

Bechukotai

by Benjamin Gee - Wednesday, May 29, 2019

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The Jewish people have never given up hope...

There is always room for hope.

This powerful message is presented to us in a wonderful Haftorah for Parashat Bechukotai from the prophet Jeremiah. It accompanies our parasha, in which we read the Tochecha – a long list of curses. This long list follows a much shorter list of blessings. The blessings are given to us in a brief form because they are presented to us in a general way, with wide ranging blessings to be given to those who follow the words of Hashem. But the Tochecha - the curses - are mentioned explicitly. According to our sages, this is in order to warn us – perhaps even shock us – with regard to the negative consequences of our misdeeds.

Reading the Tochecha is quite a depressing experience and that's why we read it in an undertone in synagogue. And our sages so wisely chose a magnificent Haftorah to accompany the Tochecha. Jeremiah, of course, was somebody who knew what national tragedy was all about because he prophesied at the time of the destruction of the first temple, and toward the end of his prophecy he declares "Mikveh Yisrael Hashem", 'the hope of the people of Israel is God'. We should never lose our hope in Hashem. Perhaps in the dark tunnel that we may be travelling through, we might not see any light at the end of it, but there is always light there! Hashem is always with us, and we should place our hope in Him.

"Refaeini Hashem v'erafei", 'Heal me Hashem, and I will be healed'. "Hoshieini v'ivashea", Save me and I will be saved, "ki tehilati ata", for you are my praise. We pray to Hashem: please heal me - and I look forward to being healed! Please save me, oh how great it would be to be saved! But even if that doesn't happen, 'tehilati ata' – God you are my praise, I will forever praise you, because I know that in the context of the big picture, whatever you are doing is for my good and for the good of the world.

This very sentiment is conveyed to us by King David in psalm 27, a psalm written for a period of wartime! Concluding with the words 'kaveh el Hashem' - have hope in Hashem, "Chazak v'ameitz libecha' – be brave and of good courage, 'v'kaveh el Hashem' – and have hope in Hashem. It is at times such as these that we need to be brave, we need to be courageous. We need to take steps to save ourselves but all of our actions should be preceded and followed with hope in Hashem.

Perhaps the finest example of this is the title given to the national anthem of the State of Israel, 'Ha tikva' – The hope, 'Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim' for 2000 years we never lost hope! Through thick and thin, through so many tragic experiences we placed our hope in Hashem – and Baruch Hashem today we can sing HaTikva with joy and with pride, knowing that Hashem was with us all the way. He fulfilled his promise in parashat Bechukotai: 'v'haaretz izkor', I will remember the land – and today, we are blessed and privileged to have Medinat Yisrael.

Without doubt, 'Mikveh Yisrael Hashem' the hope of the people of Israel is God Himself, and there is always room for hope.

Shabbat Shalom

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