

# Parsha Ponders

Tisha B'Av | August 4, 2022 | 7 Av 5782

## *The redemptive undertones of Megillas Eichah*<sup>1</sup>

איכה ישבה בדד העיר רבתי עם היתה כאלמנה רבתי בגוים שרתי במדינות היתה למס

Alas! [Jerusalem] sits alone. The city [that once] was filled with many, has become a widow. The greatest amongst the nations, an officer amongst the countries, has reverted for plunder<sup>2</sup>

*Megillas Eichah*, the book of Lamentations, contains within it a description of the horrible tragedies that befell the Jewish people during the destruction of the First Temple. Who wrote it? Our tradition has it that it was written by the prophet Yirmiyahu, Jeremiah<sup>3</sup>. In fact, he prophetically<sup>4</sup> wrote it before the gruesome disaster even occurred<sup>5</sup>. He knew that the destruction was imminent and tried his best to get his generation to improve their ways. Unfortunately, they did not take kindly to his rebuke, and ultimately, he witnessed the very prophecy he had foretold come to fruition. We recite *Megillas Eichah* every year on Tisha B'Av, as the most fitting way to recall the destruction, which took place on that very day.

However, this interpretation creates a real problem. Prophets can't just receive prophecy whenever they want. They have to be in the right frame of mind and the proper mood. They have to be content and happy<sup>6</sup>. Prophecy doesn't rest on a person who is sad or depressed. How then could Yirmiyahu receive prophecy about the impending destruction? There's no way that once he realized what was going to happen that he would be in a good mood. He knew that the worst atrocities imaginable awaited the Jewish people. How then could Yirmiyahu receive his entire prophecy, and write it down in a scroll<sup>7</sup>?

Rav Yosef Chaim of 19<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad, belovedly known as the Ben Ish Chai, wrote a fascinating and unique<sup>8</sup> commentary on *Megillas Eichah*, called *Nechamas Tzion*. The commentary is based on a verse which says ברוגי רחם תזכור, in Your fury, remember Your mercy<sup>9</sup>. Hashem, even when You're angry with us, please continue to have mercy on us. However, the Ben Ish Chai reads the verse to also mean, in Hashem's words of anger and fury, in *Megillas Eichah*, you will see and recognize Hashem's mercy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a *shiur* given by Rav Daniel Glatstein, found at <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=156521>

<sup>2</sup> Lamentations 1:1

<sup>3</sup> Bava Basra 15a; Moed Katan 26a

<sup>4</sup> Rav Daniel Glatstein said that Sefer Halkkarim understood Yirmiyahu only wrote it with *ruach hakodesh*, a lower level of prophecy. I couldn't find this. However, all other *Rishonim* understood he wrote it with a full level of prophecy

<sup>5</sup> Eichah Rabbah 1:1 brings a dispute in this. One opinion is that he wrote it before it happened, another says it was written after it happened. However, Moed Katan loc. cit. only brings the opinion that it was written *before* the destruction

<sup>6</sup> Shabbos 30b; Mishneh Torah Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:4

<sup>7</sup> Rav Daniel Glatstein says that he always knew this was the question of the Yad HaMelech ad. loc., a descendant of the Noda B'Yehuda. However, he subsequently found that this question is asked by many authorities, such as the Yismach Moshe Vaeschanan § 24 (on the *haftarah*, Isaiah 40:1), the Ye'aros Devash 1:13 (brought by the Yismach Moshe), and the Chazon Ish (brought in the introduction to Sha'arei Aharon Orach Chaim and the English *sefer Strength through Fire*, by Rav Moshe Hubner)

<sup>8</sup> The Ben Ish Chai says a similar style of commentary was written by Rav Avraham Galante. However, if this was referring to his *sefer Kol Bochim*, that commentary was written in the style of *kabbalah*, but not necessarily that of redemption. Rav Daniel Glatstein also cites a commentary called Alon Bachus by Rav Binyomin Vital, which is like the Ben Ish Chai's. See also Pri Tzaddik Devarim § 17, who also references commentaries that give a positive spin

<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk 3:2

The Ben Ish Chai's commentary is a positive spin on the words of destruction. It's based on the Zohar, which says that all the promises of redemption and consolation are buried within the words of *Eichah*<sup>10</sup>. Every verse can be read in two ways: the traditional tale of woe and suffering, or allusions to the grandeur of the Jewish people in their miraculous freedom from exile.

One example is the first verse of *Eichah*. On the surface level, the verse is describing how populated and diverse the city of Jerusalem once was. Now, she's desolate. She's like a widow, all alone and without help. The prophet despairs at what he sees. However, there's another way to read the verse. With the word *Eichah*, the prophet is expressing excited surprise at what he sees. The city of Jerusalem is highly populated. It is the most populated city around. And yet, against all odds, it is completely independent. Even the wealthiest of cities require importing resources that aren't native to the land. Nevertheless, the glory of the ultimate redemption will include Jerusalem's self-sufficiency, contrary to what common sense would dictate.

What does it mean that Jerusalem will be like a widow? The Hebrew word for widow is אלמנה. This word can be read as two words: אל מנה, without measure. Meaning, the population of Jerusalem will be so enormous, that it will be beyond measure. There will be too many people to count<sup>11</sup>. Even so, the city won't have to rely on any other. *Eichah!* How can Jerusalem be so independent, despite her numerous inhabitants. This is just one example. The Ben Ish Chai proceeds to go through each verse in *Eichah* and explain it in a positive way.

The Ben Ish Chai says that this interpretation of the verses will be how we will recite *Eichah* after the ultimate redemption. For our Sages already said<sup>12</sup> that after the redemption, the book of *Eichah* will be annulled. How can this be understood literally? It's part of *Tanach*, and we believe that the *Tanach* will never be substituted or altered. Rather, what it means is the current way we read it will be annulled. Instead, we'll replace this interpretation with the more positive one<sup>13</sup>. We'll even say the blessing of *Shehecheyanu*<sup>14</sup> before its recital.

Coming back to our question, how could Yirmiyahu write down *Megillas Eichah* before it happened? His prophecy must have been interrupted, for it surely would have put him in a depressed mood. The answer is based on the Ben Ish Chai. Yes, Yirmiyahu saw the prophecy of the destruction, but he also received the prophecy of the redemption. Simultaneously embedded in the words of *Eichah* are the two interpretations, the one for bad, and the one for good. The redemptive elements of *Eichah* surely overpowered the depressing ones, and allowed Yirmiyahu to complete his prophecy, and commit it to writing.

May we merit to witness the ultimate redemption ourselves, speedily in our days.

---

<sup>10</sup> Zohar Chadash parshas Ki Seitzei p. 54d

<sup>11</sup> See Genesis 13:16

<sup>12</sup> Rav Daniel Glatstein cited this from the Yerushalmi, but I couldn't find it

<sup>13</sup> Pri Tzaddik *loc. cit.* also says this. Rav Daniel Glatstein added that we find nine days of Sukkos (albeit in the diaspora), as well as nine days of Av. The last day of Sukkos, *Simchas Torah*, corresponds to Tisha B'Av. The tune we use in the verses of *Ata Horeisa* are eerily similar to the tune for *Eichah*. The difference is how the tune ends. On *Simchas Torah*, the verses end on a high note, whereas the verses in *Eichah* end on a low note. In the future, when we will read *Eichah* with this interpretation, we'll recite it with the tune of *Ata Horeisa*

<sup>14</sup> Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, brought in Imrei Tzaddikim