

The Holy Women who Protect Israel

Haftorat Bereishit

Yesha'yahu 42:5-43:10

This is a piece about Simchat Torah with a short commentary on the haftorah of Bereishit from where I extrapolated the important role of women to protect the Jewish people from anything negative. Rav Tzadok of Lublin teaches that while it is the role of the men to establish the values of the Jewish people, it is the holy women who protect Israel from the negative influence, which constantly threaten to destroy us. Especially in our time we have many internal enemies and temptations, which attempt to destroy the holiness of Israel. One of these is drug addictions, including marihuana, which several frum men regularly use. As I wrote in the end of this commentary, women have the power and strength to clean out and remove these negative influences from our midst, so that we can "Sing to Hashem a new song" (Yesha'yahu 42:10) and herald the Final Redemption!

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah Reading

I found it interesting that as we begin the Torah anew, between the lines of both the Torah reading and its *Haftorah*, the right of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel is highlighted.

The *haftorah* of *Parashat Bereishit* opens by declaring Hashem the Creator of heaven and earth. This echoes the recount of Hashem's creating the world in six days, described in our Torah portion. The commentaries express surprise that the Torah begins by recounting G-d's creation of the world. They would have rather expected it to begin with the first mitzvah, since the Torah is a way of life, rather than a history book. Rashi explains that Hashem created the world for the sake of Israel. Therefore, in order to validate the children of Israel's undisputable right to the Land of Israel, He began the Torah by clarifying how Hashem created the world, and therefore has the right to allot His land, to whomever He deems worthy of it (*Rashi, Bereishit 1:1*). The fact that Hashem is the creator of the world including the Land of Israel, and that He recorded repeatedly in the Torah, how He granted the Land of Israel as an inheritance to the children of Israel, should leave no opening for anyone to ever doubt the Jewish people's univocal right to the Land of Israel.

The Purpose of Creation – Forging An Eternal Relationship with Hashem

This concept connects the Torah portion with its *haftorah*, which outlines the privileges and responsibilities of the Chosen nation. The prophet Yesha'yahu opens our *haftorah* with the following declaration, "So said G-d, Hashem, the Creator of the heavens and their expanse, He Who spread out the earth and what springs forth from it, He Who gives a soul to the people upon it and a spirit to those who walk there" (*Yesha'yahu 42:5*). Our Sages interpret this verse to refer specifically to those who live in *Eretz Yisrael*. They deduce that even a gentile maidservant who resides in the Land of Israel will merit everlasting life. In addition, even one who only passes through the Holy Land will merit an elevated spirit in *Olam Habah* (the World to Come) (*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a*).

The Land of Israel – Land of Eternal Relationship

Since the purpose of the entire Creation is that people recognize Hashem as the King, and establish an ongoing relationship with Him, Dovid Siegel explains, that specifically in the Land of Israel, do we

have the privilege to experience a relationship with Hashem so intense that it becomes everlasting. Even visiting *Eretz Yisrael* produces intense feelings of closeness to Hashem that translate into eternity. Therefore, whoever merits to enter *Eretz Yisrael* fulfills Hashem's purpose in creation.

Hashem Burst Forth like a Woman in Labor

There is one feminine metaphor in our *haftorah*. Hashem compares Himself to a Woman in Labor. However, surprisingly, rather than describing the forthcoming birth, a masculine imagery of destruction is used, "I was silent from time immemorial; I am still, I restrain Myself. Now I will cry like a woman in travail; I will be gasp and pant together" (*Yesha'yahu 42:14*). *Metzudat David* explains that this verse describes how Hashem held His anger back and kept silent and for so long, about the injustice with which the nations have treated Israel. Yet, from now on, He will roar with the voice of a woman in labor, to destroy all the enemies of Israel. According to *Radak*, Hashem says, "I have held myself back for too long, but now I can no longer bear the suffering of my people. I will destroy all my enemies with my breath." The continuation of this verse describes several natural catastrophes that Hashem will cause on all those "that trust in carved idols..." (Ibid. 15-17).

Destruction as Part of the Birthing Experience

All this destruction seems to be the very opposite of a nurturing mother giving birth to new life. However, as I'm getting ready to plant the winter garden, during the week following Sukkot, I recognize that the first step of nurturing new seedlings is to remove all the weeds. At this time of renewal, when we begin the Torah anew, we read about how the destruction of evil indeed is compared to the birth of good. Following the imagery of devastation, G-d arouses the Jewish people to return to being a light unto the nations, by opening their deaf ears and blind eyes, "and bring those who sit in darkness out of prison" (Ibid 22).

Out of the Prison of Marihuana

Hashem compares Himself to a birthing woman, when He causes destruction for the sake of redeeming His people. Likewise, the nurturing feminine role includes *gevurah* – severity and strength, for the sake of protecting her beloved ones. In order to fully nurture her son, Sarah the first Jewess used her feminine strength to separate off the negative from within her midst. When we women use our feminine power to protect our households from negative influence, with the perseverance and outcry of a woman in labor, then with Hashem's help, we will give birth to the renewed reality of our personal and communal redemption. For example, I know a *frum* woman whose husband had been smoking marihuana for many years. As the times passed, the effect of the drug became even more accentuated. The woman kept crying out to Hashem with the intensity of a woman in labor, to please uproot and remove this negativity from her beloved husband. In addition to her intense prayer, she also used the wisdom of women to take actions, and seek help to make her husband understand the negative effect of his actions. Baruch Hashem after many years of struggle, her husband is now in recovery. The process may be lengthy and challenging, yet the wife has steadfast *emunah* that Hashem will "bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of prison" (Ibid.7).