

This week's Al HaPerek learning has been donated by Hannah and Chaim Newman in memory of Sh'chora Neiman, daughter of Chaim Eliezer and Sussiya Stock, who passed away on the 29th of Tamuz, 5769; and in memory of Esme Hadassah Aaronson, daughter of Rivkah Rachel and Yossef Dov Imber whose 10th yahrtzeit falls on Tisha B'Av.

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 42-43

Perek 42

Many short prophecies are interlaced within these chapters and the ones to follow. These prophecies deal with the redemption of the Jewish people, their unique affinity to God and their national and universal destiny as- '*a light of nations*'. This chapter opens by describing God's servant, who according to some opinions, symbolizes Israel; and depicting his special character as judge of the nations (1-7). Another part describes the connection between the creation of the world by God and the lofty destiny of the servant. The following prophecy calls on those who dwell in the outskirts of the land, to praise God through songs, for His might and bravery which is revealed in the redemption of Israel after a long period of silence and self-restraint which he took upon Himself (10-17). In the final section Yeshayahu turns to God's servant once more; however, this time it is to criticize his obtuseness to God's will which is revealed through historical events.

1 "This is My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one, in whom I delight...He shall not cry out or shout aloud" (1-2)

a) Pesukim 2-3 use five verbs which describe the servant of God by what he doesn't do, rather than by what he does. What do these verbs have in common, and how would you characterize his manner of judgment described in these pesukim? See the following explanation of **Radak**:

'He shall not cry out': Normally a judge must shout at those being charged, and force them to accept his judgment; however, he will not need to do so. He will speak pleasantly with them and they will listen to him.

b) How does pasuk 4 "balance out" pesukim 2-3? Note the use of the words "*dim*" [כהה] and "*bruised*" [רצץ] and discuss their contrasting contexts in pesukim 3-4.

2 The character of God's servant, who has the spirit of God rest upon him, is similar to that of the "*shoot*" described in chapter 11:1-10. Compare the following points: God's spirit which rests upon them, the just judgment of the nations and the unusual nature of the judgment. In what way are the characters of God's servant and the "shoot" different? Note each character's identity, role and situation.

3 Two stages are detailed in the continuation of the section: God's actions (5) and the task that was appointed to His servant (6-7). In what way are these stages related to one another; and how does God's servant, implied here to be referring to Israel, complete God's actions in the creation? Note the description in Yeshayahu 60:1-3.

4 "*Who is so blind as My servant, so deaf as the messenger I send?*"(19).

In contrast to the previous prophecy, which spoke of the lofty destiny of the servant of God, this one criticizes him for his severe "blindness" and "deafness"(18-25). What is the prophet hinting at through this imagery? See pesukim 23-25. A similar image appears at the beginning of the book, in Yeshayahu's dedication prophecy (6:10). What role do the blindness and deafness have there and what do they lead to?

5 "*The Lord desires His [servant's] vindication, that he may magnify and glorify [His] teaching*" (21). This pasuk is situated in the heart of our chapter, between the simile and its interpretation. The commentators disagree as to the meaning of this pasuk and its correlation to the rest of the prophecy. Read the following explanations given by **Radak** and the **Mishna** (Makot 3:16):

Radak: During the redemption, when God will raise and glorify His Torah, as it says '*For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord*'(Yeshayahu 11:9), he shall not do it for your sake. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (ibid 35:5), but now they are blind, deaf and despised. For they are a plundered and despoiled nation; they do not apprehend that their sins have brought this upon them.

Mishna: Rabbi Chananyah ben Akashya says: The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to make the people of Israel meritorious; therefore He gave them Torah and *mitzvoth* in abundant measure, as it is written: *'The Lord desires His [servant's] vindication, that he may magnify and glorify [His] teaching'*.

What is the object of God's desire according to each source?

Perek 43

This chapter opens with the message of the redemption (1-8), which describes the wondrous journey the exiles will take from all corners of the earth back to their land. From a few aspects this message entirely contradicts the criticism of the previous prophecy. Pesukim (9-13) describe how God summons the nations to judgment, while the people of Israel are His witnesses testifying about His salvations throughout history (9-13). In the next section God announces to Israel the future redemption, which will be more glorious than the one from Egypt. Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter ends with Yeshayahu rebuking Israel for their manner of worshipping God.

- 6 The first prophecy of the chapter emphasizes the close affinity between God and His nation, which he formed and created for Himself. How is this affinity expressed in pesukim 2, 3-4 and 5-6? The fire which encompasses Israel in the beginning of the chapter (2) was mentioned at the end of the previous prophecy as well (42:25). Discuss the role of the fire, and why Israel didn't notice it in each one of the prophecies?
- 7 Once more, Pesukim 9-13 describe the judgment between God and the nations, similar to the judgments of chapter 40. However, the emphasis here is on the witnesses of the judgment. In what way are the people of Israel God's witnesses; and about what and regarding who are they testifying? See the surprising explanation of the midrash- **Sifri** (Devarim 144):

'So you are my witnesses- declares the Lord- and I am God'. When you are my witnesses, I am God; and when you are not my witnesses I am, so to speak, not God.

In light of this, why are the subjects of blindness and deafness emphasized in these prophecies (42:7, 42: 18-25, 43:8)?

Appendix

The people I formed for Myself

Since the existence of the Jewish nation is due to the covenant, so too the Jewish state only exists because of the covenant. Two things are supposed to occur in the Jewish state: God's promise not to desert His nation, and our obligation to sanctify His name in the world. The state is the arena in which the meaning of Jewish history, and in fact all mankind's history, will manifest. This mission requires openness to all of mankind's suffering and to all the possibilities concealed in human beings. When a young child begins to speak, his father teaches him two pesukim, which are in fact two words that are the key to Judaism: *Torah* and *Shema*. These two words point to endless horizons. The first is the ethical challenge, accepting the command and the willingness to work towards *tikun olam* (improving the world); the second is the deepening and expansion of wisdom to the utmost bounds of the eternal hills. Both depend on one another. Scientific and technological advancement allows the manufacture of resources, which improves society and advances all life systems. One who does not own anything cannot be a *ba'al tzedakka* (give to the poor); and when the land does not bear fruit, one cannot avoid being hungry. However, without the understanding that mankind is commanded; the advancement in science and technology could, heaven forbid, cause destruction...

In the same way that an individual is required, as a creation of God, to balance self-esteem with true humbleness which is a derivate of him being created as a wilted flower; so too the state must find the golden mean where two paths intertwine. The first path is of the days of yore which cross the course of history; the second, a narrow trail winding upwards, belongs to a small nation whose mere existence is due to the kindness of God...

Historical processes which have no equal are occurring before us, and the prophet as if begging for us to notice what is occurring says: *'Look up all around you and see: they are all assembled, are come to you'*. Has anyone seen occurrences like we've seen happen to us? The prophets' visions are full of wonders that many thought were exaggerations poured out poetically. Many of them became raw facts which then were taken for granted: *'In an hour of favor I answer you, and on a day of salvation I help you- I created you and appointed you a covenant people- restoring the land, allotting anew the desolate holdings, saying to the prisoners, Go free, to those who are in darkness, Show yourselves'*. Prisoners who were locked up in the Soviet

Union as well as those who were in hiding in the darkness of Ethiopia; now walk down our streets as though they had always done so. Who would have thought of population influx in our tiny country; a country which experts believed, sixty years ago, could not hold anymore since residents were then suffering from hunger and poverty? Now, thank God, we have multiplied by ten and more, and yet *'They shall not hunger or thirst, hot wind and sun shall not strike them'*, and still most of the land is desert waiting to be settled. There is no one among us who knows the extent of all this. For we were destined: *'I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, and I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you- a covenant people- a light of nations'*. This is the definition of the Jewish people, and it is the purpose of the state of Israel; a covenantal people, which symbolizes the covenant between the creator and all mankind. Where are the ear and heart of flesh that can hear the question of all questions: *'Why, when I came, was no one there, why when I called, would none respond?'* Despite the waves of hostility and hatred, large countries such as China and India seek cooperation with Israel; and we cannot fathom the reason why, yet the answer was given so long ago, all we must do is pay attention: *'Hearken to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation, for teaching shall go forth from Me, My way for the light of peoples.'* All one must do is recall the covenant in order to comprehend all that happens to us, and in order to appreciate the magnitude of our mission. And God's words thunder through the heavens: *'I am about to do something new; even now it shall come to pass [...] The people I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise'*.

[*'The people I formed for Myself'*, Rabbi Nahum Eliezer Rabinovich. In: *The Jewishness of Israel* (Aviezer Ravitzky and Yedidia Stern, eds. 2007)]



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