

Inspirations from the Haftarah – Behar
Purchasing a field as a show of good faith... in Hashem
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The haftarah for Parshas Behar contains a direct connection to the Torah reading as well as a deeper message. The two texts are linked by a discussion of the laws of *Yovel* - the Jubilee year. The Torah tells us (Vayikra 25:25-28) that if one is forced to sell a field that is part of a 'family farm,' then a relative within that family should try to redeem the property, thus keeping it in the family's possession. But whether or not a relative performs this mitzvah, when the Yovel year arrives, possession of the field automatically reverts to the original owner, at no charge. In this week's haftarah, Yirmiyahu HaNavi (Jeremiah the prophet) fulfills this mitzvah by redeeming a field from his uncle Chanamel, son of Shulem. The transaction is recorded in detail, from the weighing of the silver to the signing of documents in the presence of witnesses. The document was handed, in front of witnesses, to Baruch ben Neriah, for safekeeping in an earthenware vessel designed to preserve it. Why the emphasis on preservation? Because even though Yirmiyahu the prophet foresaw the imminent destruction of the [first] Bais Hamikdash and our subsequent exile, he wanted to instill in us faith that we would eventually return and repossess our land; thus, he took pains to redeem his family property.

Beyond the bittersweet promise contained in this prophecy, the haftarah contains some deeper and even more moving elements when examined in its broader context. The haftarah is taken from Chapter 32 of Sefer Yirmiyahu. A few verses before the start of our public reading, the verses describe the setting for what is to follow: it was the eighteenth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Bavel (Babylon) and the tenth year for Tzidkiyahu, king of Yehuda (Judah). In fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecies, the Babylonian armies had already laid siege to Jerusalem. Yirmiyahu had warned King Tzidkiyahu not to try to fight the Babylonian army, since he would surely be defeated.

As is the case with many prophets, Yirmiyahu's message was derided and rejected, and thus Yirmiyahu found himself in prison,

where he received a prophecy about his uncle coming to him to discuss the redemption of a field. True to the vision, Uncle Chanamel arrives, and Yirmiyahu redeems the property, after which the prophet proclaims to all present that he had been instructed to do so by Hashem. He explains that he was carrying out his mission in order to inspire the populace in the knowledge that even though they are about to go into exile, they will return to Eretz Yisrael, where they are sure to purchase fields again.

This point is even more moving when we consider that it was Yirmiyahu who reported the darkest prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Bais HaMikdash. So much of Sefer Yirmiyahu is devoted to the horrifying forecast of Jerusalem's destruction and the deportation of its populace to Bavel, the land of our enemies. The prophet laments in Eichah (Lamentations) 3:1 that he was the man who saw all the horrible prophecies come true; unlike the other prophets who merely predicted calamity but did not live through them, Yirmiyahu actually experienced Hashem's wrath. On the other hand, Yirmiyahu himself prophesied that despite the horrific massacres and devastation, there "will yet be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem: the voice of gladness and simcha, the voices of groom and the bride" (Jeremiah 33:10-11), the verse which lends itself to a song sung at virtually every Jewish wedding. So despite the visions and even very real eventuality of a destroyed and desolate Jerusalem, its inhabitants taken as captives, Yirmiyahu shows us a vision of a future Jerusalem where the fullness of Jewish life will be felt again someday. God's compassionate pledge includes the promise to rebuild our devastated holy city, return us to our homeland, and embrace us, this time eternally; in the closeness we shared in ancient times.

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, zt"l, pointed out something very similar in the time of the second churban. Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai who was our leader at the time showed a similar characteristic to Yirmiyahu. As is well known, he negotiated with the Romans to allow us to continue our Torah Centers at Yavneh. It was clear that he saw the destruction coming and planned effectively on how to keep our religion and community intact. At the same time he made takanos with the thought that the Bais Hamikdash will

soon be rebuilt. One example of his takanos was the takana that he made to forbid eating of the new crop [chodosh] till the 17 day of Nissan. When the Bais Hamikdash stood, it was forbidden to eat chodosh till the kohanim brought the special korbonos including the flour offering from the new barley crop. After the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, min Hatorah, one would be allowed to eat chodosh at sunrise because the day of the 16 of Nissan itself allowed chodosh to be eaten. However, Rabban Yochanan Be Zakai made the Takana to forbid eating chodosh till the following day. His reasoning was that perhaps when the Bais Hamikdash is rebuilt, people will not know to wait for the Kohanim to bring the special korbonos and eat chodosh too early. This was the analysis of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai who led Klal Yisroel through the Churban! Rav Wachtfogel, zt"l, concluded from here that even in the horror of the Churban itself, we see the sparks of geulah had been planted and even in the face of such horrific destruction one must be cognizant of geulah and not get so lost in the tragedy as to lose all hope. Such are the extraordinary talents of our greatest leaders. On one hand, they demonstrably bear the pain and tragedy of our people. On the other hand, they see and inspire others to see beyond the immediate; they show us how even destruction brings messages of hope and courage.

Our generation can rightfully be inspired by the messages of Yirmiyahu. After 2,000 years of exile, we still must not lose hope that we will return to our homeland in the full sense. We have lived to see the revival of Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem as beautiful, vibrant centers of Torah and Jewish life. May we continue to see the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the rest of our homeland with the coming of the *geulah shleimah* - the ultimate redemption.