



Parashat Bereshit - #252

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On the Haftarah... Spiritual Blindness

[Ashkeanzim: Yeshayahu 42:5-43:10

Sefardim: Yeshayahu 42:5-42:21

Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 42:1-42:16]

In our Haftarah, Yeshayahu is full of anger.

"Listen, deaf ones; look, blind ones, so that you can see" (18).

There is so much to see, so many miracles which Hashem performs for His Nation. One must open one's eyes and see the natural fulfillment of the messianic prophecies that have led to the establishment of the State of Israel. We are not discussing pseudo-prophecy or retroactive prophecy, as those who ascribe to Biblical criticism explain, but the promises of Yeshayahu materializing before our very eyes. "The

earlier ones have come about" – the earlier prophecies were already fulfilled – "And I relate new ones, I will let you hear them before they spring forth" (9).

To our distress, there are avowed blind people - people who recognize these prophecies but refuse to register in their minds this shining reality. Who are these blind people? "Who is blind but My servant and who is deaf as My messenger whom I sent? Who is blind as the perfect one and blind as Hashem's servant" (19).

To be "Hashem's servant" or "Hashem's messenger" is one of the highest levels of involvement, requiring a special ability to integrate sterling character traits, righteousness, purity, and holiness. This obviously includes observing, out of unlimited love, Shabbat, kashrut, and all of the other mitzvot. A person such as this is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of Torah and we are full of respect and admiration for him.

To our dismay, however, despite his extremely high level of commitment, this religiously and spiritually righteous person is capable of being afflicted with historical blindness. He is capable of passing through powerful revolutions which occur to the Nation of Israel without noticing: "Seeing much but not observing, opening the ears but not hearing" (20).

The day will arrive, though, when "Hashem desires for the sake of its righteousness that the Torah will be magnified and made glorious" (21), for the sake of the Nation of Israel. The same Nation, which was free from guilt during the thousands of years of Exile, yet suffered terrible afflictions, pogroms, expulsions, and finally the horrors of the Holocaust – is now free. "But it is a looted, downtrodden Nation, all of whose people are trapped in holes and hidden away in prisons. They are robbed with no one to rescue them, oppressed with no one to say: 'Make restitution' (22)

Now everything has changed completely. Certain people – whether religious or not – worry in vain about the future of our State. "But now, so says Hashem, your Creator, O Yaakov; the One who formed you, O Yisrael: 'Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are Mine" (43:1). Tzahal – the Israel Defense Force – will stand strong. "When you pass through water, I will be with you; and through rivers, they will not flood you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned and a flame will not burn within you" (2).

"Do not fear, for I am with you" (5). Don't we have enough proofs in order to be completely convinced that Hashem has decided to redeem us?

"I will bring your seed from the east" – these are Sefardic Jews, "and gather you from the west" – these are Ashkenazic Jews, "I will say to the north: 'Give back'" – these are Russian Jews, "and to the south: 'Do not withhold'" – these are Yemenite Jews.

"Bring My sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth" (5-6) – these are Ethiopian Jews and the other lost Tribes of Israel who will be found anew.

What horrible distress is suffered by stubborn Jews who do not see this wondrous chain of miracles. "Bring forth the blind people who have eyes and the deaf who have ears" (8). But do not despair. "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped" (35:5). "You are My witnesses, says Hashem" (43:10). For this purpose, every one of us is called upon today to be an active witness of our Nation's history.

Rav Aviner on...
"Drafting Girls is Absolutely Forbidden!"
[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Parashat Behaalotcha 5767]

In 1960, eleventh graders from Shevet "Chalutzim" of Bnei Akiva approached a number of great Torah luminaries regarding the question of girls being drafted into the Israeli army. The Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Ha-Gaon Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank told them that halachically speaking, girls were forbidden to enlist, so they were obligated to choose the religious exemption. They asked him, "And what if the required declaration is not made sincerely, for example, when it is the result of parental pressure? After all, the formula requires one to declare that one is seeking the exemption 'for reasons of religion and conscience'. Seemingly, in some cases, this would be a false declaration." Ha-Gaon Rav Frank answered, "One is allowed to make the declaration, and it is even a Mitzvah, in fulfillment of 'Honor your father and your mother', especially considering that it is for her own good."

Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook answered the same way, adding, "When her father pressures her, he is simply guiding her in the halachic path. The girl is not steeped in Talmud and halachic sources, and she does not know all the various laws regarding going to the army. Rather, she has a passion for enlisting. It is therefore a Mitzvah for her to heed her parents' voice, and her declaration will be the truth, both in terms of the word 'religion' and in terms of the word 'conscience'."

When they asked Ha-Gaon Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, he told them to look in his book, "Le'or Ha-Halachah" (p. 27), which states that women are forbidden to take part in war. He added, "Our military circles have done research and concluded that drafting girls does not bring any tangible benefit. As far as the work and assistance that the female soldiers do provide, it would be provided more efficiently, and with a much smaller budget, by salaried civilian clerks."

They asked him, "What about girls making an insincere declaration, based on self-interest?" and he answered, "If the girl is truly religious, she can make the declaration, even if she is making it for other reasons as well."

By the way, it was Rabbi Dr. Zerach Warhaftig who insisted that to the expression "for reasons of religion" be added the words "and conscience", which leaves an opening for irreligious girls to choose this option as well.

After they heard what the great rabbis had said, the young people concluded that it was forbidden for girls to enlist, and in the Movement's magazine they addressed all girls asking that they declare their desire for an exemption – hopefully with sincerity. They added that by doing so, the girls would be helping themselves and the country. (“Chalutzim” Magazine, No. 3, 1960).

Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda further said, “Drafting girls involves a risk that they will decline spiritually. Some say a girl can't be in the army without declining. Others say she can, in fact, and it depends on the girl. Presumably, some will be affected more than others, but generally speaking, spiritual deterioration does occur.”

Yet it is obvious that where modesty is concerned, a person's spiritual rise or fall is not to be assessed by what the person himself imagines, but by the guidelines laid down by G-d and by our Sages. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda therefore wrote that girls should apply to “the National Service alternative, taking into account our sages' fear and reverence as far as avoiding immodesty, as described and depicted at the end of Masechet Kiddushin” (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda, “Ish Ve-Isha, p. 44 and quoted in the book “Bat Melech”).

He therefore declared, “Someone who really wants to know, has to ask ‘the priest officiating at that time’ (Devarim 26:3), the Chief Rabbis of Israel, who are likewise familiar with all of these deliberations, and who also possess divine assistance in their decision making. Therefore, one must rely on them in every matter” (ibid., p. 43).

Indeed, at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel, Israel's Chief Rabbis ruled: “Drafting women in a military framework, in any form whatsoever, is absolutely forbidden!” Fighting compulsory wars is certainly a great Mitzvah, but as is well-known, we don't do a Mitzvah by way of a sin. A Mitzvah that comes about by way of a sin is itself a sin. National Service positions authorized by rabbis are a great Mitzvah, involving no sin. It doesn't matter if it is less “exciting”. It often happens that the evil impulse is more exciting than the good impulse, but the good impulse is holy.

Moreover, a girl who does not go to the army, strengthens the army, for thanks to her action, G-d is with us in the army camp. “Hashem, your G-d, makes His presence known in your camp, so as to deliver you and grant you victory over your enemy. Your camp must therefore be holy. Let Him not see anything lascivious among you, and turn away from you” (Devarim 23:15). It's our choice who we want in the army: girls or the Master of the Universe. Therefore, there were no girls in the army of Moshe nor in the army of Yehoshua, nor in the army of Shaul or of David, nor in the army of the Chasmoneans or of Bar-Kochba. Precious Jewish daughter! Be strong and courageous! Remember: National Service is the right path. That is the true way to serve the Nation.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Laws of Mourning

A mourner preparing for Shabbat

Q: When should a mourner who is sitting shiva begin to prepare for Shabbat?

A: One should prepare approximately one hour before Shabbat. He can change his clothes and wash up a little. It is true that it is forbidden for a mourner to wash, but

it is permissible if he is dirty or sweaty. While our Sages prohibited pleasure washing, they permitted removing a distressing situation. The source for this idea is in the Mishnah in Berachot (2:6) which says that Rabban Gamliel bathed when he was a mourner. His students said: Didn't you teach us that it is forbidden for a mourner to bathe? Rabban Gamliel responded: I am an "istinis," i.e. I am punctilious about keeping clean and I will suffer terribly if I do not bathe. I am not washing for pleasure, but to remove a distress. Today, everyone is considered an "istinis." Everyone bathes almost each day, and some people even bathe twice a day – in the morning and evening. It is therefore permissible to take a shower, but obviously it should be done quickly and in lukewarm water. The same applies to clothing. On Shabbat a mourner wears outer clothing which is clean, but does not change his undergarments, since dirty outer clothing would be mourning publicly. Again, nowadays people change their undergarments daily and if they do not they will suffer greatly. Therefore, one should take clean undergarments and dirty them a little by using them to dry the bathroom sink, or some other activity... in order to remove the pleasant feeling of clean clothing.

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