

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 54-55

Perek 54

In chapter 54 Yeshayahu continues to console and encourage Zion; this time however, the consolation entails a dramatic and inconceivable change. From the state of being a barren, abandoned woman to becoming a beloved woman, to "the happy mother of children" (1-8). From a poor and weak woman to a wealthy and protected one (11-17).

- ❶ *'Shout, O barren one, you who bore no child!'*- Zion, the 'lonely woman', has two troubles. What is the trouble that's hidden within the simile in pesukim 1-3, and what emotion describes it? What trouble is described in pesukim 4-8, and what emotional experience accompanies it?
- ❷ *'For this to Me is like the waters of Noah'*- the prophet compares the covenant with Zion, that there would not be another exile, to the covenant made with Noah that there would never be another flood. What are the similarities between these two covenants? Why did Noah need the covenant after the flood, and why is the covenant required in our chapter, after the destruction and exile? See **Rashi's** commentary for Breishit 9:9:

'For Noah was afraid to engage in propagation until God promised him never to destroy the world again.'
- ❸ *'Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uncomforted!'*- Zion, who is in despair while in exile, is compared in our prophecy to a miserable and depressed woman; who has been transferred by the storm of the exile, and who is lonesome with no one to console her. The prophecy describes Zion's revival in two stages (11-12, 13-14), follow the building process in pesukim 11-12. Note who the builder is, and in what way is the building process a restoration? Follow the building as depicted in pesukim 13-14, who is the builder now, and why? Note the passage in the **Talmud Bavli**:

'R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Hanina: The disciples of the wise increase peace in the world, as it says, And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord,

and great shall be the peace of thy children. Read not *banayich* [thy children] but *bonayich* [thy builders]' [translated by Halakhah.com]

- 4 There are clear similarities between the prophecy of 'Shout, O barren one' and the prophecy of 'Unhappy, storm-tossed one'. Both describe Jerusalem as an unfortunate woman, both use the simile of building in order to describe the redemption and in both prophecies the prophet calls her not to fear: 'Fear not, you shall not be shamed' (4)- 'You shall be safe from oppression, and shall have no fear' (14). With this knowledge of the similar background- try to find points of distinction between the prophecies. (Note the distress, the comparisons and the manner in which each comparison acts as a correction for the distress)

Perek 55

Our chapter includes one of the most famous prophecies of *teshuva* (repentance) which is read on fast days (6-13). In this prophecy the prophet addresses the nation in exile and calls them to return to God, from the depth of exile, at an hour of mercy when God wishes to redeem them. Throughout the prophecy two themes intertwine within each other: divine spiritual awakening and human spiritual awakening. God approaches man, and man must utilize this hour of mercy to come close to God through his *teshuva*. Both the word of God and *teshuva* are able, together, to bridge the tremendous gap between heaven and earth- between God and man. The chapter opens with a short prophecy (1-5) which promises the nation who listens to the words of God within the prophecy, that they will merit an eternal covenant similar to the eternal covenant with King David.

- 5 'Seek the Lord while He can be found, call to Him while he is near'- What state is the nation in, that necessitates this prophecy to call for repentance of the people (6-7)? See Devarim 4:7-31, 'For what great nation is there that has a God so close at hand as is the Lord our God *whenever we call upon Him?*... But if you search there for the Lord your God, you will find Him, *if only you seek Him with all your heart and soul...* For the Lord your God is a compassionate God...!'
- 6 The prophet compares the inconceivable gap between the way of God to the way of man- to the heights of heaven and earth (9). How is this related to the call for repentance in the previous pesukim, and what are God's ways and plans in our prophecy? Note the parallel pasuk which appears in Tehillim 103:11, and another related pasuk in Yechezkel 18:25.

- 7 After demonstrating the gap between God and man using the comparison to heaven and earth, in pesukim 10-11 the prophet specifically emphasizes the link between them through the simile of rain. In what way does the simile of rain illuminate the meaning and object of God's word in the world?

Appendix

'Seek the Lord while He can be found, call to Him while he is near'

The prophecy of repentance in chapter 55 opens with a call to repent at a specific time- when God is close to those who call out to Him. The question that rises on its own is: when is this time? When is this hour of mercy for repentance? And in general, why is there a need for a specific time, for isn't God always close to those who seek Him? Indeed, this is a very important question, which merited several answers in chazal and the commentators. We shall bring one of the famous answers, found in the Talmud Bavli. From this source chazal learned the importance of the ten days of repentance.

Because it says, '*As the Lord our God is whenever we call upon him*'. But it is written, '*Seek the Lord while he may be found*? — This verse speaks of an individual, the other of a community. When can an individual [find God]? — Rabbah b. Abbuha said: These are the ten days between New Year and the Day of Atonement. (Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashana 18a. translated by halakhah.com)

This is how **Rambam** phrased it in Hilchot Teshuva (2:8) following the Talmud:

Even though repentance and crying out to God are good for the world, during the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur they are the finest, and are immediately accepted, as it says '*Seek the Lord while He can be found, call to Him while he is near*'. This is with regards to an individual; however, the community, as long as they repent and cry out whole-heartedly- they will be answered, as it says '*...as is the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him*'.

The midrash in Pesikta DeRav Kahana brings two parables on this drasha:

What is this a parable for? This is a parable for a king who said to his servants: Go out and declare throughout my nation that I shall sit and judge civil law cases; and whoever has a quarrel with his friend should come before me, and I shall judge favorably towards him until I have a capital case brought before

me. In this manner, God, blessed be He, said to Israel: My children, know that I pass judgment four times a year: At the time of Pessach- I adjudicate cases that concern produce of the field, at the time of Shavuot- cases that concern fruits of the tree, at the time of Rosh Hashana- cases that concern all the inhabitants of the world, who come before me one by one, at the time of Sukkot- cases concerning the supply of water. During three of these times I judge civil matters, some people will become rich, some poor. Some will receive more and some less; however, Rosh Hashana is when I judge capital matters. The judgment for life or death... If you have repented before me, I shall accept you, and judge you favorably, for the gates of heaven are open and I can hear your prayers. For I watch out through the windows, and peek through the cracks, right up until the time of the verdict on Yom Hakippurim; for this reason Yeshayahu said: *'Seek the Lord while He can be found'*.

What else is this a parable for? This is a parable for a king who dwelled in a country, and the residents of the country would anger him. Since the king was angry he went as far as 10 milin outside the country and stood there. A passerby saw him and told the people of the city: 'Know that the king is upset with you and wishes to send troops to destroy your city. You must go and appease him before he gets too far away. There was an intelligent one amongst them who said: 'You fools! While he was still close by you did not go out to appease him, now, before he gets farther away, approach him, and perhaps he will accept you. For it says: *'Seek the Lord while He can be found'*, in these ten days of repentance, in which God is amongst them...

We shall conclude with a Chasidic drasha on this pasuk, written by the Rebbe of Gur, the Sfat Emmet:

Chazal said *'Seek the Lord while He can be found'*, these are the ten days of repentance. For God, blessed be He, at the time of creation, made himself, so to speak, be present in this world. For every person must understand and believe that God is hidden, and farther than anything which is far. And yet, He is closer than anything which is close... This aspect of closeness was formed with the creation of the world, and is renewed each year. Indeed this closeness is achieved through Torah and Mitzvot as it is said, that Breishit ראשית means 'for' בשביל 'Torah' which is called 'Reishit' ראשית. Therefore, through sin and being idle people become farther away from this closeness; and through repentance they return to this intimacy and closeness. This closeness is renewed during these days...