

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

THEMES AND IDEAS IN THE HAFTARAH Yeshivat Har Etzion

This haftara series is dedicated in memory of
our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak
(Mrs. Claire Reinitz), zichronah livracha, by her family.

NOACH

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "*RONI AKARA*" AND "*ANIYA SO'ARA*"

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Two of Yeshayahu's prophecies of consolation – "*Roni akara*" ("Sing, o barren one" [54:1-10]) and "*Aniya so'ara*" ("O you afflicted, tossed with tempest" [54:11-55:5]) – were combined in order to create the *haftara* of *Parashat Noach*. We are dealing with two prophecies that differ one from the other; they express different approaches to the topic of exile and redemption, and their fusion into a single *haftara* provides a double perspective on the issue of redemption. Besides the substantive differences that will be discussed below, during the summer months, in the framework of the reading of the seven *haftarot* of consolation, the two prophecies are divided into two separate *haftarot*. "*Roni akara*" serves as the *haftara* of *Parashat Ki-Tetze*, whereas "*Aniya so'ara*" is read two weeks earlier as the *haftara* of *Parashat Reeh*. There is no doubt, then, that our *haftara* is comprised of two separate units.

Truth be told, the custom of combining the two distinct summer *haftarot* and reading them together on *Parashat Noach* is restricted to the Ashkenazi rite. The Sefardi rite preserves the independence of "*Roni akara*" and does not append "*Aniya so'ara*" to it, because they do not constitute a single organic unit, but rather two distinct prophecies that are adjacent to each other. In the framework of this series of *shiurim*, we will deal with the longer Ashkenazi *haftara* that includes both elements. This is in keeping with our established policy that when faced with diverse customs, we will deal with the longer, more inclusive, version. And furthermore, "*Roni akara*" adjoins "*Aniya so'ara*" already in the book of *Yeshayahu*, and their proximity sheds light on both prophecies. Thus, it behooves all communities to consider the connection between the two prophecies in their scriptural setting.

SUFFERING IN THE PRESENT AND HOPELESSNESS REGARDING THE FUTURE

The two prophecies deal with the promise given to a people deep in exile concerning their future redemption. Both open with a metaphor that describes Israel's situation in exile; both metaphors - one who is barren and one who is poor and afflicted - appear on the list of people whom *Chazal* regard as if they were dead.[1] There is, however, a fundamental difference between them: "*Roni akara*" relates to the future, whereas "*Aniya so'ara*" focuses on the present.

Let us begin with "*Roni akara*." Two different factors make up the tragedy of exile - the suffering experienced in the present and the hopelessness regarding the future. It is important to emphasize that these are two different phenomena: it is possible for terrible suffering in the present to be accompanied by hope regarding the future, because improvement over the current situation is guaranteed. The opposite situation is also possible. The present in and of itself may not be so terrible, neither individuals nor the nation as a whole suffering acutely at the moment, but the future may still appear hopeless with no light at the end of the tunnel, this giving rise to severe despair.

THE DESPAIR OF BARRENNESS

The prophecy of "*Roni akara*" confronts the despair and hopelessness regarding the future, arising out of the circumstances of exile. This is its focus. It accomplishes this

through the metaphor of barrenness. The root of the problem of childlessness lies in the lack of hope regarding the future. Surely, any couple that is forced to deal with fertility problems experiences unbearable moments of suffering in the present; the essence of their difficulty, however, is that they have lost all hope for the future. Were they to know that in the future they would have offspring, these difficulties would disappear. In contrast, if a person suffers with severe emotional or physical pain in the present, his distress does not diminish because of a hopeful future. Knowing what the future has in store for him may strengthen him and give him greater endurance, but it cannot conceal or alleviate his present pain. A childless person is regarded as if he were dead in the present because already now he lives with the feeling that he has no future. There will be nobody to take care of him when he grows old, there will be nobody to say *kaddish* after he is gone, and most of all, there will be nobody who will live on after him and continue his existential world and legacy. To take a biblical example, let us consider Avraham. When God emphasizes His protection and blessing in the present, which found expression in the war of the four kings, Avraham's response is: "What will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damesek" (*Bereishit* 15:2). In other words, Avraham answers God that his problem is not with the present but with the future. Needless to say, since what is important is the future, a childless man or woman is unable to enjoy the present as long as he or she has no future.

The Jewish people in exile are likened to a barren woman. During many periods of Jewish history across the generations the Jewish people in exile did not suffer afflictions or oppression, and the gentiles did not want to destroy them. Sometimes the Jewish people found themselves in circumstances which today is called "exile in countries of ease," both economic and political. However, the despair of the barren woman who sees a future for her neighbors, while she is in a state of "Give me children, or else I die" (*Bereishit* 30:1), gives expression to Jewish existence throughout the course of the exile. Even when living in comfort, Jews have felt that they have no future as a nation, and when they "saw every city built on its foundation, and the city of God cast down to She'ol," they felt as an abandoned woman who contemplates her neighbors' success and her lack of a future. It is not the difficulties of the present, but the knowledge that there is no future that hangs over the childless woman and over Israel in their exile.

In a passage that is astonishing in its strength, *Chazal* combine metaphor and reality, parable and lesson. In a discussion regarding the halakhic status of a non-Jew who might possibly descend from one of the ten lost tribes of Israel, the Gemara states (*Yevamot* 17a) that there is no concern about the validity of his betrothal (that is, there is no chance that he is a Jew), and no concern that he actually descends from the exiled tribes, for we have a tradition that the wombs of the women of the generation of the ten exiled tribes split open and they were barren.[2] In other words, the despair that took

hold of them in the wake of their exile and the trauma suffered by the first generation of exiles made them barren, and thus the metaphor was actualized, turning into terrifying reality!

CONSOLATION OF THE BARREN WOMAN

The consolation that the prophet promises the people is meant to answer the problem that is troubling them. It should come as no surprise, then, that the verses of consolation in the "*Roni akara*" section speak about plans for the future. The prophetic message does not limit itself to the mere promise of children; rather it paints an entire picture of preparations for the future. "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations, spare not; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes" (54:2) is not merely a picturesque description of the great numbers of children that may be expected in the future, but rather a consolation in the present. The present suffering of the childless woman results from the fact that she sees herself as having no future. Therefore, the moment that the future becomes tangible, even before it actually arrives, the present becomes pleasant and offers comfort. The prophet's telling the people to enlarge their tents and strengthen their stakes comforts the people now in exile, even before they return to their land. This may be likened to a couple with fertility problems whose doctor tells them to go out and buy nursery furniture because their problem has been solved. Already now, their world has changed beyond recognition, long before their child is born; the future has already made a turn for the better even if the swing in fortune has yet to be actualized.

THE SUFFERING OF THE POOR AND AFFLICTED PERSON

The prophecy of "*Aniya so'ara*," in contrast, relates to suffering in the present. The afflicted person's problem is the very opposite of that of the barren woman. It is not the lack of a future that weighs down upon him, but rather his suffering in the present. His fate may change for the better and his situation may improve; but it is his current distress that oppresses him by day and turns his nights into Gehinom.

The Jewish people's situation is often similar to that of the afflicted person. The present is difficult, the possibilities of making a living are limited, the advances that may

be made are restricted on both the personal and the national level, and they lack the comfort enjoyed by the rest of society. Even if future redemption is promised, the suffering in the present that expresses itself in oppression, affliction, and tyranny of the non-Jews weighs down heavily and suffocates. This is the world of the poor and afflicted woman, who is tossed with tempest and suffers in the present.

Here too, the consolation offered follows from the problem that troubles the people, and therefore it is different from the consolations offered in the previous prophecy. When the problem was barrenness and lack of a future, the promise of a rosy future was the primary consolation, but when the distress of the exile focuses on present afflictions, the message of consolation changes accordingly, and therefore Yeshayahu promises precious stones and jewels. If the principle of "*Roni akara*" was "enlarge the place of your tent," then the motto of "*Aniya so'ara*" is "eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (55:2).

THE JEWISH PEOPLE – SERVANT OR BELOVED

Another important difference between "*Roni akara*" and "*Aniya so'ara*" lies in the definition of the relationship between God and His people in the two prophecies. To clarify the matter, let us briefly review one of the fundamental issues that runs through the entire course of Scripture.

We are presented with two basic models that characterize the relationship between God and the Jewish people, both of which appear in pronounced fashion throughout the prophecies of Yeshayahu. The first presents man as a servant before his Maker, with the Creator high and lofty, far from man and towering above him, for "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (55:9). In a single word, God is transcendental, and His relationship with man is the relationship between master and servant, between Creator and creature. In the *haftara* of *Lekh Lekha*, we will read: "But you, Israel, are **My servant**... And I have said to you, You are **My servant**" (*Yeshayahu* 41:8-9), and this definition repeats itself many times in the series of chapters from which these *haftarot* are taken. The clearest expression of this is found in the verse which asserts: "Remember these, O Yaakov and Israel; you are **My servant**: I have formed you; You are **My own servant**: O Israel you shall not be forgotten by Me" (44:21).

From this perspective, man is obligated to his Creator and the yoke of His kingdom; he must obey His commandments and fulfill the missions imposed upon him.

Parallel to this, there exists also a different relationship, one of nearness and intimacy, one in which God is close to the world and reveals Himself to it with a smiling countenance. The clearest expression of this reality in Scripture is found in the book of *Shir Ha-shirim*, but it makes a significant appearance in *Yeshayahu* as well. From the verses of the seven *haftarot* of consolation, we may cite as a clear representative of this approach the verse: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God... as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels... And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (61:10, 62:5). From this perspective, the observance of *mitzvot* is an expression of intimacy and the desire to fulfill the desire of one's lover, as a beloved who tries to find favor in her lover's eyes, rather than as a servant who fulfills the orders of his master.

ISRAEL – FORSAKEN WIFE OR WRETCHED PAUPER

These two different perspectives find expression in our *haftara*. The intimate perspective of marriage is found in "*Roni akara*." Israel is promised redemption because the relationship created by marriage remains, it being inconceivable that a wife of youth should be cast away. Indeed, God forsook them and they went out into exile, but this should be seen as a lover's quarrel that expresses momentary and passing anger, but not basic loathing or a fundamental decision about leaving. Redemption is not seen here as a new creation, as it had been presented in the *haftara* of *Parashat Bereishit*, because from the perspective of the trait of love, even the exile is understood not as an expression of basic differences, but as momentary abandonment. The Jewish people are like a woman whose husband has left her for a short time, and she is sad on account of the fight that she had had with him before he left. But it is only a brief abandonment "for a short moment," and the anger is only the noisy and passing anger of a lovers' quarrel, anger that raises a lot of hostility to the surface, but does not express a true break. Thus, the prophet does not hesitate to declare: "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In the overflowing of wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting faithful love will I have mercy on you, says your redeemer, the Lord" (54:7-8). For this is the quality of love and this is the manner of its redemption.

"*Aniya so'ara*," in contrast, does not give expression to the quality of love, or to the lover's commitment towards his beloved to redeem her. Redemption comes because Israel is wretched. The suffering pauper is the reason for the redemption, and God's mercy upon His creatures is the force that drives their redemption. The redemption is described as "the heritage of the **servants of the Lord**, and the recompense of their righteousness appointed by Me" (54:17), and not as a return to a wife of youth.

BENEFACTION – CONDITIONAL OR FREE GIFT

These different perspectives express themselves in another important way in the process of redemption. In "*Aniya so'ara*," the redemption is not a free gift to the people, but rather it is accompanied by a demand for action on their part – "In righteousness shall you be established; keep away from oppression; and you shall not fear" (54:13). And benefaction is presented as being conditional upon the fulfillment of God's will: "Hearken diligently to Me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure loving promises of David" (55:2-3).

The redemption of "*Roni akara*" lacks all these demands and challenges. It is an unconditional promise, like the gift of a husband who wishes to act magnanimously with his wife. The sad and forsaken woman is redeemed through the very fact that her husband does not want her to be unhappy, and through his love and connection to her, and not through compassion for the wretched or the expectation of fulfilling missions and achieving goals. The connection between them is itself sufficient cause for her redemption.

ABILITIES OR PERSONALITY

Man's greatness and the recognition of his creative powers are paradoxically connected to the quality of fear and to man's standing before God as Creator, to a degree that it is not necessitated by the perspective of the quality of love. Man is at a distance. He senses God's loftiness and sublimity with full force, and therefore does not approach Him, but the very definition of man as a servant who is ready to minister to his master and accept upon himself missions, assumes that it is in his power to fulfill them. His

existence in this world is for that purpose, and therefore the fulfillment of these missions is so central to his being.

The model of the lover and his beloved, in contrast, does not assume creative powers in the beloved, and nobody comes to her with demands and challenges. The relationship is founded upon an existential connection, stemming from the force of her nature and personality, and is not based on her abilities. Think of it this way: A cook seeking employment in a restaurant must prove his culinary talents, for if he lacks such skills, the restaurant owner has no need for him. But husband and wife do not test each other in the kitchen before the wedding, for their relationship is not based on how well they can run a household.

Therefore, in "*Aniya so'ara*," there are calls for redemption, but when it arrives it is described as coming by virtue of Israel's actions and as their heritage: "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and the recompense of their righteousness appointed by Me, says the Lord" (54:17). This heritage is given to man by right, and not as a gift, and a servant's heritage is given to him because of his actions and his investment. The redemption in "*Aniya so'ara*" is Israel's heritage and recompense for their righteousness. All this is absent in "*Roni akara*" which relates to redemption in the framework of the relations between husband and wife. In this sense, it is reminiscent of another *haftara* taken from the book of *Yeshayahu* (for *Parashat Ekev*), where the redemption is presented as the expression of a relationship, not between husband and wife, but between parent and child: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (*Yeshayahu* 49:15).

UNIVERSALISM OR INTIMACY

In this context it is appropriate to pay attention to yet another point, namely, that in "*Aniya so'ara*" redemption is presented as saving Israel from the hands of the nations who are threatening them, whereas in "*Roni akara*" the other nations are not mentioned at all.[3] It seems that this too is connected to the previous point, that is to say, to the differences in perspective between the two prophecies. Man's standing before God as a servant before his master is fundamentally a universal phenomenon, whereas the situation of lover and his beloved is not necessarily universal, but rather unique to God's people. Therefore, in the prophecy dealing with the universal experience, there is room

to examine the relationship between Israel and the nations, and to emphasize the competition between them and Israel's standing. In light of this, the prophet declares "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and the recompense of their righteousness appointed by Me, says the Lord" (54:17). So too, the prophet emphasizes: "Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of nations. Behold you shall call a nation that you know not, and nations that knew not you shall run to you" (55:4-5). On the other hand, in "*Roni akara*" which is a prophecy based on the intimacy between God and His people, we do not find any mention of the nations, they being entirely out of the picture from the perspective of this prophecy.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE *PARASHA* AND THE *HAFTARA*

In light of the analysis presented thus far, we can now examine the relationship between the *parasha* and the *haftara*. The simple and immediate connection, of course, is the verse that mentions the story of the flood and the covenant that followed in its wake: "For this is as the waters of Noach to Me; and I have sworn that the waters of Noach should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be furious with you, nor rebuke you" (54:9). We must emphasize, however, that the *haftara* is not read merely because of an isolated verse that establishes a coincidental connection between the flood and the prophecy of consolation, but rather the connection between the two is essential and runs through the entire course of the prophecy. In order to understand this, we must examine a central point in the story of the flood, namely the fact that Noach (and the world) were saved not by virtue of Noach's righteousness but because of God's mercies and His love of man. This assertion requires a comprehensive analysis of the figure of Noach, a study which we cannot enter into in this context. Suffice it to say that this is the understanding that arises from various rabbinic sources, first and foremost of which is the *Malkhuyot-Zikhronot-Shofarot* prayer in the Rosh Ha-Shana *Amida*. Noach is assigned there a central position; he is mentioned precisely at the midpoint of the prayer, and serves as the crane that shifts our turning to God from the attribute of justice to the attribute of mercy. Prior to Noach's mention, God is depicted as sitting on the throne of justice and kingship, whereas from that point on He moves from the seat of justice to the seat of mercy. This transition is intimately connected to the personality of Noach and to the fact that his redemption resulted from God's love for his creatures, as we declare there:

Also Noach did You remember graciously, granting him merciful aid when You did send the flood to destroy all creatures because of their evil doings. Because of his record that came to You, Lord our God, You did make his descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, as the sand of the seas.

As is plainly evident, the remembering of Noach is defined as resulting from the trait of love and as an act of salvation and mercy, the primary purpose of which was the survival of mankind and saving of the world.[4] A sharper expression of this perception is found in *Midrash Rabba* at the end of *Parashat Bereishit* (25, 9)[5]:

R. Abba bar Kahana said: "For I repent that I have made them. But Noach found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (*Bereishit* 6:7-8). Even Noach who survived - it was not because he was deserving, but because he found favor.

THE COVENANT OF THE WATERS OF NOACH

The Midrash's perception of Noach perfectly matches "*Roni akara's*" perception regarding redemption. In the *haftara*, the people are not redeemed by virtue of their actions, but because of the personal relationship between Israel and God, that is to say, the people of Israel are redeemed because they find favor in God's eyes, this being the Midrash's perception regarding Noach. Therefore, the mention of the waters of Noach in the *haftara* of "*Roni akara*" is very intentional. The principle of the waters of Noach serves as the foundation of the mystery of redemption, for it states that never again will there be total destruction, because the waters of Noach gave rise to a new course of redemption that does not depend on the righteousness of man. Would the redemption come exclusively by virtue of human actions, and would the fate of the world depend upon mankind's credit or guilt, it would be impossible to promise that there will never be another flood, for man is endowed with free choice and who can guarantee that he will not veer again from the proper path. However, God's decision not to destroy the world and the fullness thereof – even when He brings the floodwaters to destroy all creatures because of their evil doings, He allows Noach to live and makes his descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth – means that He wishes to maintain the world even if it is undeserving. In light of this, the prophet invokes the covenant of the waters of Noach to bolster the promise of redemption, for if it is God's will to maintain the world and redeem man even if he is undeserving, and it is this desire that expresses itself in the covenant of the waters of Noach, then this principle is operative also regarding the relationship between Israel and God. Israel can rest assured that God will redeem them, for He desires them as the wife of His youth.

THE FOCUS OF THE REDEMPTION

It is fitting to note one additional correspondence between *Parashat Noach* and the *haftara*, namely the focus of the redemption. One of the striking differences in the transition from *Parashat Bereishit* to *Parashat Noach* is the fact that the created world described in *Parashat Bereishit* is a world defined as "the generations of the heaven and of the earth" (*Bereishit* 2:4), and man is inserted therein as part of the world of nature. In contrast, the new world described in the aftermath of the flood (which parallels the description of creation in *Parashat Bereishit*) is depicted in the framework of God's relationship with man, there being no mention of nature.

So too in the book of *Yeshayahu*, we find descriptions of redemption that depict nature as renewed, improved, and redeemed,[6] but in "*Roni akara*," there is no mention of any of this. The vision of redemption is entirely on the level of God's relationship with the people of Israel, nature playing no role whatsoever. In a famous *agada* about R. Elazar ben Durdaya who acquired his world in a moment, *Chazal* note the gap between the redemption of man and the redemption of nature, citing a verse from our *haftara*:

He went and sat between two mountains and hills, and said: "Mountains and hills, petition for mercy on my behalf." They said to him: "Before we petition for you, let us petition for ourselves." As it is stated: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed" (*Yeshayahu* 54:10).

The meaning of the utterance of the mountains and the hills (and so too of the heaven and the earth, of the sun and the moon, mentioned there in the continuation) is that man can be redeemed independently of nature. *Chazal* prove this from the verse in our *haftara* adjacent to the mention of the waters of Noach. Just as in the time of Noach, a model for the redemption of man without the redemption of the world was established, so *Yeshayahu* proposes a model for the redemption of Israel which is not a cosmic redemption. For this he invokes the covenant made with Noach. Here too it seems that the redemption of man without nature is not unconnected to the fact that the redemption does not come about through repentance and good deeds, but through finding favor in God's eyes, and therefore it cannot elevate the world and redeem it. The person and the people who find favor in the eyes of God are redeemed, but the world will

have to wait until man repairs himself and the world, and then the entire world will be redeemed.

ENDING ON A NOTE SIMILAR TO THAT ON WHICH WE BEGAN

In order to end on a note similar to that on which we began, let us just point out that the two important elements that connect the *parasha* to the *haftara*, and that accompany the very mention of the flood by the prophet, are found in "*Roni akara*," and not in "*Aniya so'ara*." Thus, there is great inner logic to the custom of the Sefardi communities to suffice with the reading of "*Aniya so'ara*." Nevertheless, the Ashkenazi communities preferred to broaden the canvas and add another prophecy that presents another model of redemption and thus complete the picture presented by the first model.[7]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] "It was taught [in a Baraita]: Four are considered as if they were dead: A pauper, a leper, a blind man, and one who is childless" (*Nedarim* 64b).

[2] This is the view of the first position cited in the Gemara. The Gemara there cites another position that follows another course regarding the halakhic issue.

[3] Of course, if Israel is regarded as a wife of youth that enjoys an intimate relationship with God, then it is clear that the other nations do not enjoy that status, but this is a side product of what is stated there and not part of the actual contents of the prophecy.

[4] I expanded on this idea in my article, "To Err is Human – the Human Element in *Teshuva*," published in *Torat Zion* (1), Cleveland, 5759.

[5] See other positions in passage 29, ad loc.

[6] Chapter 35 serves as a clear, but not unique, example of this.

[7] Another possible consideration could be the desire to reach 21 verses, the minimum length of the *haftara* according to the Gemara's conclusion in tractate *Megila*. However, even the Ashkenazi rite is often not exacting about this (for even the Ashkenazim divide "*Roni akara*" and "*Aniya so'ara*" into two separate *haftarot* in the framework of the seven *haftarot* of consolation). It is, therefore, difficult to see this as the cause of the difference in custom.

(Translated by David Strauss)