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Parashat Re'eh 5772 - #245

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On the Haftarah...

A Thirsty Soul

[Yeshayahu 54:11-55:5]

The revival of the Nation of Israel, which began with the establishment of the State of Israel, cannot be limited to a national, economic, and military, renewal. It must be accompanied by a spiritual awakening which will allow the Nation to fully blossom.

"Afflicted, tossed by a storm, uncomforted" (Yeshayahu 54:11). Why isn't the Nation comforted? Doesn't the beginning of the chapter (which is the Haftarah for Ki Tetze) describe the wonders of the Redemption? "Break out into song and joy" (ibid, v. 1). After all, the Nation of Israel returned to its Land and spread out its settlement: "Expand the place of your tent and stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes, for you will break forth to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess nations, and make desolate cities to be inhabited" (ibid. v. 2-3). We are witnessing the return of the Nation of Israel to its Land, the renewed building of the Land, the establishment of a strong economy and a powerful army – which is today called "normalization."

Alongside our joy and gratitude to the Master of the Universe, however, must be the awareness that all of these accomplishments are still not enough. The State of Israel cannot simply serve as a national shelter to protect the Nation of Israel, as Herzl had proposed. Our soul also thirsts for spirituality, thirsts for Hashem. On the verse "The soul is not filled"

(Kohelet 6:7), our Sages give a parable: A princess married a commoner who tried very hard to provide his royal partner with the best the city had to offer. But, despite all of his efforts, the princess held a deep nostalgia for her previous, royal life in the palace, which could not be satisfied (Kohelet Rabbah *ibid.*).

The soul of a person is like a princess, and cannot be satisfied by simple normalization. The individual soul, like the national soul, requires deep spiritual sustenance. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explained that the first generation of the National revival is a generation of the physical and material. Only in the next stage will we reach the spiritual level (Orot, p. 83). He illuminates the path for us in order to help us distance ourselves from all extremes - whether it is the secular extreme, which entices us to believe that that we have reached our ideal state, or the Ultra-Orthodox extreme, which holds that nothing has changed, and all of these wonders and miracles are inconsequential. The truth lies, as it so often does, in the middle. We have begun the Redemption and have merited miraculous, Divine aid, but we are only half-way there.

Jerusalem cannot be a capital for others: "I shall make your sun windows of rubies and your gates of garnets, and your entire boundary of precious stones" (Yeshayahu 54:12). Our Sages explain that this description is of Jerusalem. They relate that Rabbi Yochanan was once teaching his students that in the future Jerusalem would be built of huge diamonds and precious stones. One of those listening mocked him - for where would they find stones of this size? The mocker was later punished for his outburst (Baba Batra 75a). The Maharal explains that this future Jerusalem will be completely spiritual, just as it was in the past. It will be a city of Sages, Prophets, King-Philosophers, and earthly angels; and while this seems at first glance to be unrealistic, we will in fact see a great light in her (Netzach Yisrael, chap. 56).

"All your children will be students of Hashem" (*ibid.* v. 13). All of the Nation of Israel, in all strands of society, from prophets to sandal-makers, will be full of the knowledge of Hashem. "And abundant will be your children's peace" (*ibid.*). The first proper character trait of a Torah scholar is the knowledge of how to establish peaceful relations with his surroundings. "Torah scholars increase peace in the world" (Berachot 64a). When a person is engaged in learning Torah, but his relations with people are improper, he is desecrating Hashem's Name. In the future, we will be similar to the ladder that Yaakov saw in his dream, which was "firmly on the ground and its top reached towards the heavens" (Bereshit 28:12). According to the Zohar, this prophetic dream teaches us that along with being able to create an earthly existence based on the love of people, we will reach the highest level of knowledge of Hashem.

"Establish yourself through righteousness, distance yourself from oppression, for you need not fear it" (*ibid.* v. 14). We must act with complete righteousness. The expression "Tzedakah" is from the word "Tzedek" meaning righteousness, and is it found together with the word "Mishpat" meaning "judgment" (see Yeshayahu 1:27). This teaches us that kindness towards another person is not optional but an actual obligation, part of one's societal responsibility. Our great Rabbi, the Rambam, wrote in the Laws of Gifts to the Poor: "We are obligated to be careful with regard to the mitzvah of Tzedakh to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments, because Tzedakah is an identifying mark for a righteous person, a descendant of Avraham Avinu, as it says: 'I have known him, because he commands his children... to perform Tzedakah'" (Bereshit 18:19). The throne of Israel will not be

established, nor will the true faith stand, except through Tzedakah, as it says: "You shall be established through righteousness" (Yeshayahu 54:14). And Israel will be redeemed solely through Tzedakah, as it says: "Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through Tzedakah" (ibid. 1:27).

In circumstances such as these, there is a greater degree of Divine Providence, "Any weapons sharpened against you will not succeed, and any tongue that will rise against you in judgment you will condemn, this is the heritage of the servant of Hashem, and their righteousness is from Me, so says Hashem" (ibid. v. 17). The Rambam teaches us that any nation which tries to exterminate us will fail, whether they fight against us with weapons or as part of a cultural struggle (Igeret Teiman, Mossad Ha-Rav Kook edition, p. 117).

"Anyone who is thirsty, go to the water" (ibid. 55:1). What type of thirst are we discussing? "Incline your ear and come to Me, listen and your soul will be revived" (ibid. v. 3). Regardless of how it appears, the Nation of Israel is not interested merely in pleasure and money. It is thirsty for the word of Hashem.

We should certainly value the progress we have made in the political, economic and security realms, but the Nation of Israel can only be healed of its deep weakness through a spiritual blossoming. This blossoming will quench its thirst, and will finally allow the Nation to search and locate the true source of its life.

Rav Aviner on...  
What would Nechama Lebowitz  
say about the new approach to learning Tanach?  
[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Ekev 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

As is well-known, Professor Nechama Lebowitz left her stamp on the study of Tanach, not just amongst adults, but also, through her methodological approach, amongst students of Israeli schools. She worked hard to make this study meaningful and to engrave it deeply in the students' memories.

So what would she say about the new approaches to the study of Tanach being advanced? Actually, there's no need to guess, because the issue came up when she was yet alive. It is recounted in Chevata Deutch's book "Nechama". There, in Chapter 15, Chevata tells the story of how some twenty years ago, a Rabbi, one of her own teachers, presented himself for the position of national superintendent of Tanach Studies, in order to foment a revolution in the way it was taught. What he had in mind was an interdisciplinary approach. He thought a new –Land-of-Israel-school-of-thought should be created that would not fear the new Tanach research, but would use it to expand the field of study. He argued against Nechama Lebowitz, whose whole aim was simply to transmit knowledge and understanding. In his method, the Rabbi argued, everything begins with love. Availing ourselves of Biblical realism answers this "love" by connecting the student to the Torah, and saying to him, "The Torah is relevant in the here and now."

Obviously, Nechama Lebowitz also sought to endear Torah learning to the student, but the question was how to do it. She made light of using Biblical realism, and viewed it as cheap exhibitionism. To her, it seemed foreign and petty.

She greatly loved, for example, to teach Tehilim Chapter 23, "Hashem is my shepherd, I shall not want." To the argument that you can not understand the chapter without understanding

shepherding concepts, she responded with ridicule, explaining that the Torah transcends time and is universal, and it should not be lowered down to the earth.

Multi-disciplinary study includes geography, archaeology, grammar and history, and not just commentaries as a “crutch”, in that Rabbi’s words. Lebowitz, by contrast, sought to distance herself from all this. She was quite familiar with those approaches - after all, she had studied in Germany at the Universities of Heidelberg, Marburg and Berlin, and at the Advanced Beit Midrash for Jewish Studies at Berlin, which greatly appreciated these fields. And she was awarded a PhD from the University of Marburg. She was an expert in the school of Biblical Criticism! Yet in contrast to those who believe that one must be familiar with Biblical Criticism in order to confront it, she determined that the best approach is to ignore it by staying close to the traditional commentaries. She held that one must learn “the opus itself, not the stages of its coming into being, not the factors that influence its creation and not the story and the content out of which it sprouted, but the object itself. Likewise, it mustn’t be studied as a document attesting to things outside of itself, regarding the moment of its creation in the religious, political or economic sphere. In short, Bible mustn’t be studied as an entity that reflects a period, but as one speaking on its own behalf.”

She writes, for example, about the beginning of Parashat Masa’ei: “Before us we have about forty verses consisting of nothing but the names of places. This dry list is certainly of great interest to scholars of antiquities and geographers who toil to identify names, but what does it have to do with the Torah, which, as the Divine poet wrote in Tehilim (19:8-9) is “enlightening”, “brings one joy”, and “restore’s one’s sanity”? After all, it was that way, and not as grist for archaeological, historical and geographical stories that its true students of every generation viewed it, always searching for what was promised to us in its regard, ‘For I give you good instruction’ (Mishlei 4:2). And what is the good instruction hidden in this list of names? And as though the Torah already wished to warn us that we mustn’t make light of such a list of names, which for the person seeing with human eyes seems devoid of content, it therefore, precisely here, prefaced the list with the words: ‘Moshe recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by Hashem’ (Bemidbar 33:2).”

The rule to be learned is this: The Torah constitutes good instruction. It restores one’s sanity. It is enlightening. It sets out to teach us moral lessons!

Therefore, the program that was being presented to the schools, and that was set to replace, partially, the previous approach, made Nechama Lebowitz shudder. Whoever tried to convince her otherwise could not persuade her in the slightest degree.

Obviously, we mustn’t accuse her of arrogance because she steadfastly held on to her approach. Everyone knows that besides her having been a professor, she also lectured to the masses, was full of humility, and was known for her simple way of life. Her students called her “Nechama”, and she preferred the title of “teacher” to that of “professor”. “Teacher” is what appears on her tombstone.

Here is an example of her work: There is a well-known question: After Yosef rose to greatness, why didn’t he send off in search of his father? To this a new interpretation was offered: Yosef thought that his father had accepted the brothers’ argument and had rejected him the way Avraham had rejected Yishmael and Yitzchak had rejected Esav.

Yet Nechama Lebowitz responded to this interpretation, saying: It could not be that Yosef would suspect his father of such! It could not be that Yaakov would stop loving Yosef!

Another example: A theory arose according to which the sin for which King Shaul lost his kingdom was not his taking spoils from Amalek and sparing Agag – the reasons mentioned by the Prophet Shmuel in his rebuke of Shaul to explain his severe punishment – but rather his wiping out of only part of Amalek rather than all of it.

Nechama Lebowitz asked: If so, why didn’t Shmuel point this out to him? The response offered was that Shmuel did not know...

For Lebowitz, reading the Tanach without the commentaries constituted conceit, even arrogance.

Indeed, above all else, Nechama Lebowitz was a great educator. She therefore “ascribed little importance to the question of whether the student knows the source of the educational truth he has absorbed from the sources – Scripture itself or our Sages’ commentaries. She had a

wealth of stories, at the center of each of which stood a simple, unlearned person, who had absorbed a moral/educational idea from our Rabbinical commentaries and had accidentally ascribed that idea to Scripture itself. For example, a mother castigated her son for mistreating a cat, and she quoted to him what was 'written in the Torah' about Moshe saving the young goat. In another case, a soldier who had fought in Sinai related how he and his comrades fell under heavy fire. Suddenly one of them was wounded, and the medic endangered himself and crawled, under fire, to administer first-aid. 'Surely he got this from Avraham, whom the Torah says jumped into a fiery furnace,' explained the soldier. Nechama quoted him excitedly, saying, 'What does it matter where he learned his self-sacrifice from? So what if people get confused, as long as they take away values and models to apply throughout their lives.'

Simply put, she did not teach in an academic manner. Her approach, rather, was based on faith, education, Rabbinic commentaries and tradition.

### 3 Elul – Yahrtzeit of Maran Ha-Rav Kook

The words engraved on Maran Ha-Rav Kook's tombstone

Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook

Born on 16 Elul 5625

Ascended to the Land of Israel on 28 Iyar 5664

Ascended to Jerusalem on 3 Elul 5679

Ascended to Heaven on 3 Elul 5695

#### Maran Ha-Rav Kook's grave

Rabbi Yaakov Filber relates that Maran Ha-Rav Kook's grave on Mt. Olives remained completely intact during the period between of the War of Independence and the Six-Day War when the area was under Jordanian control. While all the other graves were vandalized and the tombstones were uprooted by the Arabs and used for paving roads, Maran Ha-Rav Kook's grave remained untouched. He heard from reliable sources that every time a Jordanian tractor came within reach of the grave, the tractor would flip over. The Jordanians were struck by the holiness of the grave and left it alone. Our Rabbi filled in the details. While everything around Maran Ha-Rav Kook's grave was bombed out or destroyed, his grave remained whole. An Arab worker related that they received special instructions from their superiors not to damage the grave in any way (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah #51). (Mareh Cohain of Ha-Rav Yaakov Filber, p. 139 including pictures of the untouched grave and its destroyed surroundings immediately after the Six-Day War).

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