



## SHIDDUCHIM, HOUSING AND ISRAEL'S ECONOMY: HOW YIRMIYAHU'S FOREWARNINGS BECAME TODAY'S SONGS

### **Od Yishama's Gloomy Context**

At any Jewish wedding today, the phrase sung with the most enthusiasm and joy is the familiar,

עוד ישמע בערי יהודה ובחצות ירושלים קול  
ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה.  
*Again there shall be heard in the cities of  
Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the  
voice of mirth and the voice of gladness,  
the voice of the bridegroom and the voice  
of the bride.*

If someone were to be cornered at a wedding and asked what this phrase means, they would probably answer confidently that it's a pasuk (verse) from somewhere in the Nevi'im (Prophets) about a bride and groom and happiness. And while the phrase is from the Nevi'im, and it *does* speak about a bride and groom, they might be surprised to find out that it's not a pasuk at all,

it's not really about a wedding, and the context is not at all happy.

The phrase “*kol sason v'kol simcha*” appears several times in Sefer Yirmiyahu, and each time the context is loaded with doom, destruction, and sorrow. Yirmiyahu generally uses the phrase not to celebrate weddings in Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), but to announce how they will come to a bitter end. Here are the first three times the phrase appears:

והשבתי מערי יהודה ומחצות ירושלים קול  
ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה כי  
להרבה תהיה הארץ:

*Then will I cause to cease from the cities  
of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem,  
the voice of mirth and the voice of  
gladness, the voice of the bridegroom  
and the voice of the bride; for the land  
shall be desolate.*

**Yirmiyahu 7:34**

כי כה אומר ה' צבאות אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּנִי  
מִשְׁבִּית מוֹרֵה־מְקוֹם הַזֶּה לְשִׁנְיֹתְכֶם וּבִימֵיכֶם קוֹל  
שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה:

*For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the  
God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to  
cease out of this place, before your eyes  
and in your days, the voice of mirth and  
the voice of gladness, the voice of the  
bridegroom and the voice of the bride.*

**Yirmiyahu 16:9**

והאבדתי מהם קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן  
וקול כלה קול רחיים ואור נר:

*Moreover, I will cause to cease from  
among them the voice of mirth and  
the voice of gladness, the voice of the  
bridegroom and the voice of the bride,  
the sound of the millstones, and the light of  
the lamp.*

**Yirmiyahu 25:10**

The phrase is less about weddings than about the city in which the weddings take place: Yerushalayim. The sound of weddings in the streets serves as a

barometer of Yerushalayim's spiritual and physical state. And for the most part, it's a gloomy forecast!

In all these instances, the context of this familiar phrase is the opposite of the joyful association we are used to. So why do we sing these words? **How has this phrase associated with doom and destruction become the most popular wedding song?!**

## A Hopeful Twist

The answer stems from the fourth time Yirmiyahu speaks about *kol chatan v'kol kallah*, where there emerges a ray of hope. Yirmiyahu declares:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' עוֹד יִשְׁמַע בְּמִקוֹם־הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָתֶם אֹמְרִים חָרֵב הוּא מֵאִין אָדָם וּמֵאִין בְּהֵמָה בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם הַנְּשֻׁמֹת מֵאִין אָדָם וּמֵאִין יוֹשֵׁב וּמֵאִין בְּהֵמָה: קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה קוֹל אֹמְרִים הוֹדוּ אֶת־ה' צָב־אוֹת כִּי־טוֹב ה' כִּי־לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ מִבָּאִים תוֹדָה בַּיִת ה' כִּי־אָשִׁיב אֶת־שְׁבוֹת־הָאָרֶץ כְּבָרָאשְׁנָה אָמַר ה':

*Thus said the LORD: Again there shall be heard in this place, which you say is ruined, without man or beast—in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man, without inhabitants, without beast—the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride, the voice of those who cry, “Give thanks to the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for His kindness is everlasting!” as they bring thanksgiving offerings to the House of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as of old—said the LORD.*

**Yirmiyahu 33:10-11**

Despite all the destruction that will come, Yirmiyahu now declares that Yerushalayim will rise out of it, and once again, the celebratory cheering of weddings in the streets will return. This is a bombshell of positivity. If you look closely at these psukim, you'll notice that the song we sing is actually a carefully selected compilation of just

the scattered positive phrases within this prophecy.

In between the words that we sing, the doom continues. Yerushalayim is still desolate. There is not a soul to be found. The silence is disturbing and harrowing, just as in the first three prophecies. Yirmiyahu was presumably not singing and dancing while delivering even this fourth prophecy. And yet this time, Yirmiyahu pulls through in his prophetic power and declares that the desolation is only temporary. It's a prophecy of faith, of hope in the face of destruction, that one day there will be joy in the streets again and that Yerushalayim will return to its glory.

## Prophecy Becomes Reality

While this expression of faith is powerful and hopeful, it still does not quite match our modern context. Now, 2,500 years after Yirmiyahu gave this hopeful prophecy, when we attend a wedding in Yerushalayim, we sing these words not forebodingly as in the first three prophecies, and not longfully as in the fourth prophecy. Today, these words ring as a joyful description of the present. With weddings happening every day throughout Yerushalayim, we can finally celebrate what we see in front of us. While Yerushalayim still has a long way to go before it has reached its full potential and splendor, Yirmiyahu's wistful longing for the return of joyful sounds to Yerushalayim has become a cheerful and energetic description of reality.

## Yirmiyahu's "Once Again" Refrain

Yirmiyahu's hopeful phrase of "*od yishama ...*" is actually embedded in between a group of prophecies about what is to come, many of which involve the same phrase of "*od ...*" The prophecies right before and right after

the *kol sason v'kol simcha* declaration are less well known, but they are equally as dramatic.

The prophecy right before our wedding prophecy is about a field.

Yerushalayim is under siege and heading toward destruction. God tells Yirmiyahu, who has been thrown in jail for all of his prophesying about Yerushalayim's demise, to redeem a field in his hometown of Anatot, on the outskirts of Yerushalayim. God declares,

כִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' צָב־אוֹת, אֶ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: עוֹד יִקְנוּ בָתַּיִם וְשָׂדוֹת וְכַרְמִים, בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת.

*For thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land."*

**Yirmiyahu 32:15**

Yirmiyahu is bewildered. Why is God asking him to waste his money buying back this field? Why would anyone want to own land near Yerushalayim? What a terrible investment in a piece of property that will surely only plummet in value.

Yirmiyahu expresses this to God:

(י"ז) אָהָה אָד־נִי ה' הִנֵּה אֶתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּכַחַךְ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזַרְעֶךָ הַנְּטוּיָה לֹא־יִפְלֵא מִמֶּךָ כָּל־דְּבָר: ... (כ"ה) וְאֶתָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֵלַי אָד־נִי ה' קְנֵה־לִּי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכֶסֶף וְהָעֵד עֲדִים וְהָעִיר נִתְּנָה בְּיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים! (17) *Ah, Lord GOD! You made heaven and earth with Your great might and outstretched arm. Nothing is too wondrous for You!... (25) Yet You, Lord GOD, said to me: Buy the land for money and call in witnesses—when the city is at the mercy of the Chaldeans!?*

**Yirmiyahu 32:17, 25**

Yirmiyahu says to God, I know you can do everything, and that you took the Jews out of Egypt and gave them the land of Israel. But to say that this piece of property will one day have value again? That's just too far.

God responds with a dramatic phrase familiar from Sefer Breishit, "*Hamimenu yipaleh kol davar*" "Is anything too

wonderous for me?” (Yirmiyahu 32:27)

Yes, God assures Yirmiyahu, one day this field will be worth something again. One day, people will actually want to buy property again in Yerushalayim. Yirmiyahu obeys, and begrudgingly buys the field back for a little over seven shekels. He could never have imagined that by 2023, the housing costs in Jerusalem would have skyrocketed, and that Jerusalem would become one of the hardest places in the world to buy property. One can only imagine how many shekels that piece of property in Anatot is worth today!

There are many songs that use the words, “*od yishama*.” There is even a song to the inspiring words, “*od yeshvu zekeinim uzkeinot birchovot Yerushalayim ...*,” a line from Zecharia 8:4-5 about children and elderly people playing and sitting in the streets of Yerushalayim.

It’s probably not surprising that we have yet to hear any songs celebrating the staggering housing prices in Yerushalayim, and how expensive it is to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Katamon. But Yirmiyahu would be crying from happiness to hear about it. **Yirmiyahu’s dramatic, wistful description of the returning demand of property in Israel has become so real that the country’s best economists have been trying for decades now to reel it back in.**

## The Return of Israel’s Economy

The final “*od*” phrase in this string of hopeful prophecies is the immediate continuation of the psukim about the return of weddings. How are new couples supposed to support themselves? Well, Yirmiyahu assures the Jewish people that the job market will flourish once again too:

כֹּה־אָמַר ה' צָבָאֹת עוֹד יִהְיֶה בְּמִקּוֹם הַזֶּה  
הַחֲרִיב מֵאִין־אָדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־עֲרֵיוֹ נָוֶה  
רָעִים מְרַבְּצִים צֹאן: בְּעָרֵי הַהָר בְּעָרֵי הַשְּׂפֵלָה

וּבְעָרֵי הַנֶּגֶב וּבְאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־מִן וּבְסִבְיָי יְרוּשָׁלַם  
וּבְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה עַד תַּעֲבֹרְנָה הַצֹּאן עַל־יְדֵי מוֹנֶה  
אָמַר ה'.

*Thus said the LORD of Hosts: In this ruined place, without man and beast, and in all its towns, **there shall again be a pasture for shepherds, where they can rest their flocks.** In the towns of the hill country, in the towns of the Shephelah, and in the towns of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin and in the environs of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, **sheep shall pass again under the hands of one who counts them**—said the LORD.*

**Yirmiyahu 33:12-13**

Metzudat David explains (33:13):

ר"ל כ"כ יתרבו הצאן עד שלא יספיקו בעליהם  
למנותם בעצמו ויעמיד מונה במקומו להעביר  
הצאן לפניו למנותם:

*This means to say, there will be so many sheep that their owners will not suffice to count them on their own, and will appoint someone to count them in his stead to pass his sheep before him to count them.*

It seemed unimaginable that people in Israel would ever be prosperous again, but Yirmiyahu says that one day it will happen. People will be so financially comfortable again that they will need to hire others to take care of their wealth.

Not everyone who comes to Israel is thrilled about the first prophecy of the astronomic housing costs. Not everyone finds a spouse right away to celebrate the second prophecy. And not everyone who moves to Israel finds themselves suddenly so overloaded with money and possessions that they need to hire others to manage their wealth. But the combination of these prophecies is an astonishingly accurate description of today’s reality. What even a generation or two ago was a sacrifice and a plunge into the unknown has become a secure and sustainable option. Israel’s many wedding halls are booked to capacity, there’s a swelling job market and a strong economy, and there are communities with old people, young

people and everyone in between.

## Yirmiyahu and Today’s Aliya Trends

In recent years, Yirmiyahu’s prophecies have taken on even greater significance, especially for North American olim. Yirmiyahu’s prophecies of housing, marriage, and the job market are likely to resonate most strongly with young professionals establishing their lives and careers. And this is exactly the primary age bracket that is now moving to Israel.

Statistics published by Nefesh B’Nefesh and the Ministry of Absorption show that in recent years, the largest demographic of North Americans making Aliya has shifted from retirees to the 18-to-36-year-old bracket. Yirmiyahu’s focus on financial and family stability are exactly what is on the minds of today’s olim, and Yirmiyahu’s promise for a bright future in these areas is of the utmost significance to them. The rise of Israeli undergraduate programs in English, including Yeshiva University’s recent decision to launch undergraduate and graduate programs in Israel, is a further reflection of this historic development in Jewish history. **These students, young professionals and young families are coming to Israel and finding not the desolate and barren Israel described by Yirmiyahu at the beginning of the book, but the flourishing, prosperous country described at the end.**

Yirmiyahu promised we would progress from *od yiknu* to *od yishama* to *od ta'avorna*. And so it has happened: properties in Yerushalayim are valuable again. Weddings have returned. The economy is strong. Young people are coming to Israel like never before to write the next inspiring chapter of this eternal land. One can almost imagine, among the busy city streets and vibrant wedding crowds singing “*Od Yishama*,” Yirmiyahu smiling and singing along.