the unbearable hurt of our loss.

It has become clear that Yeshayahu spoke the truth. All of those who doubted his words, and all of those among the Nation of Israel who despaired, must now understand that we did not stand strong for naught: "Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste and destroy you depart from you. Lift up your eyes and see, all your sons gather and come to you. As surely as I live, declares Hashem, you will wear them all as jewelry, you will put them on, like a bride (ibid. v. 17-18). All those who return from around the world, from Russia and Poland, France and Germany, North Africa and Yemen, America and Ethiopia, they are the adornments of the Nation of Israel, and they, despite being different from one another, are glorious together.

"For your ruins and desolations and your spoiled Land will now become overflowing with inhabitants" (ibid. v. 19). Certain areas in our Land are becoming crowded and major thoroughfares regularly have major traffic jams. "The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: 'This place is too small for me, give us more space to live in.' You will then say in your heart: 'Who bore me these? I was bereaved of children and alone, I was exiled and wandering. Who reared these? I was left all alone, but these - where have they come from?'" (ibid. v. 20-21). The Master of the Universe finally decided that the time to meet anew has arrived, and that all of humanity would participate in this return.

Although there were a few nations who were opposed, there were many who wanted to take part in this historical spiritual repair: "This is what Hashem, G-d, says: 'I will raise My hand toward the nations and I will lift up my banner to the peoples, they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings will be your nurturers, and their princesses your nursing mothers'" (ibid. v. 22-23).

The Balfour Declaration (which led to granting a Jewish State to our Nation at the United Nations in 1948), and its verification at the conference in San Remo, prove that there was an ethical enlightenment at that specific historical moment. Even though it was only temporary, it still recalls Yeshayahu's prophesy that the nations will acknowledge the preferred status of the Nation of Israel in the world: "Then you will know that I am Hashem, those who hope in Me will not be disappointed" (ibid. v. 23).

And not only then, but today too. Despite the gloomy picture spread around the world by the media, we should understand and absorb the glorious message of our great prophet, Yeshayahu. The final, future Redemption of which he spoke, has begun.

Rav Aviner on... Revering Torah Scholars

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Parashat Nitzavim 5765]

Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah taught us to revere all Torah scholars. Once, one of his students disparaged Charedi rabbis and blamed them of being responsible for Jews dying in the Holocaust. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah castigated him: "Before all else, you must learn the meaning of treating Torah scholars with respect!" He devoted several hours to explaining this concept to him. Why go to such lengths? Because "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai, passed it down to Yehoshua, Yehoshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets, and they in turn passed it down to the Men of the Great Assembly" (Avot 1:1). Without those who handed down the Torah, there is no Torah. Everything rests on the way we relate to those who learn Torah. "Torah scholars increase peace in the world" (Berachot 64a). That is their essence.

Consider how Rabbenu Tam honored Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra. With enormous humility he wrote: "I am the servant of Avraham, and I prostrate myself before him." And see the adoration with which Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra responded: "Is it proper for a knight of the People, mighty and thundering, to lower his head in a letter to a simple individual?" If you say that the Rabbis of our own generation are not as great as those of previous generations, you are not speaking from wisdom. Our Sages taught us: "Gidon in his generation was like Moshe in his generation, and Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel in his generation..." as it says (Devarim 17:9), 'Approach the Kohanim and Levi'im and the judge who will be in your times'" (Rosh Hashanah 25b).

Do not cast aspersions on the Rabbis of the generation if you find a shortcoming. A person is judged according to his overall deeds, and a great Rabbi's shortcomings surely make up only a negligible minority of his total, less than a sixtieth, perhaps less than a thousandth. Our Sages did not refrain from pointing out that even the greatest Jewish personalities - the patriarchs, the kings and the prophets - had shortcomings. That does not mean, however, that

we are allowed to criticize them. An irrevocable condition to criticizing them, says Maran Ha-Rav Kook, is that we ourselves must be learned, saintly, pure, and free of all blemish (Ein Aya, Berachot 83, page 97, Ot 29).

Moreover, writes Radbaz, even if it is revealed that a great Rabbi has expressed himself heretically, that is no reason to ridicule him. After all, even after Rabbi Hillel said that there shall be no Messiah to the Jewish People, the other Rabbis continued to quote him (Shut Radbaz 4:187). Also, Rav Kook wrote that if we set out to create a fence to protect Jewish law from harm, we mustn't as a result cause even greater destruction by disgracing a Torah scholar (Ma'amarei Ha-Re'eiyah, p. 56).

Controversy between scholars is legitimate. It is good to ask questions of the great Rabbis of the generation, our spiritual leaders. Having faith in the sages doesn't mean playing the fool. It is permissible to ask. Yet it is forbidden to disgrace them! And anyway, it is impossible to follow all the sages at once. There are controversies among them. Therefore, one must at the same time "find a Rabbi" (Avot 1:6), and honor all other Rabbis.

The rule is this: Love and revere those who dedicate their lives to Torah day and night, for their devotion earns them divine assistance. The Rabbis said: Whoever loves Torah scholars will have a son who is a Torah scholar. Whoever is deferential to Torah scholars will have a son-in-law who is a Torah scholar. Whoever reveres Torah scholars will himself become a Torah scholar (Shabbat 23b).

We can learn from Yehoshafat, King of Judea. Whenever he saw a Torah scholar, he would rise from his throne and hug and kiss him and say to him, "Rebbe! Rebbe! Master! Master!" (Ketuvot 103b). Rabbi Zeira, when he needed a break from his studies, would sit at the entrance to the house of study in order to be able to fulfill the Mitzvah of rising before Torah scholars (Berachot 28a; quoted in Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 19). How fortunate we are that we have Torah scholars! How fortunate we are that we love them, honor them and revere them!

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

A Place in the World to Come

Question: Do only observant Jews have a place in the World to Come?

Answer: The Rambam clearly lays out in the Laws of Repentance who does not have a share in the World to Come: the most heinous sinners. We otherwise learn that every Jew has a portion (see the introduction to each chapter of Pirkei Avot). At the same time, the spiritual level which one reaches in this world will determine one's spiritual level in the World to Come. It only makes sense that one who reaches high levels here is prepared for a higher level in the next world. Pirkei Avot says that we do not know the reward for each of the mitzvot. Most Jews – Baruch Hashem - fulfill many of the Mitzvot and will thus have a place.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet