

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

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Shabbos Rosh Chodesh

Who ever heard anything like this? Who ever saw anything like these things? Can a land go through labor in one day? Can a nation be born all at once? For Zion has gone into labor and born her children. (Haftarah, Yishaya 66:8)

The Midrash at the very end of Shir Hashirim Rabbah says that the Neviim use several metaphors for the redemption of Israel. They compare it to:

1. The grain harvest: "Use the sickle, for the harvest is ripe" (Yoel 4:13).
2. The grape harvest: "On that day, sing to it [Israel], the wine vineyard" (Yishaya 27:2).
3. The spice harvest: "Flee, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer, on the mountains of spice" (Shir Hashirim 8:14).
4. A woman giving birth: "Therefore He will place them [the Jews in the hands of their enemies] until the time when the woman gives birth" (Micha 5:2). This metaphor is also found in Yishaya 66:7-8: "Before she went into labor, she bore a child; before any pains came to her, she let out a boy. Who ever heard anything like this? Who ever saw anything like these things? Can a land go through labor in one day? Can a nation be born all at once? For Zion has gone into labor and born her children." And also in Tehillim 113:9: "He makes the barren woman of the house into a joyful mother of children."

The Midrash says that the common thread of all these metaphors is that they cannot be done too early. If grain is cut too early, it will not be good even as animal feed. If grapes are cut too early, they will not even be good to make vinegar. If spice is picked too early, it will not have a smell; it must be allowed to dry out on the tree. And if a woman gives birth prematurely, the baby will not live.

The Matnos Kehunah explains: "The meaning of all these analogies is that when Israel hurries the end, they are not successful, but at the proper time, may it be soon, they will be successful. And they will ascend in the name of Hashem, may He be blessed and exalted forever."

The Yefeh Kol explains: "These things, which are not good before their time, are an analogy for what would happen if Israel breaks through to leave the exile with the strength of their hands, like the children of Ephraim."

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld used an analogy to explain why premature redemption is not good. Once there was a prince who excelled in all areas and was perfect in every way. He was also the only child of his father, the king, and his father loved him dearly. One day the prince became seriously ill. His father sent for the best doctors and brought them to his hospital bedside, where he stood together with him. Could one imagine that such a wise boy would ask his father and his doctors to free him from the hospital and send him home? And even if he did make such a foolish request, they

would not grant it, despite their mercy and love for him. Leaving while not completely recovered would put his life in danger.

We, the Jewish people, are in such a situation. Hashem sent us into exile because of our sins. The exile is the Jewish people's hospital. It is unthinkable that we should take ourselves power in our land before our healing process is complete. Hashem protects us and shields us while doling out to us the medicine of suffering in exact amounts. We are certain that when the time comes and our healing from our sins is complete, Hashem will not delay even one second, and He Himself will redeem us. Not so if we would hurry to leave the hospital – then a mortal danger, a perpetual danger would hover over us, G-d forbid. And even when we pray for our redemption, we only ask that our healing process be completed quickly – not that we should return to the King's palace while still sick, G-d forbid" (Mara D'ara Yisroel v. 1 p. 145).

We can better understand the prophet's question "can a land go through labor in one day" based on the following Gemara in Gittin 57a: Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav Asi: King Yannai had 600,000 cities in Har Hamelech, and each city had 600,000 Jews, except for three, which had 1,200,000 each... Ulla said: I saw that place and it did not even have enough room for 600,000 reeds. A heretic said to Rabbi Chanina: You are lying when you claim that there were so many people there! Rabbi Chanina replied: Hashem said to the prophet Yirmiyahu (3:19), "I gave you a cherished land, the inheritance of the deer, the hosts of the nations." Eretz Yisroel is called the land of the deer. Just as a deer's skin cannot cover its flesh once it has been flayed, Eretz Yisroel expands when people dwell on it, and shrivels when no one dwells on it.

Yishaya Hanavi, seeing his vision of the redemption, expressed his wonder not just at the sudden dramatic growth of the Jewish people, but also at the ability Eretz Yisroel will have to absorb them. Eretz Yisroel, in its exilic state, is not a land that can support millions of people, let alone hundreds of millions or billions. Like the skin of the deer, it has shriveled up. A few people can live there and successfully farm the land. But when ten million try to live there, they run into insurmountable obstacles: the water supply is inadequate. The rivers and groundwater become polluted and poisoned.

Those attempting large-scale settlement of Eretz Yisroel during exile fit into one of two categories. Some are like the heretic mentioned in the Gemara. They don't recognize the difference between a time of exile and a time when the Jewish people is supposed to be living on its land. If the land could support so many people in the Temple era, it should be able to do so today too, they say. To them, Rabbi Chanina responds with the analogy of the deer's skin. Others understand that there is a process of "labor" that the land must go through, as Yishaya Hanavi says, but they think they can induce this labor early. For them, the Midrash at the end of the Shir Hashirim warns that attempting to bring the redemption early is like a woman giving birth early - the baby will not live.

But the Midrash concludes on a positive note: although we may not bring the redemption ourselves, Hashem Himself might bring it early if we are worthy: "I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it" (Yishaya 60:22). If we are not worthy, it will happen in its time, but if we are worthy, He will hasten it. So may it be His will, soon in our days, amein



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