

Dvar Torah, Rosh Hashanah Day 2, Minyan Masorti, by Aaron Finestone

***"Your sons and daughters shall prophesy;
Your elders shall dream dreams,
And your youths shall see visions."***

In today's Haftarah, Jeremiah states (*1):

Thus said GOD:

A cry is heard in Ramah ---

Wailing, bitter weeping ---

Rachel weeping for her children,

She refuses to be comforted

For her children, who are gone.

Thus said GOD:

Restrain your voice from weeping.

Your eyes from shedding tears;

For there is a reward for your labor.

--- declares God:

They shall return from the enemy's land,

And there is hope for your future

--- declares GOD:

Your children shall return to their country.

The Hertz Chumash (*2) explains that Rachel who had so longed for children regards herself as dead without them. Now she weeps that they are no more, slain or driven into exile. According to legend, Jacob buried her near Ramah, by the roadside, because he foresaw that his descendants would pass by Rachel's tomb on their way to exile. Rachel would weep and intercede for them.

In the March 4, 2024 edition of the Atlantic (*3), Franklin Foer wrote an article titled "The Golden Age of American Jews is Ending." The subtitle, "Anti-Semitism on the right and the left threatens to bring to a close an unprecedented period of safety and prosperity for Jewish Americans—and demolish the liberal order they helped establish."

Here is my view:

That moment has arrived. Israel's support in Congress is diving. This past Sunday, a headline in the Washington Post stated, "[U.K., Canada, Australia recognize Palestinian state, breaking with U.S.](#)"

(*4). As a community in the United States, we must recast ourselves. I am not addressing the now, I am addressing the future. We need new communal strategies. Our history shows that political reverses can lead to new creativity, new institutions, and pathbreaking innovation in our ritual, theology and culture.

Tova Ganzel, Professor at Bar-Ilan University writes in The Jewish Study Bible (*5) that in 597 BCE the Judean elite was exiled to Babylon. Ezekiel was among these exiles.

Holiness is the theme of the Book of Ezekiel, Professor Ganzel writes. It was the people's task to preserve their sanctity. The sins of the people, primarily idolatry, desecrated the people, the Temple, and the divine name. Impurity must be removed from the land. Upon the return from exile, the Temple must be built according to a new model. Only after the ingathering of the people in their land will the divine name be sanctified.

Professor Christine Hayes (*6), professor emerita at Yale University and senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, writes that Ezekiel believed that Adonai would restore a purified Israel to the land under a Davidic monarch. Ezekiel (like Jeremiah) held that relationship with Adonai was possible outside of the Land of Israel. For Ezekiel, Israel's punishment was fully deserved. Nevertheless, Adonai is with his people in exile.

Professor Hayes, describes the Jewish Diaspora as a religious-national body. The people remained loyal to God while in exile, and without worshiping God cultically or by means of sacrifice. Synagogues were established. A new form of worship developed consisting of prayer, confession, fasts, and ritual observance. Three times a day Jews began to pray facing Jerusalem. The Sabbath grew as a memorial of the covenant and symbol of Jewish faith. Non-Jews joined themselves to Adonai, adopting the religion of Israel. The history of Israel as a nation came to an end and the history of Judaism began.

A second example of renewal after disaster arises at Yavneh after the destruction of the Second Temple. Dr. Solomon Grayzel, author of A History of the Jews (*7), writes that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai established an academy at Yavneh. He established a new Sanhedrin as a legislative and judicial body for the surviving Jewish community. Except for sacrifice, some Temple rituals were adopted by the Synagogue. For example the priestly benediction, the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanna and the lulav procession on Sukkot. Thus the Synagogue became the heir of the Temple.

Yochanan and his colleagues emphasized study. Jewish knowledge was to identify a Jew. The nobility of blood which had existed in Temple times was replaced by a spiritual nobility of the mind and spirit. The most respected group among the Jews became known as rabbis. The head of the Bet Din was the Nasi.

An unofficial civil government of the Jews developed in the Land of Israel. The Roman authorities generally deferred to the Jewish community except for matters of taxation. The Nasi exercised authority over the Jewish communities in the provinces, and enforced rulings of the Bet Din.

Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove (*8) (of Park Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan released a book in 2024 titled "For Such A Time As This: On Being Jewish Today." Rabbi Cosgrove suggests a strategy for American Judaism and American Zionism.

We can integrate the wisdom of everything that came before October 7 with the newly learned wisdom of our post-October 7 reality, Rabbi Cosgrove writes.

First, we need an American Zionism that begins with love for the Jewish people and teaches our children and grandchildren the story of our exile, the pitfalls of powerlessness, the dreams of our national longings, and our right to the land. We need an experiential curriculum. Our children should be in dialogue with Israeli children through technology, exchange programs, and sister congregations.

We need Israeli educators, programs that bring Israelis into contact with American Jews, and more teaching of Hebrew---the most effective bridge to one another, to our past and to our future.

The next chapter of American Zionism must integrate the universal and prophetic dimension of American Jewry.

Finally, the new American Zionism is not a substitute for American Judaism. Build up your own Jewish identity and that of your children and grandchildren. Support individuals and institutions committed to the global Jewish community, Rabbi Cosgrove concludes.

I close with a prophecy from Joel (*9).

JOEL 2:1

*Blow a horn in Zion,
Sound an alarm on My holy mount!
Let all dwellers on earth tremble,
For the day of GOD has come!
It is close—*

JOEL 2:15

*Blow a horn in Zion,
Solemnize a fast,
Proclaim an assembly!*

JOEL 3:1

After that,

I will pour out My spirit on all flesh;

Your sons and daughters shall prophesy;

Your elders shall dream dreams,

And your youths shall see visions.

SOURCES

- (*1) The JPS Tanakh Gender-Sensitive Translation, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 2023, page 895 (Jeremiah Chapter 31:15-17)
- (*2) Dr. J. H. Hertz, Pentateuch & Haftorahs, Second Edition, Soncino Press, London, 1981, page 958
- (*3) Franklin Foer, ""The Golden Age of American Jews is Ending," Atlantic Magazine, March 4, 2024
- (*4) ["U.K., Canada, Australia recognize Palestinian state, breaking with U.S." Washington Post, September 21, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/21/britain-recognizes-palestine-state-israel/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/21/britain-recognizes-palestine-state-israel/)
- (*5) Tova Ganzel, The Jewish Study Bible, Second Edition, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors, Oxford University Press USA, New York, 2014, page 1035
- (*6) Christine Hayes, Introduction to the Bible, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012, page 307
- (*7) Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews, Second Edition, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1969, pages 192-199
- (*8) Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, For Such A Time As This: On Being Jewish Today, Harvest/William Morrow, 2024, page 191-193
- (*9) The JPS Tanakh Gender-Sensitive Translation, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 2023, pages 1073-1075 (Joel, chapters 2 and 3)