



MRS. LEAH FEINBERG

OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

From Eicha to Iyov: Reflections on National and Personal Affliction

Among the numerous possible eras in which Iyov may have lived, Hazal suggest that he was a contemporary of Nevuchadnezzar, who destroyed the First Temple.¹ The basis for this suggestion is the news brought by a messenger that a band of Chaldeans had fallen upon Iyov's camels and camel drivers. Maharsha explains that only in the time of Nevuchadnezzar would the Chaldeans have been unified under the banner of that appellation.²

Further support for the notion that Iyov lived during the era of the destruction of the First Temple is found in Megillat Eicha. The third chapter of Eicha opens with the phrase "אני הגבר ראה עני" - I am the man (*gever*) who has seen affliction." Hazal offer several suggestions as to the identity of the speaker. While Rashi cites the view that the speaker is Yirmiyahu, who unlike other prophets witnessed the fulfillment of his dire predictions, Hazal offer another opinion: "אנא הוא" [The speaker is] Iyov, as the verse states 'Who is a man (*gever*) like Iyov, who drinks scoffing like water?'³

The proof text brought by the midrash is not the first time in the sefer that Iyov is referred to as "*HaGever*", nor is this the only support for the notion that Iyov was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu. In Chapter 3 of Sefer Iyov, after his friends had sat with him for some time in silent commiseration, Iyov bursts forth with a heartrending lamentation, cursing the day of his birth and the night of his conception - "יֵאבֶד יוֹם אוֹלָד בִּי, וְהַלִּילָה אִמִּי" - "Yirmiyahu similarly curses the day upon which he was born. Da'at Mikra sees in this and other similarities between the language of Sefer Iyov and Megillat Eicha a suggestion of contemporaneous forms of expression.⁴

Rav Medan offers an insightful contrast between the two figures: While Yirmiyahu's lament expressed his despair that he was unable to fulfill his life's mission of preventing the Churban, Iyov was lamenting his own personal suffering. The latter was a failure of Emunah, while Yirmiyahu was expressing a legitimate sense of frustration at his inability to prevent a national catastrophe.⁵

The use of the term *Gever* is not unique to

1. Bava Batra 15b

2. Chiddushei Aggadot Bava Batra 15b

3. Eicha Rabbah 3

4. Da'at Mikra, Introduction to Sefer Iyov

5. Iyov: Between Darkness and Light, Chapter 3

Yirmiyahu and Iyov, yet Hazal link them by virtue of this shared expression. Commenting on the use of the term in Megillat Eicha, Rav Baruch HaLevi Epstein explains that the speaker chose specifically this expression because of its shared root with the term “*Gevurah*”, might. Hashem endowed us with the strength to withstand suffering, and even one who experiences profound national or personal affliction is capable of accepting these challenges with love if he possesses faith in Hashem.⁶ How many courageous men and women of our own time have demonstrated the truth of this principle! Iyov has the capacity to accept his suffering as just, and his refusal to do so is therefore a failure of Emunah.

While this may be the classic understanding of Iyov, Rabbi Sacks turns this theory on its head. In his words, “Though [Job] defies G-d, he does not lose faith in Him... Despite the fact that he knows his suffering is unjust, he does not cease to talk to G-d, to argue, pray, challenge, debate, question and fight against wrong even to the very gates of heaven itself. He is capable of the sustained cognitive dissonance that lives at the very nerve center of Jewish consciousness. G-d exists and evil exists (at least from the perspective of humankind)... *Faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty.* It does not mean having the answers, it means having the courage to ask the questions and not let go of G-d, as He does not let go of us.”⁷

May this cognitive dissonance speedily be resolved with the coming of Mashiach and the end of all human suffering. ■

6. Torah Temimah Eicha Chapter 3

7. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, To Heal the World, pp. 198-199

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi program

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