

To all interested members of the community:

In the hope of intensifying our communal learning atmosphere, I will be sending out a weekly e-mail with one or two leading questions about the parshah. The questions will be based on the study sheets of Prof. Nechama Liebowitz zt"l, and I think it would be appropriate to have her in mind while thinking about them.

I'm not yet sure how formal a follow-up will develop from this initiative. For now, please feel free to e-mail or buttonhole me with your answers, or with questions that my e-mail may have stimulated, and I would love it if they became a general topic of conversation in the minyan. Also, feel free to forward this e-mail.

This week's questions, based on the 5722 study sheet, are actually on the first verse of the haftarah, Isaiah 54:1-10.

"Sing, O barren woman (akarah) who has not borne children (lo yaladah); break out into song and exult, woman who has not been in labor; because the children of the desolate woman (b'nei shomeimah) are more numerous than those of the 'husbanded' woman (b'nei b'ulah), says G-d."

The heart of the verse is the comparison between the b'nei shomeimah and the b'nei b'ulah. The shomeimah seems clearly to represent Jerusalem in destruction, but the word itself can refer to

- a) women who have never been married and
- b) women who have been abandoned.

Candidates for the referent of the b'ulah include inter alia

- a) Jerusalem before the destruction and
- b) the nations that destroyed Jerusalem.

Questions:

- 1) Is there a progression in the images presented in the verse (barren woman, woman who has never been in labor, shomeimah)? With which translation of shomeimah is it easier to find a progression?
- 2) Can one choose between the possible referents of b'ulah based on a) the progression in the verse discussed in question 1 or
- b) the rest of the haftarah, especially verses 4-5?

verse 4

... you will forget the embarrassment of your girlhood, and no longer remember the shame of your widowhood.

verse 5

Because your husband (boalayikh - same root as b'ulah) who fulfills you - G-d Lord of Hosts is His Name; and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, will be called the G-d of all the earth.

Shavuah Tov!