

Redeeming the Land – The Extension of Our Soul

Haftorat Behar

Yirmiyahu 32:6-32:27

I'm writing this as I mourn together with my people the spilled blood of our holy soldiers for the sake of redeeming the Land of Israel from the hand of the other nations. This fits with the theme of the Torah reading and its haftorah which is about redeeming the land. In my commentary, I attempt to explain why it is so important that each one's particular land stays within the family, and what this principle teaches us about the relationship of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel.

Purchasing Land in Eretz Yisrael with Emuna

This week's *haftorah* highlights our eternal relationship with *Eretz Yisrael* – our homeland. The Jewish people are encouraged to purchase land in the Land of Israel and continue to build even in the midst of difficulties, obstacles and building freezes. Although the exile from *Eretz Yisrael* was imminent, and the Jewish people were about to leave the "Palace of the King", Hashem instructed Yirmeyahu to buy land as an eternal lesson that Israel's bond with its Land can never be permanently severed. With the purchase of land in *Eretz Yisrael*, Yirmiyahu demonstrated his complete *emuna* in the return of the Jewish people. There is never any reason to despair and break our eternal ties with the land. Even though Judea is suffering under siege, "Houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land" (*Yirmiyahu 32:15*). By spending a substantial sum of money for a purchase from which Yirmiyahu will not be able to personally benefit, he taught us that the Jewish people are never disconnected from the Land of Israel. We truly belong to *Eretz Yisrael* and this land will always belong to us.

The Connection between the *Haftorah* and the Torah Reading

Yirmiyahu's purchase of his cousin Chanamel's field is called redemption. "Behold, Chanamel, the son of Shallum your uncle, is coming to you, saying: Buy for yourself my field that is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption is yours to buy it" (*Ibid. 7*). This redemption which entails ensuring that the land stays within the family echoes one of the main themes of this week's Torah portion, B'Har: "If your kinsman becomes poor and has to sell part of his land, his closest relative shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold" (*Vayikra 25:25*). It is a mitzvah to redeem the land so that it remains within the family.

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Until we obtained our own portion of land, in the Land of Israel, I never understood why the Torah emphasizes the mitzvah of keeping each plot of land within the family. I also didn't understand why it is called "redemption." While exerting the effort required to transform our plot from rocks and thistles into a lovely orchard garden, a prayer and vision of the grandchildren of my grandchildren often comes to mind. Who, after seventy years, will one day pick carobs from our land? Who will play on the swings, climb the apple trees, pick juicy figs, and make homemade grape-juice after we will be

gone? Every year, as we deepen our imprint on the land which has become an extension of ourselves, my hope and prayer, that our own children will continue where we leave off, intensifies. Just as a person's body is a vessel for his soul, so is the land in *Eretz Yisrael* the vessel for the Jewish body – a vessel to the vessel of the soul. True redemption is when we are able to express our soul in all of its layers including the particular land which is the manifestation of our particular souls. This is why Megillat Ruth emphasizes "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (*Megillat Ruth* 4:5). It is not enough to elevate Ruth's deceased husband's name by means of marrying his closest living relative, and siring offspring in his name. His soul elevation must take place on his particular land – the extension of his soul.

The Spiritual Effect on each Jew of Keeping all of *Eretz Yisrael* in Jewish Hands

Also on a national level, redeeming the entire Land of Israel manifests the communal soul of our people. Only when the Land of Israel was redeemed by her people, after eighteen hundred eighty four years of exile, did the spirit of Israel become revived, expressed in the revival of the many Yeshivot from Mir to Slobodka. In addition to and increase in Torah learning, also Jewish art, music, science and healing received a renaissance in the wake of the establishment of the Jewish state. This is why giving away any part of the Land, is tantamount to causing sickness to the communal soul of Israel. Any part of *Eretz Yisrael* which is not in Jewish hands, prevents our people from manifesting their soul to it fullest. Not only the evictees of Gush Katif (Gaza) suffered a horrible trauma. The expulsion had a traumatic effect on the entire Jewish people; even those Jews who commanded it, as well as those who carried out their orders. Giving away land from *Eretz Yisrael* has a negative effect on the life of every Jew, no matter where he or she lives. This is why preventing to relinquish any land within *Eretz Yisrael* is so vital for the spiritual health of our entire people.

The Land of Israel Gathers the Jewish Souls together and Purifies the Impure

On the other hand, the fact that we have a Jewish State influences even the Jews in the furthest exile. Rabbi Teichtal explains the meaning of the obscure prophetic verse: "Hashem who gathers the outcast of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those of him that are already gathered" (*Yeshauyahu* 56:8). "Gathering Israel in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, they will become a general center for all Israel. Even those who remain in exile... will be connected in their souls to the general center established in the Land of Israel, to the extent that it will unify them even in *galut*. Therefore, their dispersion will not be called a complete dispersion, for they will all be connected together to the center in the Land of Israel... Even the individuals who remain in exile will not be *hefker* without anyone responsible for them. Whoever wants to harm us will know that there will be someone to demand of him law and judgment for his deeds... (*Em Habanim Semecha* p. 95). Perhaps this is why at the end of our *haftorah* the Land of Israel is called, "A land flowing with milk and honey" (*Yirmiyahu* 32:22). Milk which is produced from the blood, and honey produced by the bees are the only two kosher substances that are derived from non-kosher sources (i.e., bees and blood of animals are not kosher). This implies that the Land of Israel has the spiritual energy to purify even the impure. The Land of Israel purifies and heals the Jewish people from all of the impurities of our exile and allows our communal soul to manifest and flow freely like milk and honey. No wonder we read this *haftorah* close to *Yom Ha'atzmaut* – the week we celebrate the physical redemption of the Land of Israel.