

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 61-64

Perek 61

'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble... to comfort all who mourn... to give them a turban instead of ashes' (61:1-3). At the opening of our chapter the prophet announces the mission he was summoned to carry out- to console the mourners of Zion and to herald the message of the redemption. The continuation of the chapter describes another, loftier, development, when the entire nation will become priests of God *'While you shall be called priests of the Lord, and termed servants of our Lord'* (61:6).

- 1 Notice the various opposites listed in pesukim 1-3, and reflect on the connection between the naming- *'They shall be called...'*(3) and the process described in these pesukim.
- 2 Previous chapters also described how the nations brought possessions as part of the redemption process (see for example chapter 60:5-13), however, in our chapter it is given a deeper meaning. How does the naming explain the relationship between Israel and the nations in this section? Discuss what the possible meaning could be for copying the model of the Israel- priests relationship to the Israel-nations relationship.

Perek 61:10 - 62

The foundation of our chapter is the unwillingness to compromise with the partialness of the redemption, and the expectation that it will be completed in full. In the first section of the prophecy the prophet describes three phases in the development of the redemption; with a different simile appearing in each phase: the happiness of a

groom and bride (10), growth (11) and light (62:1-2). In the second section of the prophecy the prophet addresses the watchmen who guard Jerusalem's walls, and persistently pleads them to pray for the completion of Jerusalem's redemption (6-7).

- 3 *'I greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being exults in My God'* (61:10). The prophet compares the joy of the redemption to the joy of a bride and groom. Compare this pasuk with the conclusion of the prophecy (62:5). Notice the similarities and differences between the pesukim. Which dimension of the redemption is expressed in this comparison?
- 4 *'For as the earth brings forth with her growth'* (61:11). The second comparison deals with vegetation. What is the additional dimension in this comparison? To better understand the meaning of the comparison read the following explanation offered by **Radak**:
'For as the earth'- Additionally he compared Israel's redemption to the earth which sprouts foliage. For the tiny grain which was rotten and ruined on the earth, would then grow and renew itself and return to what it used to be. It would become even better and more beautiful with this renewal, for as with most things the new is better than the old; additionally, from one grain come many more. Similarly, when Israel was in exile for a long period of time, they were damaged and ruined and all hope for them was almost lost. However, when the time of the redemption comes they will grow and multiply; they will increase in numbers, honor and greatness, more than they ever had been...
- 5 *'Till her victory emerge resplendent and her triumph like a flaming torch'* (62:1). How does the comparison of light bring an additional aspect to the comparison of growth? Note the nations' responses during the phase of growth and the phase of enlightenment.

Perek 63-64

Chapter 63 opens with a short prophecy that deals with God's revenge on Edom, for the harm that they caused Israel during the time of the destruction of the Temple (63:1-6). A communal prayer and plea appears in pesukim 63:7- 64:11, dealing with Israel's situation during the destruction and exile. In the prayer the prophet contrasts God's miracles long ago with the *'hester panim'* (God's 'face' being hidden) at the time of destruction. The first section of the prayer (63: 7-14)

describes God's deeds of kindness and love for Israel in the past; and Israel's ungratefulness on the other hand, as a result of which God changed His attitude towards them and fought against them. In the second section Israel despairingly calls out to God - *'Look down from heaven and see!'*, and begs that He see their difficult situation, and the horrific destruction, and then arise to redeem them.

6 The kind acts that God did for Israel in the past (*'the days of old'*), are mentioned in two stages:

a) How is the mutual connection between pesukim 7-9 depicted? What was God's expectation from Israel, and how was His love manifested? Read the following midrash:

Israel's trouble is like God's trouble, as it says: *In all their troubles He was troubled*. Israel's rejoicing is like God's rejoicing, as it says: *I rejoice in your deliverance*. [Mechilta D'Rebbe Yishmael. Amalek 2]

b) Pesukim 10-14 describe the reversal in their relationship- *'But they rebelled, and grieved His holy spirit; then He became their enemy.'*(10); and memories of several main events from the past connected to the redemption from Egypt rise up: *'Then they remembered the ancient days...'* (11-14). Who is the one remembering in these pesukim? Study the following explanations and discuss what the meaning of remembrance is according to each one.

Rashi: The prophet complains and his words are said as a prayer- today, while in exile, His nation remembers the days of old, the days of Moshe; and in their trouble they say: where is Moshe, our shepherd, who brought us up from the Sea of Reeds?

Targum Yonatan: He spared His name because he mentioned His acts of kindness from long ago, the miracles that He did for His nation through Moshe...

Da'at Mikra (Amos Chacham): However, even during those times that He made war against them He remembered the early days, the ancient days. To hint to us that- even at times when He is angry at Israel He remembers His affection towards them from the days of yore.

7 In a plea for redemption (63:16; 64:4-9) the prophet emphasizes the basis for his request for the redemption, while dismissing other possibilities. What is unique about this basis, and in what way is it connected to God's relationship with Israel from long ago?

Appendix

The poem 'Anim Zemirot' and Yeshayahu's prophecy

The poem 'Anim Zemirot', also referred to as 'Shir Hakavod', is sung in Ashkenazi communities, at the conclusion of tefillat Shacharit or Mussaf on Shabbat and Chag. The poem is attributed to Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid, who lived during the 12-13 century, and who wrote the famous book 'Sefer Chassidim'. The poem opens with a description of the inability and lack of power of one who wishes to praise God. All the verbal references cannot succeed in expressing the uniqueness of God. The various descriptions and similes are merely partial exposures of His qualities. The poem continues to describe the intimate relationship between God and His nation, and God and His prophet Moshe.

Many pesukim describing God and Israel from Yeshayahu's prophecies, and descriptions of the bride and groom from Shir Hashirim, are woven into this beautiful tapestry. Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid goes back and forth between descriptions of God to descriptions of Israel; and with the surprising pesukim embedded from Yeshayahu he provides very special explanations, all based on the mutual love between Israel and God. We'll follow a few pesukim from the poem:

- The description of the head is central in God's and Israel's description in the poem. The description 'The hat of salvation He put on His head' is connected to Yeshayahu 59:17: *'He donned victory like a coat of mail, with a helmet of triumph on His head'*.
- God's glorification in Israel 'He shall glory in me for He desires me' is based on Yeshayahu 49:3: *'And He said to me 'You are My servant, Israel in whom I glory'*. And the nations responds 'And He shall be for me a crown of pride', meaning that he too will be glorified by God by adorning Him as a crown. This line is based on Yeshayahu 28:5: *'The Lord of Hosts shall become a crown of beauty and a diadem of glory for the remnant of His people'*.
- 'May His treasured nation be in His hand like a crown, and like a royal tiara the pride of His splendor', this is based on our prophecy, which foresees that Israel, God's treasured nation, will be like a glorious crown of kingship: *'You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God'*(62:3). In this manner Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid binds two of Yeshayahu's chapters together. The first is the prophecy in chapter 28, which describes how Israel glorifies itself by crowning God on its head, as a *tikkun* (correction) for past sins, when pride was what was crowning their head. The second, completing one, is chapter 62 which describes how God glorifies Himself by crowning Himself with Israel, as an expression of His deep love for them.

To hear Avraham Fried's Anim Zemirot click on the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCtPAHngs4g>

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