

A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

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in memory of his mother
Pessel bat Naftali (Mrs. Peppy Lewin) a"h

Today's Learning:
Nach: Eichah 1-5
Mishnah: Shevi'it 2:9-10
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 74

Why, asks R' Yeshayah Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Ha'kadosh; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630), do we yearn for the end of the exile and the "good old days" of the Temple era? Are we not taught that we should accept with love any suffering that Hashem metes out to us?

He explains: There are three potential benefits that can result from this yearning. First, when we focus on how great our loss has been and how significant the destruction was, and we realize that our sins are the cause of our continued exile, we will be inspired to repent.

Second, our Sages teach that our oppression by other nations during the long exile is a substitute for being punished in Gehinnom. And, possibly, our sins have caused us to deserve a long "sentence" there. By focusing on the bitterness of the exile in a way that increases the pain that we feel, we reduce our need to be punished elsewhere.

Lastly, the darker the night, the more one appreciates the light that follows. This is true of figurative "darkness" as well. Hashem's plan is that the darkness of the exile will be followed by the great "light" of the redemption. The more we emphasize the darkness in which we find ourselves now, the more we will appreciate the light of the redemption that will follow.

These three ideas are alluded to in the verses (Eichah 3:40-42), "Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem" in repentance. "Let us lift our hearts with our hands to G-d in heaven," feeling

as if the pain is tangible (in "our hands"). "We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not forgiven"--rather, You force us to be refined in the blast furnace of the exile so that the ultimate "light" will shine purely. (Shnei Luchot Ha'brit: Masechet Ta'anit)

"May Hashem, the Elokim of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you ka'asher deebair / as He has spoken regarding you." (1:11)

R' Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer z"l (1880-1933; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) writes: Moshe Rabbeinu blessed Bnei Yisrael that Hashem should multiply them a thousand times over, as if to say: G-d willing, all will go well with you, the Jewish People. But, he added: Remember that Hashem is blessing you even "ka'asher deebair," which may be translated, "when Hashem speaks harshly about you," i.e., a time of strict judgment. (Chiddushei Rabbeinu Yosef Nechemiah Al Ha'Torah)

"Eichah / How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" (1:12)

R' Naftali Hertz Herz Landau z"l (1840-1900; rabbi of Strelisk, Galicia) suggests another reading of this verse based on a verse in this week's haftarah. We read in the haftarah (Yeshayah 1:3), "An ox knows his owner, and a donkey his master's trough; [in contrast,] Yisrael does not know, My People does not cause itself to understand / 'hitbonan'." Why, asks R' Landau, does the verse use the reflexive form ("My People does not cause itself to understand") rather than say, "My People does not understand"?

He answers: The prophet is bemoaning a time when the masses will sin because of unqualified leadership. The prophet means: Because Yisrael--a term that usually refers to the elite--does not know the Torah, My People--a reference to the masses--is not brought to understand what Hashem wants. The proof for this interpretation is that we read later in the haftarah (verse 26), "Then I will return your judges as in earliest times, and your counselors as at first, after which you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City." The implication is that the fact that we are not now a "City of Righteousness, Faithful City" is due to the lack of suitable judges and counselors.

This, writes R' Landau, is what Moshe bemoans in our verse as well: I cannot "carry" you alone. Therefore, I must appoint other leaders. And I know that a time will come when those leaders will cause you to be contentious and quarrelsome.

R' Landau adds: There were three prophets who used the word "Eichah" in their prophecy. One is Moshe, in our verse. One is Yeshayah, in our haftarah. The third is Yirmiyah, the author of the book of Eichah. Not coincidentally, Yirmiyah bemoaned the same problem of unqualified leaders when he wrote (in last week's haftarah--Yirmiyah 2:8), "The Kohanim did not say, 'Where is Hashem?'; even those charged with teaching the Torah did not know Me." (Ahavat Tziyon)

"So I took the heads of your tribes, distinguished men, who were wise and well known, and I appointed them as heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes." (1:15)

R' Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman z"l (the Vilna Gaon; 1720-1797) writes: Our verse refers to four different categories of leaders: "Leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens." Other verses refer to the leaders by different names: roshim / heads, shoftim / judges, shotrim / law enforcement officers, and zekeinim / teachers of Torah. The "leaders of thousands" were the "heads," who served a general leadership function. The "leaders of hundreds" were the judges. The "leaders of fifties" were the teachers. Finally, the "leaders of tens" were the officers who enforced the judges' rulings.

The Gaon continues: Why were there twice as many Torah teachers--one per 50 people--as judges--one per 100? Because there are twice as many hours available for Torah study as there are for judgment, since courts may sit only during the day, while Torah must be taught day and night. (Aderet Eliyahu)

"You slandered in your tents and said, 'Because of Hashem's hatred for us He took us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Emorites to destroy us.'" (1:27)

Rashi z"l comments: Really, He loved you, but you hated Him. A common proverb says: What is in your own mind about your friend, you imagine is what is in his mind about you.

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) elaborates: In the hearts of the Generation of the Desert there was a very subtle hatred of G-d. They would never have admitted it, for the simple reason that they were not aware of it. They truly believed that Hashem hated them, and this pained them a great deal. They believed that they loved Hashem with all their hearts, and they could not understand why He seemed not to return their love. But all of this pain and concern was wasted, for, in reality, Hashem loved them dearly. This illustrates how carefully one must shine a light deep in the recesses of his heart to discover the areas in which he needs to improve. (AleI Shur I p.163)

"Wake up! Wake up! For your light has come, rise up and shine. Awaken, awaken, utter a song; the glory of Hashem is revealed upon you." (From Lecha Dodi recited on Friday night)

R' Aryeh Finkel z"l (1931-2016; rosh yeshiva of the Mir-Brachfeld Yeshiva; he passed away this week) writes: We all look forward to the coming of mashiach. When he does come, everyone will wake up from his spiritual slumber and believe in Hashem. But, says the author of Lecha Dodi, it is incumbent upon us to wake up now and to anticipate the coming light of redemption.

Shabbat also, continues R' Finkel, is a time to wake up from the spiritual slumber of the mundane workweek. The 13th century work Sefer Ha'chinuch explains that this is one of the purposes of the mitzvah of Kiddush: to awaken us to appreciate the greatness of the Shabbat day. That is why we recite Kiddush over wine, for wine livens up the one who drinks it. (Yavo Shiloh p.55)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' David ben Shlomo ibn Zimra z"l ("Radvaz"; 1479-1573), Chief Rabbi of Egypt and a prolific author.

You have asked me, my beloved friend, what will be in the time of techiyat ha'meitim / the resurrection of the dead, for you have received a tradition from your ancestors that the techiyah will occur just prior to the seventh millennium, when the world will enter its Shabbat-like state of complete tranquility. You find this difficult because it means that the tzaddikim and extremely pious individuals who gave their lives for the sanctification of Hashem's Name during the exile will not experience the goodness that will come to the Jewish People and will not rejoice in their happiness [i.e., they will not experience the epoch of mashiach].

Answer: This always bothered me, as well, until I saw the words of the Ritva z"l [R' Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (Spain; 1260s-1320s)], who writes in the name of his teachers that there will be two techiyot / resurrections. The first will be for individual tzaddikim who died during the exile. This will occur close to the time when mashiach comes, and they will merit to experience the epoch of mashiach in both body and soul. They will see the goodness that will come to the Jewish People and the building of the Bet Hamikdash as a reward for their Divine service. There also will be a general techiyah close to the beginning of "Shabbat" [i.e., the seventh millennium of history, after the epoch of mashiach]. That is what we refer to as "Olam Ha'techiyah" / "The World of the Resurrection."

Later, I realized that everyone must agree that there will be two techiyot. Regarding the first, the prophet Zechariah ben Berachyahu said (Zechariah 8:4), "Old men and old women will once again sit in the streets of Yerushalayim, each with his cane in his hand because of advanced age." Our Sages understand that this verse speaks of a time after the Redemption. From the fact that the verse refers to "old men and old women" and "advanced age," it would seem to be referring to a time after the first techiyah, because after the second techiyah there will be no old age. Rather, we will immediately enter "Shabbat," which is completely restful--a time of eternal life. Remember this always, because it is a great consolation to those who suffer the pain of the exile and the yoke of the nations that subjugate us. They will yet see Tziyon as a tranquil dwelling and the holy service performed according to law soon in our days. I have written what appears to me to be correct. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Ha'Radvaz No. 1,069)