

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 40-41

Perek 40

Our chapter opens with the prophecy of consolation '*Comfort, oh comfort My people*' (*Nachamu, Nachamu Ami*). In this prophecy, Yeshayahu prophesies regarding the completion of Israel's punishment, after the period of exile in Babylonia; as well as a prophecy of the return to the land of Israel and Yerushalayim. This prophecy is the first of the seven consolation prophecies known as "*sheva de'nechemta*"- the seven haftarot instated by the sages to be read at the culmination of the three week period between the 17th of *Tamuz* and the 9th of *Av*, which we began last week. Over the generations it has become the symbol of faith and longing for a consolation for the Jewish people, giving the Shabbat it's read on its name "*Shabbat Nachamu*".

The prophecy is made up of four sections (1-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11), each containing a '*voice*' which '*rings out*'. There seems to be a gradual development between the sections. The first section opens with a comforting call to Yerushalayim. The second section calls to pave the road in preparation for the return of God to Yerushalayim. Finally, the announcement of His arrival in Yerushalayim concludes these sections.

The second part of the chapter (12-31) describes Yeshayahu's dispute with the idol worshippers, in which he contrasts God who is the one and only creator and ruler of the world, with the futility of the idols. While the idols are confined within their material forms, God on the other hand rules and encompasses the natural world, and is not constricted by it. The controversy with the idol-worshippers recurs in the following chapters and is historically related to the period of time of these prophecies. During this period the Jewish people of Babylonia were immersed in the flourishing pagan culture, while their own God deserted them, supposedly, in Exile. This claim is described in our chapter: "*Why do you say, O Jacob, Why declare, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, My cause is ignored by my God*" (27). Contending this claim Yeshayahu emphasizes both the immense difference between the idols and God, and the profound and eternal connection between God and His people.

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מִתַּן מַתָּן

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The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

1 *'Comfort, oh comfort My people'*, Yeshayahu's consolation prophecies open with this divine call. Who is this call to comfort Israel directed at?

Compare the explanations offered by Targum Yonatan and Midrash Pesikta Rabati:

Targum Yonatan: Prophets, prophesy condolences for my nation.

Midrash Pesikta Rabati (Ish Shalom. Parsha 29): *'Comfort, oh comfort My people'*- R' Brachya HaCohen said: Comfort me, comfort me- my people. Customarily, if a man owned a vineyard and thieves came and chopped it down; who would need comfort, the vineyard or the owner? So too, if a man owned a house and then thieves came and burned it; who would need to be comforted, the house or the owner? You are my vineyard *'The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel'* (Yeshayahu 5:7). Nevuchadnetzar then came and demolished it, exiled you and burned my house. It is I who should be comforted, Comfort me, comfort me- my people.

2 *"For she has received at the hand of the Lord double for all her sins"* (2).

Why did Yerushalayim deserve a double punishment?

Refer to the following explanations:

Abrabanel: They have polished their sins already, and it is as if God has borrowed and owes them good favors in return for their additional punishment, and He can be trusted to do so.

Shadal: The magnitude of the tragedy is usually exaggerated by those who come to comfort in order to express their empathy; for one surely would not be receptive to their condolences had they not done so.

Amos Chacham [Da'at Mikra]: The prophecy utilizes a parable based on the laws of the Torah which state that a robber must pay double damages. One who cannot pay back the money is sold as a slave. Similarly, the nation of Israel was liable for double the damages on account of their sins and therefore was enslaved to pay back what was due.

3 *"Ascend a lofty mountain, O herald of joy to Zion..."* (9-11)

a) The messenger stands high up on a mountain and his voice can be heard calling out the return of God to Yerushalayim. To better understand the role of a messenger who returns to report the outcomes of war see II Shmuel 18: 19-28.

b) Two different pictures of God's return to Yerushalayim are given in pesukim 10-11. How is God characterized in each one, and what type of leadership does it reflect? Discuss what His *"arm"* expresses in each picture.

- 4 In Pesukim 26-31 Yeshayahu proceeds to describe the might of God shown by his government over the heavenly bodies. In what way does this description add to the previous ones regarding the creation of the world executed by God; and how can this be considered a response to the nation's contention in pasuk 27? Note the repetition of the motif of strength and might as opposed to weariness in this paragraph.

Perek 41

Continuing the disputation against the idols and their worshippers from the previous chapter, our chapter opens by summoning the idol-worshippers to judgment (1-7). This is no ordinary judgment, rather a unique one in which the idols stand opposite God; and at the end of which it will be determined who the real god is. A similar judgment appears at the end of the chapter (21-29) and in several other places in the following chapters. The heart of the chapter (17-20) depicts the flourishing of the desert as the redemption begins, including the eruption of springs and the growth of seven trees within it.

- 5 Study pesukim 2-4 and 22-26. What are the criteria for examining the authenticity of a god in judgment?

Read the following explanation by **Rashi** (26):

I foresee the future, I am the one who awakens to rebuild the ruins of Yerushalayim, and Cyrus of the north and Babylonia to destroy it.

- 6 "Seed of Avraham My friend" (8). Read the following commentaries and compare the different descriptions of the love of Avraham (אהבי). Which commentary do you think fits the context of our prophecy the most?

Rashi: For he did not know me out of rebuke or the teaching of his ancestors, but out of love.

Radak: For he loved me, was loyal to me and came from idol worshippers.

Rambam (Sefer Hamitzvot, Asseh 3): Due to his love for us He commanded us... For this mitzvah also includes the command to call all other human beings to worship God and to believe in Him. Just as you would do when you love a person, you praise his virtues before others and call them to love him – all this is a metaphor. So too, if you truly love God, and this love was acquired through obtaining knowledge of his true being you will go forth and convince the foolish and the simpletons of the truth that you have acquired. And the **Sifri** (Devarim 6:5) states "*You shall love the Lord your God with all*

your heart": Make Him be loved by the people as your father Avraham did as it says (Breishit 12:5) '*...and the persons that they had acquired in Haran*'. What this means is that just as Avraham, who is called '*Avraham My friend*', called out to others to believe in God because of all of his love towards Him; so too, you should love Him to the point that you would call others to love Him as well.

- 7 In pesukim 6-7 Yeshayahu scornfully describes the relationship between the idol-worshippers and their idols. Discuss the contrasting parallel found in the following section (8-11) which describes the relationship between God and Israel. Note the contextual significance of the roots "to strengthen" (חזק) and "to help" (עזר) which appear in both sections.

Appendix

A double consolation

Their sin was double, their punishment was double and their consolation is double. Their sin was double, as it says '*Jerusalem has greatly sinned*' (the word 'sin' is repeated in the original Hebrew חטא חטא Eicha 1:8). Their punishment was double, as it says '*For she has received at the hand of the Lord double for all her sins*' (Yeshayahu 40:2). Their consolation is double, as it says '*Comfort, of comfort My people*' (ibid 40:1).

God said to him: Yeshayahu, '*You love righteousness*' (Tehillim 45:8), you loved to justify my sons, '*...and hate wickedness*' (ibid.) you despised to hold them liable, '*...rightly has God, your God, chosen to anoint you with oil of gladness over all your peers*' (ibid.). What is '*over all your peers*'? God said to him: I swear that all the prophets who prophesy, one prophet in the name of another: '*The spirit of Elyahu has settled on Elisha*' (II Melachim 2:15), the spirit of Moshe which settled upon the seventy elders: '*He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders*' (Bamidbar 11:25); but you prophesy from the mouth of the Lord: '*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me*' (Yeshayahu 61:1). In addition to that, all other prophets prophesy simple prophecies, but you prophesy double ones: 'Awake, awake' (ibid 51:9), '*Rouse, rouse*' (ibid 51:17), '*I greatly rejoice*' (ישׁוּעַ אֲשִׁישׁ ibid 61:10), '*I, I am He*' (ibid 51:12) and '*Comfort, of comfort My people*' (ibid 40:1).

'*Says your God*' (ibid)- R' Chanina bar Pappa said: Israel said to Yeshayahu, Our Rabbi Yeshayahu, was your consolation meant only for the generation who lived during the destruction of the first temple? He replied to them: I have come to comfort all the future generations, for it does not say *said your God*, rather '*Says your God*' [future tense].

[Pesikta D'Rav Cahana 16]