

## Haftarah Weekly

This week's haftarah is from Yirmiya (1:1 – 2:3). It is the first of the 'three haftaras of affliction' which we read between תשעה באב and שבועה עשר בתמוז.

Yirmiyahu, of all the prophets, was witness to the greatest amount of tragedy. Weeping, he beheld the destruction of the First Temple and its Priests, the city of Yerushalayim and much of its population, with the remainder sent into bitter exile to Babylon.

Yet, his very first message to his People, which appears at the end of the haftarah, is a message of the eternal love of Hashem, the first love of a groom for his bride, because even if she becomes unfaithful, in the end, they will be reunited.

Firstly, Hashem tells Yirmiyahu "While you were still in your mother's womb, I knew you and I sanctified you, and appointed you as a Prophet for the Nations." Yirmiyahu's immediate response is that he is too young to be a prophet. But Hashem replies that he must do whatever He tells him and that there is nothing to fear anyway for He will be with him to help him and rescue him from any trouble. And then, "Hashem sent forth His Hand, and touched my mouth, and He said: "Behold, I have put my word into your mouth. Know that I have appointed you today over the Nations and over the Kingdoms, to uproot, to break down, to eliminate and to destroy, (but ultimately), to build and to plant!"

The haftarah continues with two visions of Yismiyahu.

The first is a vision of an almond-wood staff. Hashem tells him that he has "seen well" and that the vision symbolises that He will bring His word to fruition quickly. Next, he sees a boiling pot which is bubbling from its north side. Once again Hashem explains the vision. He says "From the north shall the evil loose itself upon all the inhabitants of the Land..." He clarifies that the reason for the destruction of Israel and its temple is because they forsook Him and worshipped idols.

The chapter concludes with G-d's charge to Yirmiyahu. He states "and you must gird up your loins, and stand, and relay to them everything that I command you; do not tremble before them, lest I cut you down before them. But I have made you into a fortified city and an iron pillar and copper walls over the entire Land - against the Kings of Yehudah, their officers, their Priests, and the people of the Land. And they will do battle against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you – the word of Hashem – to rescue you."

But as mentioned above, Yirmiyahu's first message to the people is one of hope and beauty: "And the Word of G-d came to me saying: "Go and say in the ears of Yerushalayim, 'I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your engagement time; when you followed Me into the desert, a land that was not sown.' Israel is holy unto the L-rd! It is His first produce; anyone who attempts to devour it will be utterly destroyed; evil will come upon him – the word of HaShem." (Yirmiya 2:1-3) Although we sin, Hashem will never forsake us and whoever harms us will be destroyed



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## Intention

This week's sedrah discusses the halachos of nedorim – oaths. The possuk says that if a woman makes an oath the father is able to nullify it (במדבר ל:ד-ו). The possuk continues further to say that "Hashem will forgive her". Rashi quotes Gemoro Kiddushin (81b) where it says that if a woman makes a neder to be a *nazeret* and her husband nullifies it without telling her, if she drinks wine or becomes impure (due to a corpse), then even though she seemingly did nothing wrong, she has still done an aveiroh. The Gemoro itself brings two parables. The first is the case that Rashi quoted and the second is regarding how if someone sins by accident they must bring a Korbon Chattos. Rabbi Akiva argues logically: if one who eats meat thinking its pig when it is actually lamb has sinned, and that one who eats meat thinking its lamb when in reality its pig needs to bring a Korbon, then how much more so a person who thinks he is eating pig and actually eats pig needs atonement. Therefore, it is evident there are two parts to every sin and this Gemoro seems to illustrate them. There is the physical sin of having eaten pig, and like drinking poison one has to heal himself (by means of a Korbon), but there is also an emotional side as even if the physical act itself was not harmful, the pure intention was to act against the Will of G-d and this upsets Him.

On the other hand though, we know that G-d's

*rachamim* (mercy) is stronger than His din (judgement), so if one simply attempts to do G-d's Will but fails, Hashem will reward him for the effort.

Later on in the sedrah, Moshe also teaches us how important our intentions are. The tribes of Gad, Reuven, and half of Menasheh came to Moshe and requested to live in *Ever Ha'yarden*. They said to Moshe "We will build enclosures for our livestock and cities for our children and then we will come and help you in battle". Moshe replied to them "build cities for your children, build enclosures for your livestock and then join us in battle". By switching the order of enclosures and cities, Moshe is trying to show the people that family comes first and even though they planned on establishing and building both, when they initially proposed it, their intention was clearly that business should come first and that is not right.

From both incidents in the parsha, we see how intentions make an enormous difference; good intentions can help even if we don't succeed, and bad intentions can harm even if we don't do what we intended.

*Anonymously contributed*

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## M'lachah of the Week

*Mechatech – Cutting*

Up till now we have dealt with the preparation of the hides. This m'lachah comes from cutting the hides in the Mishkan. Under this m'lachah all types of cutting are prohibited, apart from cutting food. Cutting food is not called 'mechatech' so is therefore permitted. Although tearing toilet paper is included in mechatech, when one doesn't have any ready-cut paper, one can tear the paper with a shinui – a change. However, when tearing the paper, one cannot tear along the perforated lines, since their purpose is to ensure a neat tear is made, and one cannot have that intention when tearing the paper.

## Words of the Wise

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (who lived in the 2nd century CE in Israel) was a Tanna. However, the day after Rosh Hashanah he showed up at the door of his nephews' home and began to lecture them about the importance of giving charity to the poor.

Although they didn't really have money to spare and totally didn't understand the urgency of what he was saying, they listened attentively; when Rabbi Shimon spoke everyone listened.

"Give with an open hand," Rabbi Shimon adjured. "Don't worry about tomorrow, G-d will provide. And most important: write it all down. Every penny you give, write it down and carry the list with you at all times. I want to see a big sum at the end of the year."

Rabbi Shimon made them promise and he left. Almost a year later they had another strange visit from Roman soldiers with an order for their arrest. Someone accused them of selling silk without paying the tax to the government. They began weeping and protesting their innocence but to no avail.

Trembling with fear, they were led off to prison where they were given a choice: either pay an outrageous fine of six hundred dinar or produce an even more outrageously priced silk garment for the king, both of which were utterly beyond their means.

When Rabbi Shimon heard what had happened he immediately rushed to the prison and got special permission to visit his relatives. "Where is the account of the charity you gave?" He asked. "How much did you give?" "Here," they replied as one of them pulled the small parchment from his pocket.

Rabbi Shimon took the account and noticed that they had given almost six hundred dinar; they were just six dinar short. "Do you have any money with you?" he asked.

They produced six dinar that they had sewn into their garments in case they needed it. Rabbi Shimon took the money, bribed one of the officials, the charges were dropped and they were released.

Rabbi Shimon explained to them what had happened. "This past Rosh Hashanah I dozed off and dreamt that the government would demand of you six hundred dinars. That is why I told you to give charity, to negate the decree."

"Then why didn't you tell us about that?" they complained. "We would have given the money immediately and spared ourselves a lot of anguish."

***"But then," replied Rabbi Shimon. "You wouldn't have done the mitzvah for its own sake." (From Midrash Rabbah, Vayikrah 34:12) Chabad.com***

## Encourage others not to Discourage...

Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven; "Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? Why do you dissuade the heart of the B'nei Yisroel from crossing over to the land that HASHEM has given them? This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land." (Bamidbar 32:6-8 – story of the meraglim)

The **Malbim** points out that from here we find out something that was not clearly stated earlier. We had the impression that the main problem of the spies was that they had spoken badly about the land. Now, forty years later, we learn that another serious aveirah had been committed; that they had spoken words that were discouraging to the B'nei Yisroel. A whole generation later and Moshe is still very concerned about this issue. How vulnerable then is the average person to being discouraged. See how important it is to lend encouragement to others and not to do or say anything that might soften their resolve.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin writes in 'Gateways to Happiness', "Be aware of the positive traits and behaviour of the people with whom you come into contact and help them build upon their strengths. Encouragement is a much more powerful tool for change and growth than blaming and condemning. You can bring about miracles in a person's life if you believe in their potential". **Rabbi Shlome Wolbe**, one of the great Mashgichim of the previous generation, was well known for his promoting of encouragement and positive motivation in children as being one of the key ingredients to their successful growth. With the casual power of remote control, and in a given moment, one can easily turn someone on or turn them off, and never know how far it might travel.

*adapted from various sources by Rabbi Amar*

### Parsha Bite!

In this week's parsha, Hashem commands the B'nei Yisroel to fight against Midian. He says - נקום נקמת' - בני ישראל - Take vengeance for the Children of Israel from the Midianites. When Moshe relays the message to the People, he says לתת נקמת ה' to inflict Hashem's vengeance. The obvious question arises; why did Moshe adapt the words of Hashem when relaying the message to the B'nei Yisroel. The Midrash Rabbah (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:2) recounts a discussion between Hashem and Moshe to answer this question. Hashem argues that He only wants to cause harm to the Midianites because they caused spiritual harm to His People – therefore it is vengeance for the B'nei Yisroel. However, Moshe argues back that the only reason why the Midianites hated the Jews in the first place was because Hashem gave us the Torah. Indeed this is the root of all anti-semitism. Moshe adds that if we had served idols or would not have undergone circumcision then the Midianites would never have wanted to harm us in the first place. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch suggests a link between the roots 'קום' – get up 'נקום' – revenge'. He explains that rather than revenge, נקם means the re-erection of rights which have been trodden on, or a person who has been thrown to the ground. This can aid us in understanding the midrash. We know that the midianites seduced the Jewish men and also enticed them into serving Avodah Zarah but as Moshe explained, the Midianites real quarrel was with the Torah, therefore this "revenge" was actually the re-establishment of the Torah's spiritual and moral principles.