



Parashat Bo - #266

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

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On the Haftarah... The End of an Empire

[Ashkekanzim/Sefardim: Yirmiyahu 46:13-28
Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 18:7-19:25]

The unthinkable occurred! We witnessed the disintegration of the Egyptian Empire! The Empire which not so long before had persecuted us and made every effort to eliminate us was now crumbling before our very eyes. And yet we were still here.

This momentous downfall was brought about by the young King Nebuchadnezzar, full of ambition and known for his stormy temperament, who would expand the Babylonian Empire's borders to include this region. His elderly father, Nabopolassar, had destroyed the Assyrian Empire and was thus freed from its dominion.

Before this, Psammetichus, one of the twelve kings of Egypt, was victorious over all others, and became an extremely great man. He conquered Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and protected its ruins from Nabopolassar. Psammetichus died and his young passionate son, Pharaoh Neco, conquered – among other places – the nations of Canaan. Later Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylonia and in the first year of his reign, a fateful year for world history, the two giants met. The elder Egyptian giant and the young Babylonian giant waged the final Battle in Carchemish (Yirmiyahu 46:2). Nebuchadnezzar, well-trained in the art of war and full of unparalleled cruelty (he had previously served as the head of the national army), mercilessly crushed the Egyptian Empire.

On that fateful day, still suffering from their memories in Egypt, the Hebrews knew Divine justice when they saw it. Their former oppressors were finally being punished in equal measure to their level of cruelty.

We went down to Egypt following Yosef, who had saved Egypt from famine, and instead of being eternally grateful, the Egyptians mercilessly persecuted us. They forced us to live in concentration camps and watched over us in order to throw our new-born sons into the Nile.

On that day, we felt that justice had been served. And there was a special prophecy to make it clear: "The word that Hashem spoke to Yirmiyahu the prophet, Nebuchadnezar, King of Babylonian, will come to strike the land of Egypt. Said in Egypt...Stand firm and prepare yourselves, for the sword will devour all of your surroundings" (ibid. v. 13-14). This was the military disintegration of Egypt.

But this Egyptian destruction was not only on the military level, since we know that an Empire only truly crumbles when its civilization also has disintegrated. Our Rabbis have formulated this idea in the following way: "You have no nation that is stricken whereby its god is not stricken with it" (Sukkah 29a), as it says: "And I will exact judgments from all the gods of Egypt" (Shemot 12:12). "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, does not exact judgment from a nation below until he lowers its princes above (i.e. in heaven. End of Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah). He therefore first destroyed the gods of Egypt and then decimated its army. In relation to Babylonia, its god was struck first and then the people. "Why have the mighty ones been washed away?" – i.e. their gods, "because Hashem repelled him" (Yirmiyahu 46:15).

Egypt was accustomed to its supremacy and was confident of a miraculous victory. They were certain that they would be successful in battle and they were not at all concerned before the young, brazen king. This was a fatal mistake. "Make yourself vessels of exile, daughter who dwells in Egypt, for Nof (another name for Egypt) will be a wasteland and desolate without inhabitants. Egypt is a beautiful calf, but a slaughterer is surely coming from the North" (ibid. v. 19-20).

In the jungle, revenge is the only argument capable of convincing and granting protection. It is the power which is able to guard those free of sin and teach the wicked a lesson. "For the day of disaster is coming upon them, the time of their reckoning" (ibid. v. 21). Their enemy is a serious one. "The Babylonians will come in force, they will come against her with axes, like men who cut down trees. They will cut down her forest, says Hashem, for they are beyond calculation. They are more numerous than locusts, they cannot be counted" (ibid. v. 22-23).

No nation on Earth, and no empire – no matter how strong – lasts forever. Nations appear on the stage of history, fulfill their historical role and disappear. This is what Yaakov Avinu understood when he saw the angels ascending and descending the ladder. The meaning of the dream is that each nation is represented by an angel and it can reach great heights, but in the end it will go down into the annals of history. Yaakov Avinu began to fear that this would also be our fate, and he asked Hashem, who calmed him: No, you are different from the others. You are an eternal Nation. It may be that you have a difficult history, but you will overcome the trials! You are incapable of being destroyed! (Midrash Tanchum – Vayetze 2 and see Ramban on Bereshit 28:12).

The logo of the city of Paris shows a ship sailing with the Latin motto: "It sails and will never sink." The future will show us if the city of Paris has the trait of eternity, but in the meanwhile the unsinkable ship of human history is the Nation of Israel!

This is what Yirmiyahu promised us: "And you, do not fear, My servant Yaakov, says Hashem, for I am with you; for I will destroy all of the nations amongst which I have scattered you, but I will not destroy you. I will punish you with justice, but I will not completely destroy you" (ibid. v. 28). If we are deserving of punishment, we will receive it, but we will not be obliterated. The Nation of Israel will survive and arise from its ashes.

Yirmiyahu, who is the prophet of destruction, is also the prophet of revival and building. "But you, do not be afraid, My servant Yaakov; do not fear, Israel, for I will save you from a distance and your offspring from the land of their captivity; and Yaakov will return. Be tranquil and secure and no one will frighten" (ibid. v. 27). This prophecy teaches us that we must stand firm, and that there is nothing to fear, not in the Exile and all the more so not in our Land. Despite all of the clear societal, economic and cultural difficulties, and despite the constant threat of our enemies, we can overcome these difficulties just as we overcame others. There is nothing for us to fear. The Nation of Israel has suffered so much that we have become fearful, but if we listen to the call of Yirmiyahu to trust and have hope, we can also overcome this fear.

"For I am with you" (ibid. v. 28), Hashem promises us. This promise, like the others, is fulfilled each day. Just as He dismantled and caused each and every one of our worst enemies to fall, He also returned the Children of Yaakov to their Land in order to enjoy eternal peace and security.

Rav Aviner on...
Jew, don't Vote Religious, don't Vote Nationalist,
Vote Religious-Nationalist

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Vaera 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Even an irreligious nationalist party – i.e., a secular party – is good.
But it's incomplete.

Even a religious nationalist party -- i.e. a Charedi party -- is good.
But it's incomplete.

An individual person has to be physically and mentally complete.
Otherwise he won't survive.

All the more so a party.

Because a party educates the Nation.

It leads it from the present to the future.

It builds the future on the basis of the present.

Secular parties are occupied with the present.

With the economy and security -- but not with eternity.

And a Charedi party is occupied with eternity.

With Torah and Mitzvot -- but not with the present.

But without concern for the present, there can be no Torah.

And without building the Land, there can be no Torah.

And without Torah, there can be no concern for the present.

Even the rebuilding of the Land will collapse.
All of the parties are good,
but a party means responsibility.
Like in the Army.
There is short range, medium-range, and long-range.
Parties are not judged based on words,
but based on deeds,
not based on promises
but based on facts.
And what we could do in the past
we can do in the future
and all the better.
Education -- we've done it.
Building the Land -- we've got.
Security -- we've done it.
Welfare -- we've done it.
That's *Ha-Bayit Ha-Yehudi* – "The Jewish Home".
The home for every Jew
religious or secular
Charedi or traditional
Ashkenazic or Sephardic
Yemenite or Ethiopian
Right or Left.
The Jewish Home is large and spacious.
For dealing with the present and with eternity.
My classifications here
regarding religion and nationalism
are superficial.
The foundation of Jewish life
and of Jewish survival,
includes both.
Really, they are one.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Shut Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Brit Milah

Q: For one with the custom to wear Tefillin during a Brit Milah for his son (Shach, Yoreh Deah 265:24. Magen Avraham 25:28) and who has the custom to put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin, which Tefillin should he wear during the Brit Milah?

A: The custom is to wear Rabbenu Tam Tefillin (Brit Avot of Ha-Rav Shabetai Lifschitz #6. Koret Ha-Brit in Petach Eliyahu #2).

Mourner

Q: Does a mourner put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: Some say that for the time a mourner is permitted to put on Rashi Tefillin, he is also permitted to put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin (Birchei Yosef 38:4). And others say that one should not put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin during the entire Shiva (Be'er Heitev 38:5). And both state their opinion in the name of the Arizal. Many therefore put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin in private (Nita'ei Gavriel – Avelut 82:16).