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בס"ד

Experiencing Exile with Exhilaration

Towards the end of Sefer Yirmiyahu, we learned of the disappointment of Baruch ben Neriya when he was denied prophetic revelation despite his best efforts. We learned that although Baruch was indeed deserving of Nevuah based on his own qualifications, he did not merit to achieve prophecy due to the great sorrow the nation was experiencing at that time, and because the nation was not deserving of a prophet. As the Shechina departed from the Beit HaMikdash, the channels of prophecy were weakening, and it was not an auspicious time to begin a career as a Navi.

As we transition to Sefer Yechezkel, we are faced with a question informed by our knowledge of Baruch's predicament. How is it that Yechezkel, who personally experienced the exile from Yerushalayim along with King Yehoyachin, the nobility and a large percentage of the Jewish population, merited to receive Nevuah in Bavel? He suffered both as an individual and as a member of the community, as a family man evicted from his home and as a Kohen banished from the Mikdash. How, in the face of such devastating losses, could he have achieved prophecy?

Mishbetzot Zahav resolves this conundrum with a teaching from Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin. When the Jewish people were exiled to Bavel, they left with bitterness of spirit, wailing and bemoaning their fate. Yechezkel was the exception. He walked into the diaspora with great joy, since he sensed the holy illumination which Hashem would cause to shine forth from the Babylonian Jewish community. Even as he entered the exile, he was focused on the immense potential for spiritual growth and productivity that the exile would afford. It would be in the Babylonian exile that the seeds of the Oral Torah would be planted and would flourish. By focusing on the future, Yechezkel was able to maintain a state of optimistic joy, such that enabled him not only to achieve prophecy, but would sustain and empower him throughout his painful visions and symbolic acts.

This was the essence of Yechezkel's mission - to imbue the nation with hope for the future, for the success of the exilic community and for the ultimate return to Tziyon and the rebuilding of the Mikdash. Baruch ben Neriya, as the student of Yirmiyahu and the scribe charged with recording Megillat Eicha, was mired in thoughts of destruction. He couldn't transcend the sorrow of the moment to envision a better future.

Yechezkel's ability to overcome pain and suffering with the realization that these form only a part of the whole picture,

serving as a necessary conduit to a better reality, is reflected in his first recorded prophecy. Hashem instructed him to eat the scroll he saw before him, upon which were inscribed lamentations, keening and woe. When Yechezkel complied, the scroll tasted as sweet as honey. The scroll was written upon "פנים ואחור", on both sides of the page. Rashi explains the implication. Yechezkel saw that which was "פנים", at face value, that which was happening in the current moment; but he also envisioned that which would happen "אחור", in the final event. He witnessed suffering that seemed harsh and even unbearable to some, but understood through his prophecy that the suffering was part of Hashem's plan, and that ultimately the righteous would be rewarded and the wicked would be punished, each receiving exactly what he deserved. Thus the scroll, even though it contained a full history of the tribulations that the nation would experience throughout centuries of persecution, tasted sweet to Yechezkel. The travails of the exile were transformed in his mouth to the delight of the ultimate redemption.

Yechezkel reveals to us what Baruch could not. The secret to Jewish survival is our ability to transcend tragedy and focus on building a better future. May we merit to taste the sweetness of Geulah speedily in our days. ■

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