

This week's learning is in memory of a devoted and beloved father,
Zoltan Sternberg, who passed away 2 Shvat, 5763

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 31-32

Perek 31

At the center of the prophecy of consolation in perek 31 is the description of the Matriarch Rachel who pleads bitterly before the Creator that he should return her sons to their land and redeem them from their exile; a plea which has echoed in the heart of the Jewish nation in all the generations and in all the diasporas. The perek focuses on the Kingdom of Israel which is in ruins in exile and foresees repentance, the return to the land and the unification of Israel and Judah. The deep change which will happen in the Nation of Israel is expressed also in the continuation of the perek(26-39), where we find three short prophecies which open with the phrase *"Behold, the days come, says the Lord"*, which describe the future which will take place in the era of the redemption.

① *"A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children"* (14). In pesukim 14-15 we have a description of Rachel's weeping for her children in exile.

a) Follow the development of three different stages of crying.

b) The prophecy weaves a verbal web which ties the idea of the loss of Yosef in a foreign land to the loss of Israel in its exile, and Yaakov's loss and mourning for the eldest son of Rachel, to the mourning and crying of Rachel over her children who *"are not"*. The prophet says *"she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."* By using this language he alludes to the words of Yaakov about Yosef *"Joseph is not"*(Bereshit 42:36). About Rachel it is written *"she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."* And about Yaakov it is written *"but he refused to be comforted; and he said: 'Nay, but I will go down to the grave to my son mourning'"* (Bereshit 37:35)

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program

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מתן מן

מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננערט
The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

What is the meaning of this connection? Read **Rashi** in Breshit on this pasuk:

“but he refused to be consoled: No one accepts consolation for a person who is really alive but believed to be dead, for it is decreed that a dead person should be forgotten from the heart, but not a living person.” According to Rashi, what is the meaning of Rachel’s eternal crying?

- 2 After hearing the voice and crying of the mother, we hear the voice of the son – ‘Ephraim’, who represents the ten tribes in exile. The construct of the passage (17-19) is identical to that of the previous passage (15-17), and represents a conversation between Ephraim, the repentant son, and his Father in heaven. What is the central basis for Ephraim’s repentance and what causes it to be accepted by God? Refer to the **Rambam** in Hilchot Teshuva 2:2:

What is repentance? That the person should abandon his sins, remove them from his thoughts and resolve never to do it again. As it is written, *“Let the wicked man forsake his way, etc.”* (Yishayahu 55: 7). He must also regret the past [sin], as it is written, *“For after I had returned I regretted”* (Yirmiyahu 31:18).

- 3 *“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah”* (30). What is the difference between the covenant which was made in the past and the new covenant? Think about the spiritual meaning of this difference. Compare this prophecy with the prophecy in Yirmiyahu 3:16-18 which deals with the Ark of the Covenant, where the Tablets of the Law are, which are the testimony to the covenant at Sinai. What do these two changes which will take place in the time of the Redemption have in common? (See also 17:1 – “It is engraved on the tablet of their heart”)

Perek 32

In the second year of the siege on Jerusalem, about a year before the city’s destruction, Yirmiyahu, who is imprisoned in the court of the guard, receives a commandment to do something extraordinary – to purchase a field from his cousin. This action, which symbolizes renewal and redemption, is totally contrary to the current situation in the city and to Yirmiyahu’s prophecies about absolute destruction by the king of Babylonia. This contrast brings Yirmiyahu to question God’s behavior (16-25). His question is answered by God in a long and detailed answer (26-44), which presents the purchase as a symbol of redemption and growth after the Babylonian exile.

- 4 The first pesukim in the perek (1-5) are an introduction to the story. What is the reality described in these pesukim? Try to figure out what the function of the introduction is.
- 5 Pesukim 9-14 include one of the most detailed descriptions of acquisition (*kinyan*) in scripture, and are a source of the laws of acquisition for the Rabbis and in Halachic literature. Why do you think this process is so emphasized and detailed in our perek?
- 6 After Yirmiyahu fulfills God's commandment he turns to God in a speech (16-25) which opens with the words "Ab! Lord God!"
- A similar expression appears in other places in our book: 1:6, 4:10 and 14:13. What do these pesukim have in common?
 - Analyze Yirmiyahu's main allegation in our perek. Note the emphasis on *Torat Hagmul*, the idea that God rewards righteousness and punishes evil, and think about what it contributes to his allegation against God's behavior.
 - Compare Yirmiyahu's opening (17) with God's opening (27). How is Yirmiyahu's perspective different from God's perspective?

Appendix

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not. Thus says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord; and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says the Lord; and your children shall return to their own border. (31:14-16)

Midrash – Eicha Rabba, proem

At that hour (the destruction of the Temple and exile), our mother Rachel jumped up before God and said: "Master of the universe, it is known to you that Yaakov loved me greatly and worked for me seven years. And when he completed those seven years and it was time for me to marry, my father decided to put my sister in my stead, and this was very difficult for me. I heard the plan and I told my husband and gave him a sign so that he should be able to differentiate between her and me, so my father would not be able to switch me. And that evening they switched my sister for me and I gave my sister all the signs I had given my husband, so that he would think that she was Rachel. Not only that, but I crept under the bed where he was with my sister and he would speak to her and she would be silent while

I answered him, so that he would not recognize my sister's voice, and I was kind to her and did not envy her and did not allow her to be humiliated. If I, who am but mere flesh and blood, dust and ashes, didn't begrudge my competition and didn't cause her embarrassment, You, Who are the immortal eternal King, how could you be jealous of idolatry, which is meaningless, and exile my children and allow them to be killed by the sword and to be treated so by the enemy?" Immediately God's mercy was awakened and He said: "For you, Rachel, I will bring Israel back to their place."

The weeping of Rachel continues to echo until our day...

From Rabbi Menachem Porush z"l's book.

My history with the tomb of Rachel started many, many years ago. We always prayed there, and we knew that weeping at the Matriarch Rachel's tomb would bring salvation and redemption.

After the Six Day War, when by God's grace we merited returning to the place, I came there with the Jerusalem Tzaddik, the "father of the prisoners", Rabbi Aryeh Levin Ztz"l and the Gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz...

Rabbi Aryeh Levin called out in tears, "Mama Ruchel".

And Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz said, crying terribly, "Mother Rachel, it says in the pasuk *"Refrain your voice from weeping"* and I say to you **keep** crying *for your work shall be rewarded!*"

It is difficult to describe the awe-filled scene which occurred there...

In the Oslo agreements Rabin was going to give away Rachel's tomb. Many people tried to pressure him not to relinquish the tomb, but were unsuccessful. In the beginning I was hesitant to get involved, but in the end I asked for a meeting with Rabin. I came to him and I said to him: "How did you decide to transfer Rachel's tomb? This decision is now in your hands." I grabbed Rabin and started to cry, and there was no way to stop me.

Rabin stood silent and was embarrassed. He said to me: "Rabbi Porush, is this how emotional you are?" I said to him: "Rachel's tomb is our soul," and the cries got stronger and stronger. I could not stop myself.



Painting of Rachel's Tomb, 1911

[Wikipedia / The book "The Heart of the Bible" by Ella Broadus Robertson (Editor)]

At that very meeting, Eitan Haber told me that the decision was changed, that Rachel's tomb would not be given to the Palestinian Authority.

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