

Haftorat Noach and Blessing in Disguise

Haftorat Parashat Noach
Yesha'yahu, Chapter 54

This week's haftorah is also partly read during the seven weeks between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashana in two different prophesies of consolation. (The third prophesy of consolation as Haftorat Re'eh, Yesha'yahu 54:11-55:5, and the fifth prophesy of consolation as Haftorat Ki Teitzei, Yesha'yahu 54:1-10). In Haftorat Re'eh I expounded upon the properties of the precious stones of the various tribes described in the haftorah, whereas in Haftorat Ki Teitzei I discussed the metaphors of Israel being compared to both a barren, divorced and widowed woman. You may be interested in reading these commentaries which also relate to our current haftorah. In this Haftorah, I focus on the connection to Parashat Noach, in addition to the disguised blessings of the barren woman, which I myself experienced in several ways throughout my more than fourteen years of secondary infertility.

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah reading

Just as the world became rebuilt after the flood in Noach's time, so will *Yerushalayim* become rebuilt and expanded with splendor, Jerusalem stones, brilliance and sapphires. We are called to learn the words of Yesha'yahu's prophesies of consolation, and to fulfill the mitzvot within them: To trust in Hashem's deliverance, to make *aliyah* (immigrate) to the Land of Israel, and to cultivate its holy soil. Through these mitzvot, we will, with Hashem's help, merit the renewal of the kingdom of David (Amos Chacham, *Da'at Mikra*).

Between the Flood and our Present Exile

As a continuation of the covenant between Hashem and Noach, in this week's haftorah, there is a promise that the covenant and love between Hashem and the Jewish people will be renewed and everlasting. *Yesha'yahu* compares the flood in the time of Noach with our present exile. "In the overflowing of anger, I concealed My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will show My compassion, says Hashem, your redeemer. For this is to me, as with the waters of Noach. Just as I have sworn that the waters of Noach should never again flood the earth, so have I sworn never again to become angry with you, nor rebuke you" (*Yesha'yahu* 54:8-9). Just as the world will never experience a second flood, so will the Jewish people never experience another exile. Hashem's unconditional guarantee to withhold a flood from this world serves as a sound proof of the eternal redemption of the Jewish people.

The World is Renewed in the Merit of Reversal of Selfish Corruption

In order to elucidate the connection between Hashem's promise never to flood the world again, and our forthcoming redemption, we need to understand the connection between Noach's plight and our current exile. In Noach's time, people became focused on themselves – pursuing their selfish desires without respecting the rights and wishes of anyone else. They considered everyone and their belongings as objects for satisfying their own personal needs. The fact that everyone cared only about himself had corrupted mankind as it states, "The land was corrupt before Hashem and the land was full of robbery" (*Bereishit* 6:11). The reestablishment of the world had to take place through the

reversal of this selfish corruption. Since it was Noach and his family's responsibility to restore morality to the world, they were charged with selfless caring for all the animals in the ark. The overwhelming responsibility of providing and tending to the needs of every living being with their varied feeding schedules, developed the kindness and compassion upon which the world became reestablished. According to the Midrash, this total reversal of priorities, focusing entirely on the needs of others, was the single merit through which the flood subsided and Noach's family was permitted to leave the Ark and reenter the world (*Bereishit Rabbah* 33:4).

The Eternal Quality of Hashem's Loving-Kindness

In response to Noach's and his family's dedicated *chesed* (loving-kindness), Hashem promised humanity eternal kindness through which His covenant of peace would be everlasting. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my *chesed* shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace falter, says Hashem, Who has mercy on you" (*Yeshu'ahu* 54:10). Malbim explains that *chesed* is eternal, since it is not dependant on the worthiness of the recipient. Therefore, Hashem's covenant of peace, founded on this *chesed*, is by its very nature an eternal commitment. This *chesed* translates into the unconditional guarantee that no matter how undeserving the world becomes, it will never undergo total destruction, but be redeemed.

Chesed is the Focus of the Generation Preceding Mashiach

Rabbi Dovid Siegel explains that just as the people had to be engaged in *chesed* in order to enter the renewed world in Noach's time, likewise the main service of the generation preceding Mashiach is to perform acts of selfless *chesed*. This can be learned from the fact that although we recite in the silent prayer, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, the G-d of Ya'acov, at the end of the first blessing, we bless Hashem as the protector of only Avraham. The following sentence of the prayer leads us straight to praising Hashem for reviving the dead. Whereas, the service of Yitzchak is sacrifice and prayer, and that of Ya'acov is Torah learning, it is Avraham's *chesed* that leads us to the final redemption and revival of the dead. From this, we can learn that although there were generations whose main service was Torah learning or prayer, the focus of our generation – the launching pad for the Mashiach – is dedication to selfless *chesed*. I was very inspired by this insight, as I am often annoyed to have to interrupt my learning and writing for the sake of helping someone in need, such as responding to a neighbor who comes to borrow some eggs. Next time there is a knock on the door at a very inconvenient time, I will remind myself, that Hashem is giving me an opportunity to do *chesed* in order to bring the Mashiach!

The Song of the Barren Woman

In addition to performing deeds of kindness, the Messianic era is characterized by *emunah* (faith) and happy song. "Sing, O barren one, you that did not bear, break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you that did not go into labor: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, says Hashem" (*Yeshu'ahu* 54:1). The prophet compares the desolate *Yerushalayim* and the congregation of Israel to a barren woman who didn't give birth, yet Hashem promises that in the time of the *Geulah* (redemption) she will become more fruitful than the rest of the nations (*Metzudat David* *ibid.*).

The Blessing of the Barren

Sefat Emet asks why it states, “Sing O barren one?” What would be the reason for the barren woman, who is experiencing the pain of infertility, to sing? I remember that my first Rebbetzin, who herself gave birth to fourteen children, used to say, “It is a blessing to have, but it is also a blessing not to have.” While I watched my friends’ bellies growing full of life, giving birth to baby after baby, these words consoled me, and helped me not to get depressed. I cannot say I felt so blessed being barren that I burst out in song, yet I recognized “the blessing of not having,” which included a full night’s sleep, the ability to learn uninterrupted, and lots of creative energy to put into my home, garden, teaching and writing. If we have perfect *emunah* (faith) that Hashem is the source of only good, then we thank Hashem for whatever we have to go through, recognizing that even the worst situations must be blessings in disguise. *Sefat Emet* explains that sometimes it is a hidden blessing to be barren rather than to give birth to difficult children, who may not turn out the way we had hoped. In addition, we all come into this world to work on ourselves and reach perfection. Every stumbling block we encounter in this world helps us to grow, develop our full potential, and reach our spiritual goal. Often our *tikun* (rectification) is by means of the difficulties of being “desolate,” as it states, “In her desolation she established for me righteous people” (*Midrash Shir haShirim* 4:12). Therefore, sometimes the difficulties of being a single woman enact a greater rectification, than the blessed life of the married wife. This explains the meaning of, “More are the children [blessings] of the desolate than the children of the married wife” (*ibid.*).

Character Development through “Desolations” and Frustrations

I can’t begin to describe to you all the difficulties and stumbling blocks that I’ve experienced whenever I tried to do something worthwhile, such as making *aliyah* to Israel, raising a Torah family, founding and running a midrasha for women, and publishing my first book. The many difficulties and frustrations I have encountered, are so intense, that they could never have happened randomly. For example, one of the difficulties, I experienced in publishing my first book, was finalizing the cover. My graphic artist had to travel overseas for more than a month, just one day before she could complete the final correction on the cover. Subsequently, her flight back home was cancelled, and after finally returning, her internet was down. In running the midrasha, there are so many never-ending stumbling blocks such as, finding the right staff, securing the land and raising funds, to write them all would fill thousands of pages. Nevertheless, all these “desolations” and frustrations provide the greatest opportunities for character development. I recognize that each error and delay polishes another facet of the diamond of my psyche. I am learning, the hard way, how far-flung our lack of control extends. I recognize all the impediments as tests to strengthen my trust in Hashem, my patience, endurance, and persistence. Likewise, all the days of darkness and concealment during our long-winding exile are for our benefit, and help us to perfect ourselves. For this opportunity, the barren woman can be thankful and sing (*Sefat Emet, Parashat Tetzeh*, 5651).

The Gestation Period of Exile

In Kabbalistic writings, exile is often compared to pregnancy, and redemption to birth. During pregnancy, the fetus is not seen on the outside; yet, during this period all of its limbs are being formed within the womb of the mother. When the fetus has completed its development, then it emerges from the womb and becomes an independent human being. In the same way, the purpose

of exile is to complete the building of our nation, so that we will become worthy of having the Divine presence rest on us. Just as the fetus could not be completed without its period of gestation within a narrow, dark space, likewise, the darkness of exile enables the completion of the development of Israel into a holy nation (Rav Yitzchak Chaver, *Yad Mitzvayim*). May the pregnancy of this final exile culminate in a speedy birth of a very healthy child – the perfected people of Israel!