

Haftorat Parashat Ki Teitzei

Yesha'yahu 54:1-10

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

The Barren Woman Bursts Out in Song of Jubilation

The *haftorah* opens by comparing Israel to a barren woman, who is promised countless children. “Sing barren woman, you who did not bear; burst out into song and jubilate, you who have not experienced birth pangs... (*Yesha'yahu* 54:1). When I was 35 years old and my only son was 13, I had almost given up hope of ever expecting another child. Yet, at a routine checkup, my gynecologist brought up the subject of fertility. I told her my story, and after we both shed tears together in her office, she gave me new hope. I remember when I received the good news that I was finally pregnant. How I had waited, hoped and prayed for this moment. I felt exactly like the barren woman described in our *haftorah*. I felt like bursting forth in a proclamation to the whole world: I am pregnant!!!! I AM PREGNANT! After all these years! It was unbelievable. All I wanted to do was to publicize the miracle.

The Barren, Divorced and Widowed

During our long exile, Israel is compared not only to a barren woman, but also to a widow who lost her husband, and to a woman whose husband left her, abandoned and forlorn. “For, like a wife who is deserted and distressed in spirit has Hashem called you, and a wife of one’s youth who was rejected, said your G-d (*Ibid.*6). The prophet assures all these bereaved women, that G-d has not forsaken them. Although He has momentarily hid His countenance from them, He will gather them from their exiles with great mercy. I was trying to understand the metaphorical meaning of each of these deprived women. Which aspect of our thorny distressing exile do they each represent? The barren woman seems to allude to the lack of fertility of the land, and the freeze on the development of our vibrant Jewish neighborhoods. When the communities of Israel will become like a mother blessed with many children, every new-married couple will easily find affordable housing. We still await the time when *Eretz Yisrael* will produce even more wormless organic fruits, as there is no greater sign of the coming redemption than when the Land of Israel brings forth fruits in abundance (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a*).

The widowed woman, I believe, refers to the suffering of the terrorism in Israel. The prophet promises: “Fear not...the disgrace of your widowhood, you shall no longer remember (*Yesha'yahu* 54:4). When women are brutally murdered, and children are left orphans, we ask ourselves “where is Hashem? Why does He not protect and defend His people from this disgrace and terrible affliction?” Finally, the divorced woman seems to refer to the different divisions within Jewry:

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black hats, knitted *kipot*, secular, and settlers. Like “divorce”, the word “disengagement” signifies this division that includes the expulsion from Gush Katif and part of Shomron, the separation and estrangement of some Diaspora Jewry from the Land of Israel, the division of the Jewish people as a whole from the Torah lifestyle.

The Greatest Building Defrost

Our *haftorah* of consolation comforts the barren woman, who is told to enlarge the size of her tent to make room for all the children she will have. “Widen the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations, do not spare; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes; for you shall spread out right and left, and your seed shall inherit nations and settle desolate cities” (Ibid. 2-3). These prophetic verses don’t exactly suit our current political climate. Nonetheless, the hidden agenda of all the political figures who were trying to impose a building freeze on Israel, was to prevent the redemption of Tzion and the fulfillment of its prophecies. Likewise is the continued demolition of Jewish homes in Yehuda and Shomron (Judea and Samaria). The United States, seemingly our ally, descends from Esav, and like him, is disguised in the veil of a cultured, civilized, modernity. Yet, behind the mask of friendliness hides the selfish greediness of a power-monger, promulgating individual advancement, at the expense of facilitating a dwelling place for the G-d of Israel. In spite of the resistance from the majority of the world, the proportions of the Jewish redemption will be so overwhelming that *Eretz Yisrael* won’t be capable of containing it. Yerushalayim will be flooded with newly arrived residents, and the surrounding areas will speedily overflow. Rabbi Dovid Siegel explains that even after the entire Judean hills will be saturated with newly sprouted neighborhoods, the Jewish *aliyah* will continue. The new wave of emerging Jews will take possession of the entire land of Israel and settle it. The return will be so encompassing that even these broadened quarters will not suffice.

Forget the Shame!

In order for all these blessings of redemption to take place, we all need to return to Hashem in perfect faith. However, the feeling of hidden embarrassment about our dark past often prevents and blocks us from reuniting with Hashem in the deepest way. We ask ourselves, “How will we ever overcome our past transgressions and establish an everlasting bond with Hashem?” Hashem responds, “Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed, and be not embarrassed, for you shall not be put to shame; for the shame of your youth you shall forget...” (Ibid. 4). Malbim explains that all the disgrace of exile will be totally forgotten, both our personal embarrassment for having acted immorally (תבושי), as well as the shame received from others (תקלמי). Now, during the month of Elul, Hashem is in the field, ready to welcome us back to His holy palace, even if we have dirty feet, as long as we brush off the mud. No matter what kind of murky past we leave behind us, Hashem is waiting for us to start anew, as a pure vessel for His blessings.

The Remarriage and Birth of Redemption

During the redemption, Hashem will finally gather His beloved people back, and renew His loving relationship with us, just like when we were His youthful bride. “I forsook you for a brief moment, but with great compassion I will gather you in” (Ibid. 7). My dear friend, whose husband was murdered in a terrorist attack, never allowed herself to despair, but always radiated joy and hope. This year, I happily participated in her remarriage. Another close friend who has been an *aguna* for



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many years, yet never allowed herself to become bitter, is now engaged to a wonderful loving man. All these examples of personal redemption are signs of the upcoming redemption of the congregation of Israel. "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My faithful love shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed," says Hashem, Who has compassion upon you (ibid. 10). Even if the mountains move and the hills are shaken, G-d's covenant with Israel will stand firm. Rashi explains that the mountains refer to our Patriarchs and the hills to our Matriarchs. The merit of our Mother Sarah was so great that when G-d granted her a child, He blessed together with her all barren women, as well (*Rashi, Bereishit 21:6*). Yet, Hashem implores us to strengthen our *emunah* that even if the merits of our fathers and mothers will cease, Hashem's loving/kindness to us will be everlasting. When I gave birth to my second son, I prayed not only for other women who struggle with infertility like me. I told myself, "Don't pray only for the barren women, but pray for all of Israel. For our long exile can be compared to a childless woman, and a long and difficult labor." Join me today in my prayer and blessing that all single women will find their soul-mate, all the divorced and widowed will remarry, and that all childless women will bear fruit! May G-d bring miracles to our nation the way He performed miracles for me, and may we give birth to complete redemption as speedily as I gave birth to my precious baby!

About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work.

For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.



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Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

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