



Parashat Ki Teitze 5772 - #247

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On the Haftarah... An Unconditional Covenant [Yeshayahu 54:1-10]

Through the voice of the prophet Yeshayahu, Hashem has expressed his immense love of and fondness towards the Nation of Israel. He has promised that after a "small moment" (Yeshayahu 54:7) of anger – 2000 years of exile! – He will not forsake us again.

"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness will not depart from you, and My covenant of peace will not be removed, so says Hashem who has compassion on you" (ibid. v. 10).

Our Sages distinguish between two types of love: "Love dependent on a specific cause" and "love not dependent on a specific cause." The first type can vanish if the conditions change, but the second type is eternal (Pirkei Avot 5:9). The love of Hashem for the Nation of Israel is clearly the second type, which is not dependent on our merits or our repentance. The future, promised Redemption by Hashem, through the prophets, is a free gift, and is not dependent on any prior condition.

When we read the verses of our Haftarah which promise the awaited Redemption, we see that there is no condition placed upon us: "For your Maker is your husband, Hashem of Hosts is His Name, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, who will be called the G-d of the whole world" ((ibid. v. 5). The prophet is discussing a marriage between Hashem, the Creator of all existence, and the Nation of Israel. Hashem chose us from all of the nations in order to make a covenant of marriage with us.

"For Hashem has called you a wife as if forsaken and depressed in spirit, but your G-d says: 'Could the wife of one's youth be rejected?'" (ibid. v. 6). Hashem never forgot the love of our bridal days, i.e. the amazing events which occurred between the Master of the Universe and his modest spouse, the Nation of Israel.

If this is so, how can we explain the horrible suffering we have experienced throughout the course of the Exile? As explained in Shir Ha-Shirim (6:1), the nations of the world have mocked and taunted us: "Where has your beloved gone?" In this song, the Nation of Israel declares that it has merited the love of its Beloved, but in reality, it appears that the Beloved has neglected His spouse.

Yeshayahu responds to us: "For a small moment have I forsaken you, but with great compassion will I gather you" (ibid. v. 7). The two-thousand year Exile was a "small moment" when viewed in the proper perspective. What is two-thousand years according to the Divine calculation? Doesn't the sun have enough energy for billions of years? All of the oceans together are only a drop of water. All of the gold and silver are only a small coin. All of the stars are only a small spark. According to the same principle, two thousand years is only a small moment. For human beings, two thousand years is a lengthy experience, but in relation to eternity, it is miniscule.

Therefore, Hashem forsaking us was not true abandonment since it was only temporary. "When I was a little angry I hid My face from you for a moment, but I will have compassion on you with everlasting kindness" (ibid. v. 8). Exile is a Divine expression of anger which we deserved, since we sinned severely. But the sin and its punishment does not nullify the Divine covenant.

In our times, if we open our eyes we can see the Divine love towards the Nation of Israel. For more than one hundred years, Hashem has given us an abundance of kindness. The desert is blossoming once again, the Land is being rebuilt, Jews are being gathered from their places of exile, the army of Israel is victorious, the economy is succeeding and the Torah is spreading throughout the entire length and width of the Land. All of these kindnesses speak volumes about the immense love which Hashem is showering upon us.

This is the reason we do not need to fear seeing our State crumble. Yeshayahu delivers a Divine promise: despite our numerous sins, there will not be a third destruction, just as there will not be another flood. "For this is as the waters of Noach to Me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noach will not go over the Earth again, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you nor rebuke you" (ibid. v. 9).

We certainly suffered greatly during the course of the Exile, especially during the Holocaust, but it is clear today that the situation is completely different, despite the difficulties which pain us.

Now, our problems are those of a free Nation, a proud Nation, which can no longer be lowered: "Do not fear, for you will not be put to shame. And do not be embarrassed, for you will not be found wanting, for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the embarrassment of your widowhood you will not remember anymore" (ibid. v. 4).

After such an extended period bereft of nationalism, we have begun again to live fully: "Sing barren woman, you who could not bear, break forth into song, and cry aloud, you who never felt the pains of labor, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife – says Hashem" (ibid. v. 1).

Despite all of these amazing occurrences, and the unconditional Divine promise, we cannot simply sit waiting with our arms folded and rely on a miracle to solve all of our problems with the help of Hashem. We do not rely on miracles. On the contrary, the miracles rely on us! Hashem brings greatness by us and through us, through our efforts. It is therefore incumbent upon us to rebuild our Land and expand our settlement within it. "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your dwelling places, spare not! Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall spread to the right and to the left" (ibid. v. 2-3).

Our obligation is to do everything in our ability to strengthen our Land in every realm, in order to prepare for the Redemption. We see with our own eyes the actualization of everything which Yeshayahu promised, and we therefore hear his call: "Sing!" (ibid. v. 1).

Rav Aviner on... Holy David

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shoftim 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

On a tour of Jerusalem's Old City, the teacher told his students: "We are standing right where King David's palace stood, and it was from here," added the teacher, "that he saw Batsheva bathing."

That teacher is crazy! Is this what he found to arouse the imagination of those students? Instead of stirring their imaginations about King David's positive traits, his patience, his ability to remain silent in the face of insults, his thirst for G-d, his military valor, his fortitude as a national leader, his holiness and his purity, his self-sacrifice to build up the Kingdom of Israel...this is what he chose to arouse their imaginations?! As though our imaginations are not sufficiently provoked by all the evil winds blowing in from the West!

Yet that teacher's remark was no slip of the tongue. Rather, it reflected a complex worldview, as that teacher made clear in his further remarks: "Let me emphasize that King David was just a man – a man with weaknesses, a great man with great weaknesses, a man composed of good and of evil, not an ideal man."

Heaven help us! That's what he saw fit to say? And, in fact, one student responded, "I can identify more with a figure like that than with a pure, holy person". "Indeed!" responded the teacher.

Woe to the ears that hear such things! Unfortunately such talk is part of an entire methodology of taking the greatest and most holy figures and bringing them down to eye level. Sure life is hard, and the struggle against our passions is no picnic, and sometimes we fail, and sometimes we are frustrated and despondent because we don't succeed in escaping our evil impulse.

But what is the solution? To be more courageous. To increase our longing for G-d, to gaze upon our great figures and to emulate them. Instead, they're taking those illustrious figures and making them small. They're transforming them into the everyman, with one foot in the light and one foot in the darkness, light and darkness mixed together. And all so that we can identify with them!

Instead of drawing the student higher and higher, arousing his spiritual ambitions, understanding and awareness, instead of empowering him, they leave him below and lower, together with him, those who were high up. And then it's easy to identify with them.

The student can learn Torah one moment and then read unclean material on the Internet.

Yet King David, himself, did not identify with his own sin. Our Sages point out that he wept over his sin for thirteen years. As it says, "I cause my couch to melt with my weeping" (Tehilim 6:7).

This has nothing to do with our Sages' dictum that "whoever says David sinned is in error." Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel says that he did sin, but even Abarbanel holds that David was a spiritual giant and he repented completely, escaped his sin and was purged of it. True, according to Abarbanel, King David committed a grievous sin once in his lifetime, but that does not make him a sinner. If someone lied once in his lifetime, that does not make him a liar, and if someone lost in battle one time that does not make him a loser. We don't label people as a result of one-time deeds.

David was not a sinner, not even partially. He was a great man, righteous and holy.

Yet even such a person can occasionally stumble. Even Moshe became angry. Even he erred. Yet that doesn't make us say that he was errant or wrathful. We don't judge a person based on exceptions to their norm.

Before we say anything new about King David that our Sages didn't say, we have to learn the elementary truths. There is nothing against advancing new interpretations on the Tanach. There are hundreds and thousands of them. Yet they have to be motivated by faith and reverence for G-d. Towards that end we have to study the basic books such as Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's Mesilat Yesharim.

Learn his section on saintliness [Chasidut] and you will see that David thirsted for G-d, and not, G-d forbid, for his sin. "Like a hind crying for water, my soul cries for You, O G-d. My soul thirsts for G-d, the living G-d" (Tehilim 42:2-3); "I long, I yearn, for the courts of Hashem" (84:3); "My soul thirsts for You. My body yearns for You" (63:2); "I will delight in Your commandments, which I love" (119:47).

The Ramchal instructs us: If you wish to achieve saintliness, learn the Psalms and emulate them! Surely every young yeshiva student has learned Mesilat Yesharim. Probably that same teacher learned it too. So, he should review it ten times, a hundred times, until it sinks in deep. The figure of King David is not up for grabs. You cannot say about him whatever you want, or fashion a new personality for him that samples a taste of all worlds, and that accords legitimacy to dialectically strolling along a pathway of life that combines purity and impurity. Even if one takes the approach of Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, one should learn about King David's remarkable repentance spurred by his fierce longing for the holy.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

I am the Messiah

At the end of morning davening, a Jew knocked on the Bima of the yeshiva and announced that he received permission from the Rosh Yeshiva to speak. Our Rabbi nodded his head in agreement. The Jew then explained at length that he was the Messiah, but did not demand any action. He just wanted them to know. After he finished and left, the students turned to our Rabbi in surprise for having given him permission to speak. Our Rabbi responded: "You can't perform a kindness for a fellow Jew?!" (Iturei Yerushalayim #37)

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