

Physical and Spiritual Renewal

Haftorat Parashat Lech Lecha

Yesha'yahu, Chapter 40:27, Chapter 41:16

Now that we finally have entered the month of Cheshvan, I enjoy the renewal of our daily routine following all the commotion of the holidays. After being loaded with all the lights of our spiritual experiences of Tishrei, we return to our daily day tasks with renewed strength.

I'm excited to teach such wonderful serious students, who are eager to learn and fulfill Hashem's will. Both at the midrasha and in my personal garden we are busy sowing the winter crop of greens, fennel, carrots, radishes and beets. What a wonder to behold the seeds from the old dried up plants of last years crop shoot forth fresh young sprouts! This week's Torah and Haftorah reading is in sync with this physical and spiritual renewal that we experience at this time of the year.

Trusting in Hashem brings Spiritual Renewal

Wouldn't you love to be able to keep going at whatever you are doing tirelessly? How wonderful it would be to receive the renewed strength of youth even after being "over the hill?" The opening verses, of this week's haftorah, taken from the end of *Yesha'yahu* chapter 40, ascribe both physical and spiritual renewal to those who trust in Hashem, "But those who place their hope in Hashem, shall renew their strength. They shall soar aloft with wings, as eagles. They will run, without becoming weary, they will go, and not become tired" (*Yesha'yahu* 40:31). In contrast to the young, described in the previous verse, "Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail" (*Ibid.* 30), those who trust in Hashem continue to receive renewed strength.

Returning the Strength of Our Youth

Just like the eagle sheds its feathers and receives a new set of feathers every ten years, so do the People of Israel have the power of renewal, even after their physical strength has waned (*Radak, Yesha'yahu* 40:31). This renewal is the foundation, upon which, the Jewish people are conceived. In *Parashat Lech Lecha*, the first Jewish mother, Sarah, receives the blessing of renewed youth at the age of eighty nine as it states, "I will bless her, and I will give you a son from her, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations..." (*Bereishit* 17:16). Rashi explains that the first blessing refers to her restored youthfulness, while the second blessing refers to her being endowed with abundant milk to nurse.

Raising Israel from the Ruins of the Holocaust

I believe that the return of Sarah's youth also serves as a metaphor for the Jewish people. At our weary old age, after the long winding exile, we are receiving both spiritual and even physical renewal in our Land. While the other nations are shutting down their businesses, the economy of Israel is shooting forth as *Metzudat David* explains; "The young men [who] utterly fail" refer to the other nations. My parents, who live in Europe, noticed on their recent visit how the streets of Jerusalem are bursting with activity and new life. In contrast to many cities in Europe and North America, where the streets are empty due to the unfortunate fact that one store after the other closes down; my father was amazed at how busy the shoppers are in the streets of Jerusalem. "Why

should I go to a museum and watch relics from ancient times gone by, when I can sit on a bench on Ben Yehuda Street and experience the current hustle and bustle of Israeli retail life?" asked my father. I happily agreed that we are observing the fulfillment of the prophecies of redemption in our time. "He [Hashem] gives power to the faint, and to the powerless He increases strength" (ibid 29). Hashem has raised His faint people from the ruins of the Holocaust, built us up and revived us in this Land.

Renewed With the Eagles' Wings of Nefesh b'Nefesh

According to *Metzudat David*, those who place their hope in Hashem will grow wings like the eagles and fly to their land. The journey of returning to the Land of Israel will recharge them with the strength to continue to be on the go and run speedily without tiring. This can be compared to Avraham and Sarah who began their journey to the Land of Israel at the advanced age of seventy-five and sixty-five respectively. It is not such a big deal to make *aliyah* during one's years of youth, as I, myself, can testify. I left my old country behind to move to Jerusalem at the age of nineteen. During the late teens and early "tweens" we look for adventure and change. However, as we grow older, we need the stability of settling down. Nevertheless, the fact that Avraham and Sarah made the journey to their home land at such an advanced age, paved the way for the many families with teenaged children, who now demonstrate their trust in Hashem by fastening the eagles' wings of *Nefesh b'Nefesh*. The challenge of transplanting and adjusting the family to new surroundings falls primarily on the woman. It is the *emunah* and trust of the Jewish women of today that facilitate the new wave of North American immigration to Israel. At a time of old age, recession, and diminished strength, these women realize that we have the opportunity to rebuild ourselves and grow new roots on the soil of our sacred Land.