

LUMINARIES

Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah

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לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ת ר' יעקב בן הרב שמואל יוסף ע"ה גרינבוים
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מענדל גרינבוים ומשפחתו שיחיו

Transforming Churban

Yirmiyahu

Yirmiyahu ben Chilkiyahu was one of the nation's leading Nevi'im (along with Chuldah) during the time of *Churban Bayis Rishon*, and tried with all his strength to avert disaster by imploring B'nei Yisroel and their kings to change their ways.

His personal life story, found in Sefer Yirmiyahu, is more detailed and pronounced than any of the other Nevi'im, giving us insight into his personality in an unparalleled way.

Additionally, Yirmiyahu was one of the most prolific Nevi'im, authoring Sefer Melochim and Megilas Eicha, in addition to his own *nevuos* that make up Sefer Yirmiyah.

Yirmiyahu first experienced *nevuah* as a young man. The Novi describes Hashem reaching out to him and choosing him as Novi for a dark and difficult task. The Novi further relates the back-and-forth dialogue between Yirmiyahu and Hashem before he finally accepted.

Yirmiyahu is referred to as the Novi of the Churban – charged with sharing the harsh and gloomy *nevuos* relating to it. This bitter task is alluded to in his name that contains the word '*mar*'—bitterness.

As the bearer of dreadful and frightening *nevuos*, Yirmiyahu was not very popular in his lifetime. He suffered from many enemies both on the street and in royal circles. Over the course of his life he was assaulted, imprisoned, and nearly killed. He also needed to stand up to false prophets who were singing other tunes and promising better times, actively

trying to disprove Yirmiyahu's *nevuos*.

His words often fell on deaf ears. Even when the king was ready to accept Yirmiyahu's advice, it was too late. The Jewish-Egyptian revolt had already begun and Nevuchadnetzar's armies proceeded to invade Yerushalayim, attacking its people and destroying the Holy Beis Hamikdosh.

Nevuchadnetzar allowed Yirmiyahu to live and he was granted permission to remain in Eretz Yisroel, but following the murder of Gedaliah ben Achikam, the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel once again did not listen to Yirmiyahu and forcefully took Yirmiyahu with them to Mitzrayim.

In Mitzrayim, Yirmiyahu said his final *nevuos*, and seems to have been taken to Bavel after the Babylonians conquered Mitzrayim.

Yirmiyahu and the Shechina

The Midrash says that when the Yidden were going into *galus Bavel*, Hashem told Yirmiyahu that if he stayed in Eretz Yehuda, Hashem would join the Yidden in Bavel, and if Yirmiyahu went to Bavel then Hashem would remain in Eretz Yehuda.

The Rebbe explains that we know that wherever the Yidden end up in *galus*, "*Shechina imahen*" [Hashem's presence is with them]. When Hashem told Yirmiyahu that he could join the Yidden in *galus* "instead" of the Shechina, it meant that Yirmiyahu was one with the Shechina!

The concept of the Shechina is the connection between Hashem and Yidden – and this is what Yirmiyahu was all about.¹

Yirmiyahu and Yeshayahu

Yirmiyahu and Yeshayahu – two of our greatest Nevi'im, both spoke a great deal about *galus* and *geulah*. Regarding Yeshayahu's *nevuos*, however, the emphasis is on *geulah*, while in Yirmiyahu's, the opposite is true, and the imminent *galus* is highlighted. The Gemara goes so far as to say that Yirmiyahu is *kuleih churbana* (all about destruction) and Yeshayahu is *kula nechamasa* (entirely *nechama* – comfort).

The Zohar states that these opposing styles and *nevuos* are congruent with their names. Yeshayahu – has the word *yeshuah* – salvation in his name, and Yirmiyahu's name includes the more ominous word – *mar* – bitter. The Midrash goes

further:

The Midrash asks "Why is he called Yirmiyahu? Because in his days Yerushalayim was turned into *airmiah'* [ruins]. "

The Frieddiker Rebbe explains the reason for the different types of *nevuah* as being based on their different time periods. Yirmiyah was the *novi* in a time of "*dechiya vehester*" [distance and concealment], and Yeshayahu was in the time of "*giluyim*" [revelation]. Thus, Yeshayahu aroused the Jews through talking the language of *giluyim* – *geulah*, and Yirmiyahu spoke the language of concealment, warning and cautioning of *galus*.²

Yirmiyahu – Working with the Matah

Yirmiyahu was not only charged with sharing the *nevuos* that he was given with the hard-of-hearing generation. His main objective was to improve the Jewish people's behaviors – to have them return to Hashem's ways with *teshuvah*.

Different generations have different routes to *teshuvah*. Yirmiyahu's was through *mussar*. The Gemara puts it plainly: "*Yirmiyahu misnabei b'shvokim*" – he prophesized in the marketplace. Yirmiyahu spoke on the streets, to the streets.

Yirmiyahu's emphasis on *galus* and concealment is, as



THE PIT NEAR SHAAR SHECHEM IN YERUSHALAYIM, WHERE YIRMIYAHU HANOVI WAS IMPRISONED. IT IS ALSO BELIEVED TO BE HIS TZIYON. PHOTO FROM 5640

mentioned, directly connected with his audience and his time.

These *nevuos* are also connected with Yirmiyahu as a person, based on his lineage and his relationship with many in the Jewish community.

While leaders such as Yeshayahu and Moshe Rabbeinu uplifted their generation *m'lma'alah l'matah*, through immense revelation and positive influence, others, like Yirmiyahu,³ worked on *teshuvah* that comes from below, from the low and dark “*matah*.”

Moshe brings Torah down from above on Har Sinai and Yeshayahu speaks of the lofty and glorious *geulah*. But Yirmiyahu worked with a generation steeped in sin. To change them, he needed to come from their low and worldly perspective – bringing them to teshuva by inducing them to notice and take responsibility for their actions.

Yirmiyahu took Yidden on a deep, albeit painful, journey to *teshuvah*. He wasn't fortunate enough to be able to speak comforting and uplifting *nevuos*, rather, he showed his generation the severity of their actions and the cleansing of *galus*. He too, however, promised *geulah* at the end.

The Rebbe explains that there is an advantage to the type of *teshuvah* and uplifting done by Yirmiyahu and those in his style over that of Moshe and Yeshayahu:

When inspiration comes from above, from a spiritual illumination, it fixes the problem but doesn't transform the *matah* itself. Only when the change comes from the people themselves, when they – through their own understanding, in their “language” realize the error in their ways and return does the very lowest place become elevated to *kedushah*.⁴

Yirmiyahu Ben Chilkiyahu Min Hakohanim

Sefer Yirmiyah opens with a description of Yirmiyahu's lineage: a family of Kohanim from the city of Anasos.

The Midrash explains that the reason Yirmiyahu's lineage needs to be outlined is because he descended from Rachav Hazonah—a non-Jewish family, and therefore people were dismissive of him and disrespected him. This is why the Torah clearly emphasizes his descent from a famed family of Kohanim.

The Rebbe explains that the reason Yirmiyahu worked with the *matah* was because this relationship with, and triumph over *matah* were experiences that he personally went

through.

He was descended from a prominent non-Jewish family, and had his own journey to overcome his personal *matah*.

Additionally, he suffered the disregard and disrespect of his brethren. Nevertheless he reached out to those very people and worked to bring them to *teshuvah*. A *giluy* can't impact something that resists it, the best it can do is break it. Working from the bottom up, however, Yirmiyahu was able to transform his people and all the generations of *galus* since.

The *avodah* of *galus* – working with the world around them, not letting difficulties and tribulations break one down, but rather making a positive impact on oneself and consequently on one's surroundings, this is the heart of Yirmiyahu's *nevuos* – the deeper meaning of “*Kuleih Churbana*”.

On the topic of Yirmiyahu bringing the Jewish people to *teshuvah*, the Rebbe quotes the Gemara in Megillah that tells us of Yirmiyahu bringing the *Aseres Hashevotim* back to Eretz Yisroel and to the Jewish people.

The Rebbe explains that historically, people who tried to explain Judaism as meaning something different than what it really means eventually returned to the fold. One example was Yerovom Ben Nevot leading the 10 northern Shevatim astray (which led to their exile) and Yirmiyahu bringing them back.⁵

Yirmiyahu – The Novi that went into Galus

After the *churban*, Yirmiyahu was left in Yerushalayim. The Midrash tells us that Yirmiyahu was not in Yerushalayim during the *churban* itself. Hashem had him leave so that he wouldn't intervene. In any case, being that Yirmiyahu was outspoken against the revolt, the Babylonians decided that he could stay in Yerushalayim.

Yirmiyahu's troubles were far from over, however. After Gedalia ben Achikam—who was leader of the surviving community in Eretz Yisroel—was killed, Yirmiyahu was forcibly taken with the rest of the community to Mitzrayim.

[In Mitzrayim, Yirmiyahu met with the teacher of Aristo (presumably Plato) and taught him the wisdom of Torah and Yiddishkeit.⁶ Much of this wisdom would have been imparted to his student Aristo, and served as the basis to much philosophy and science].

Yet, Mitzrayim would also not be the final stop for Yirmiyahu, Rashi says that eventually he joined the main community in Bavel.

Yirmiyahu was finally reunited with his people—while he had rebuked and reprimanded them, he loved them dearly. The Rebbe explains that as the *Roeh Ne'eman* of his generation he needed to join his people in *galus*.⁷

On a more positive note, due to Yirmiyahu's joining the Yidden in Galus – he was able to see the truth of how they were in *galus*, that even while suffering and under the

“control” of the nations, their soul, the deep and most essential part of the Yid is constantly one with the *Aibershter*.

Yirmiyahu, as *novi* of the *churban*, did not only see the Yidden at their best and most shining moments. He lived with them at their darkest point and saw the intrinsic spiritual and G-dly beauty that they possess.⁸

IN HIS TORAH

In the beginning of Sefer Yirmiyahu, the *novi* describes how Hashem appointed him *novi*, and his reluctance to accept this difficult and important mission.

Yirmiyahu tells Hashem that he is young and cannot express himself well, to which Hashem responds and reassures him that he will be going as Hashem's Shliach and Hashem will be there to support him.

In line with explaining the *avodah* of Yirmiyahu as transforming and uplifting the *Matah* through a *Matah*-centered perspective, the Rebbe explains this dialogue between Hashem and his hesitant servant takes place in our lives and *avodah* as well:

בְּטָרָם אֶצְרָךְ בְּבֶטֶן יְדַעְתִּיךָ וּבְטָרָם תֵּצֵא מֵרַחֵם הַקֹּדֶשׁ תִּתֶּיךָ לְגוֹיִם נְתַתִּיךָ:

(ירמיהו א ה)

“When I had not yet formed you in the womb, I knew you, and when you had not yet emerged from the womb, I had appointed you; a *Novi* to the nations I made you.”

The *neshama* is taken from its holy and divine source and cast down into the lower worlds of *Briah*, *Yetzirah*, and finally *Asiyah*. Here it is tasked with working with the “*goy*” – the *Nefesh habahamis*, and transforming it. The *neshama*, which comes from an entirely different background, is understandably apprehensive.

To calm the *neshama*'s fears and empower the Yid to take on the challenge, Hashem says:

“*Beterem etzarcha vabeten - yedaticha*” – [Even before you were formed in the womb, I knew you]. Meaning to say, “Your source is far beyond the realm of creation and formation – your *Neshama* is a *Chelek Elokaḥ Mima'Al Mamash!*”

Hashem continues “*Beterem teitzie meirechem – hikdashiticha*” [Before you emerged from the womb, I sanctified you]. Meaning that in addition to the *neshama*'s lofty source, it is prepared and conditioned through the study of the whole Torah to be ready and equipped to take on the mission.

וְאָמַר אָהָה אֲד-נִי יְדוּד הִנֵּה לֹא יֵדְעֵתִי דְבַר כִּי־נַעַר אָנֹכִי: (ירמיהו א' 1)

“And I said, “Alas, O L-rd G-d! Behold, I know not to speak for I am a youth”

To this, the *neshama* responds, “On the inside I may be holy and one with you, but on the outside, “*Lo yodati dabeir ki naar anochi*” [I do not know how to speak, for I am a youth] – i.e. “to be spiritual on my own, I know I have the power to do, but to share with the world around me, to transform my *Matah*, to be a “*novi lagoyim*” – for this, I am not the right fit.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְדוּד אֵלַי אֶל-תֹּאמַר נַעַר אָנֹכִי כִי עַל-כֹּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁלַחְךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְאֵת כָּל-
אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ תִּדְבֹר: אֶל-תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי־אֲתָךְ אֲנִי לְהַצִּלְךָ נְאֻם־יְדוּד: (ירמיהו א' 2-7)

“And the L-rd said to me; Say not, “I am a youth,” for wherever I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Fear them not, for I am with you to save you, says the L-rd”

To this Hashem responds: “*Al tomar naar anochi... Al tira mipneihem ki itcha Ani lehatzilcha*” [Do not say I am just a youth... Do not fear them because I am with you to save you!] – not only is the *neshama* a *Chelek Elokah Mima'al*, and not only did Hashem prepare the *neshama* before it entered this world, even here, in this world, while struggling and baffled by the “*goyim*” on the inside and out – “*Itcha Ani*” “I am with you!”

רְאֵה הַפְּקֻדְתֶּיךָ | הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל-הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל-הַמַּמְלָכוֹת לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלְנִתּוֹץ וְלְהַאֲבִיד
וְלְהָרוֹס לְבָנוֹת וְלְנִטּוֹעַ: (ירמיהו א' 1)

“Behold, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to uproot and to crush, and to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant.”

Hashem told Yirmiyahu and tells each and every Yid “*Ki al kol asher eshlachacha teleich*” [wherever I send you, you will go] – Hashem is giving the power to take on every challenge against every *goy* and each *mamlacha*, both “*Linsosh velinsotz*” [to uproot and crush] and “*Livnos Velintoa*” [to build and plant] – having an impact both through positive and preventative strategies.

The Rebbe concludes that the first *geulah* that came through Moshe is not the ultimate redemption because it didn't fully transform the “*tachton*” [lowest realm]. Yirmiyahu's path brings the ultimate transformative *Geulah*, may it come *teikef umiyad Mamosh*.⁹

1. Sicha Parshas Pinchas 5721.

2. Sicha Yud Gimmel Tammuz 5703.

3. And Pinchas.

4. Likkutei Sichos Chelek Yud Ches, Pinchas 3.

5. Sicha Yud Gimmel Tammuz 5729. Megillah 14b.

6. Sicha Shabbos Chanukah 5726.

7. Maamar Va'eira 5726.

8. Simchas Beis Hashoeva 5717.

9. Yirmiyahu's path is shared by Pinchas, and Pinchas Zeh Eliyahu – the herald of Geulah.