

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



SHABBAT NACHAMU

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Forty-six years ago I made Aliya, and my first Shabbat in Eretz Yisrael was Shabbat Nachamu. My small family was assigned an apartment in the Merkaz Klita (Absorption Center) in Mevaseret Tziyon. It was a wonderful community of new OLIM with a marvelous view of the road up to Yerushalayim. But I was caught off guard when that week's Haftora was chanted, because it contained the following verse:

Ascend a lofty mountain, O herald of joy to Zion; Raise your voice with power, O herald of joy to Jerusalem; Raise it, have no fear; Announce to the cities of Judah: Behold your God! (Yeshayahu 40:9).

Many of you already know that the words 'herald of joy to Zion' in Hebrew is Mevaseret Tziyon. The 'coincidence' and the powerful message were overwhelming and I started to cry. Another, slightly less new immigrant from Los Angeles, put his hand on my shoulder and told me, 'You'll get used to the magic.' I'm not sure I ever did.

For those keeping score at home, the

term MEVASERET also has cool translations into Greek and Old English. In Greek, it's 'euangelion' (or evangelism); in Old English it is 'godspel' which later becomes 'gospel'. The term (and the concept) travels well.

Before we dive deeper into this powerful and, clearly, inspiring expression, I think that it's cool that Yeshayahu could be both the prophet of destruction in last week's Haftora, CHAZON, and the herald of hope in this week's Haftora NACHAMU, NACHAMU. I know that there's a popular school of thought that these are two different prophets, but I'm traditional and think that he was just extremely talented and, therefore, versatile.

So, what does MEVASERET really mean? Or what does it imply?

In modern Hebrew, people often wish one another: B'SOROT TOVOT! This means good news or glad tidings. But how did the root BASAR (BET-SIN-REISH) come to mean happy news? I mean, it's the same root as 'meat'.

It seems that in the ancient world 'good news' precipitated eating meat (BASAR). It seems that the eating of meat in the ancient world was quite rare (as opposed to 'well done', JK). I feel confident that the three times in the Torah that the prohibition of 'don't cook meat in its mother's milk' appears in close proximity to the list

of the three Festivals, isn't a coincidence. It is because most Jews in ancient Yisrael only ate meat on the CHAGIM. Again, not very often.

So, perhaps, good news is very much related to BASAR, and its consumption. That would seem to be the idea behind the Rabbinic statement: There is no joy without meat and wine.

But why is the term for announcing the 'good news' in the feminine? Rashi points out that later in the book of Yeshayahu (52:7) we have a reference to a masculine harbinger. Rashi assumes that if the Jews are worthy the redemption will be swift through a male messenger, but if we are less worthy, the redemption will come more slowly through a female reporter.

On the other hand, the Radak suggests that a female messenger is used because the ultimate redemption of Israel will be announced gently and in a comforting manner, contrasting with the harsh masculine delivery of wartime announcements. While Shadal avers that in ancient Israel women bore the news. Some things never change.

However, my favorite approach is that of the Malbim. He wrote:

The description here is of Zion herself as the herald, and so, too, Jerusalem. It says - you Zion the herald go up on a high mountain and you Jerusalem

raise your voice with strength, don't be afraid lest the thing which you announce not come to pass, because it certainly will come. Not only this, but also say to the cities of Yehuda 'here is your God' as if you are pointing to something which has already come and exists. (I already explained that in Zion was the seat of the king, the Sanhedrin and the place of the Holy Temple, while in Jerusalem the masses of regular people dwelt.) Zion announces that God has returned His Presence to Zion and the kingship and the kehuna to the Jewish people. Therefore, the prophet advised her to ascend a high mountain. Jerusalem announces the ingathering of the exiles, therefore the prophet advised her to raise her voice in strength in order that those driven away hear and be gathered from the four corners of the heavens.

Communities and municipalities in Hebrew are always presented in the feminine form. Throughout Jewish history great Jewish cities were called IR V'EIM B'YISRAEL ('a city and mother in Israel').

So, Jerusalem herself declares the upcoming redemption and return of God. This is critical to understanding our long term relationship with our Holy City. We take our cue from the municipality itself.

Recall Zecharia's vision of redemption: This is what the Eternal,

Almighty says: Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city's open places will also be full of boys and girls playing again (8:4-5).

I know most of Yerushalayim right now looks like a building site, but no one can deny that the city is alive and vital. And, yes, filled with grateful retirees (like me!), and boisterous exuberant children. I catch myself smiling when I go by playgrounds filled with noisy kids.

On Tish'a b'Av most of the sadness revolves around the destruction of Yerushalayim. I know there are many references to disasters for Jewish communities around the world, but the initial focus of the book of Eicha and the Kinot is on Yerushalayim. So, it's so profoundly fitting that the focus of the comfort and reconciliation also zeroes in on our eternal, beloved Yerushalayim.

It should come as no shock, therefore, that our greatest expectation and desire is for: Yet again there shall be heard, In the cities of Yehuda and in the streets of Yerushalayim. The sound of joy and the sound of gladness. The voice of the groom and the voice of the bride (Yirmiyahu 33:10-11).

Can't you just feel that it's on the way! 