

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Themes and Ideas in the Haftara
Yeshivat Har Etzion

This haftara series is dedicated in memory
of our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak
(Mrs. Claire Reinitz), *zichronah livracha*,
by her family.

TZAV - SHABBAT HA-GADOL

"THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD"
Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein

RELEVANCE

In the introductory *shiur* to this series, we noted that the primary objective of the *haftara* is not to illuminate the *parasha*, but rather to provide each Jew with a weekly spiritual message taken from the words of the Prophets that is relevant to his own situation. The annual calendar of the *haftarot* is, therefore, very influenced by the holidays and appointed times of Israel, so that even where the Torah reading follows its ordinary course, the *haftara* may ignore the *parasha* and occupy itself with the spiritual situation dictated by the calendar. The *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, like the three *haftarot* of calamity and the seven *haftarot* of consolation, which are read during the summer months, is one of the clearest examples of this phenomenon.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE *HAFTARAH* READ ON *SHABBAT HA-GADOL*

Reading the end of *Malakhi* ("*Ve-Orva*" 3:4-24) as the *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is not based on talmudic law, but on custom. Truth be said, the impression that is left by the sources is that originally this was not a *haftara* specially designated for *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, but rather an alternative *haftara* for *Parashat Tzav* (because of its beginning which deals with the sacrifices). Over time, however, it became the *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol*. The custom to read "*Ve-Orva*" as a *haftara* is documented in early Ashkenazi sources,^{1[1]} but in connection with *Parashat Tzav* which coincides with *Shabbat ha-Gadol* in a plain (not leap) year:

It is written in the Responsa: Why did they not cancel "*Oloteikhem*" (*Yirmiyahu* 7:21), and institute [as *haftara*] "*Ve-Orva*"? Perhaps because "*Ve-Orva*" ends with "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (*Malakhai* 3:23). Therefore they did not institute to read "*Ve-Orva*" as *haftara*. But I Menachem have another spirit with me concerning "*Ve-Orva*," to uphold the custom of our fathers which is Torah, they having ministered to the great authorities of the generation. I agree with their position and say that when the fourteenth of *Nisan* falls out on *Shabbat*, when it is impossible to read as *haftara* "which I did not command them, nor did it come into My heart" (*Yirmiyahu* 7:31 – the ordinary *haftara* for *Parashat Tzav*) on the day that the *korban Pesach* is slaughtered, since it

^{1[1]} See *Sefer ha-Pardes* (no. 25) and *Or Zaru'a* II, no. 393.

says "at its appointed season" (*Bamidbar* 9:2). And it is impossible to read on the day that the *korban Pesach* is slaughtered, "Cut off your hair, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the high hills" (*Yirmiyahu* 7:29), on the *Shabbat* which is the day before *Pesach*, and thus cast down the hearts of Israel who have embarked on a festival pilgrimage. And I found support for my words when I received the book of Rabbi Moshe bar Meshulam, *ztz"l*, that was brought from Babylonia. In the Prophets section [of that book] the *haftarot* were marked for each *parasha* in the Torah for the entire year. And I saw a marking for "Tzav et Aharon" next to "Oloteikhem," and another marking for "Tzav et Aharon" next to "Ve-Orva la-Shem." Thus, I have reached the truth saying that sometimes we read as the *haftara* for "Tzav et Aharon" from "Oloteikhem," and sometimes from "Ve-Orva." And the criterion for this is as follows: If it is plain year, and "Tzav et Aharon" falls out on *Shabbat ha-Gadol* before *Pesach*, we read as *haftara* "Ve-Orva." And all the more so when *Erev Pesach* falls out on *Shabbat* itself. And if it is a leap year, and "Tzav et Aharon" falls out on one of the *Shabbatot* of *Adar Shenj*, and *Shabbat ha-Gadol* falls out on [*Shabbat*] *Acharei Mot*, then we read "Oloteikhem" as the *haftara* for *Tzav et Aharon*, if that *Shabbat* is not one of the four [special] *parashiyot*. And because there is no regular custom that is observed every year because of the leap year, therefore it was omitted and it became customary every year to read as *haftara* "Oloteikhem" because it is more frequent. Until here the responsum. It is also written in the Responsa that in a leap year *Shabbat ha-Gadol* fell out on [*Shabbat*] *Zot Tiheyeh* [= *Metzora*], and our Rabbis read as *haftara* "Arba Anashim" (*II Melakhim* 7:3) [that is to say, they read on *Shabbat ha-Gadol* the *haftara* for *Parashat Metzora*, and not "Ve-Orva].

Over time, the *haftara* of "Ve-Orva" became the *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* in all situations and in most communities. Even though there is no mention of this in the *Shulchan Arukh*, not even as a custom, it was accepted as the customary *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* in most Ashkenazi and Sefardi communities, and this is the custom to this very day.^{2[2]}

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION?

^{2[2]} A contemporary discussion of this issue may be found in R. Ovadya Yosef's *Responsa Yechave Da'at* (I, no. 91): "The *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* in most communities: 'Ve-Orva...' which ends with the verse, 'Behold, I will send you Eliya, the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.' This is based on the rabbinic dictum (*Rosh Ha-Shana* 11a): 'In *Nisan* they were redeemed and in *Nisan* they will be redeemed in the future.' With the exception of places where there is a clear custom to read the *haftara* of the week, in which case they should not change their custom. The basis of the custom to read 'Ve-Orva' as *haftara* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is in *Sefer ha-Pardes ha-Gadol le-Rashi* (no. 25) and *Or Zaru'a* II (no. 393). The Gaon R. Ya'akov Emden wrote in his *Siddur* (*Bet Ya'akov*, p. 226): Many are confused about this and distinguish between when *Shabbat ha-Gadol* falls out on *Erev Pesach*, and when it falls out on a different day. But there is no basis for this distinction, but rather we always read 'Ve-Orva' as *haftara*, and thus is the custom of Israel. And so writes *Responsa Mayyim Chayyim Rappoport* in *Kuntrus Otzarot Chayyim* (p. 68c), see there. And in the book *Me'orei Or* (Ben Nun, p. 162b), he brings what is found in the *Be'er Hetev* that we are accustomed to read 'Ve-Orva' as *haftara* only when *Shabbat ha-Gadol* falls out on *Erev Pesach*. And he writes that this is only the custom in Poland, but in our country we read 'Ve-Orva' every *Shabbat ha-Gadol*. And so too in *Responsa Be'erot Avraham* (*Orach Chayyim*, no. 7). And so was the custom of the Gaon Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathansohn, author of the *Sho'el u-Meshiv*. And it is brought as law in the book *Nezer Yisra'el* (no. 22, letter 13). And a number of *Acharonim* have testified that this is the custom of Jerusalem. These include: R. Avraham ha-Levi Prague in *Tavlin le-Mitzva* (Jerusalem, 1910); and R. Y.M. Tokincinzi in *Eretz Yisra'el* (p. 61). Many Sefardim also acted in this manner, as is stated in *Zekhor le-Avraham I, haftara* (p. 29a); and the Chida in his book, *Tzavarei Shalal* on the *haftarot*, and so too in his book *Nachal Sorek*. Since we have support from the words of Rashi and the *Or Zaru'a*, this is the way that it is befitting to act. Only in a place where there is a clear and well-known custom that they read the *haftara* of the weekly portion should they follow their custom. And one should never veer from custom, so as to prevent controversy."

In light of this, it is not surprising that the connection between the *haftara* and *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is not self-evident. If I am not mistaken, the accepted explanation today is connected to the end of the *haftara* that speaks of Eliyahu's future arrival to herald the redemption, and thus a connection is created between the redemption from Egypt and the future redemption. This connection is familiar to us from the *haftarot* of *Pesach* – from the *haftara* for the eighth day of *Pesach* outside of Israel, when we read the *haftara*, "*Od ha-yom be-Nov la'amod*" (*Yeshayahu* 10:32), which is clearly a *haftara* connected to redemption, and this is by talmudic law (*Megila* 31a). In our *haftara* the connection is weaker, and it is primarily to the future day of judgment, and it is only in the concluding verses. Thus, it is difficult to speak of a strong connection between the *haftara* and *Shabbat ha-Gadol*. But it seems that this is the foundation for the message to be found in the *haftara* for this *Shabbat*.^{3[3]}

THE MESSAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Let us now examine the contents of the *haftara*. As is well-known, our *haftara* seals the books of the Prophets, and we should therefore see it as relating to a broad historical totality, and as providing general guidance to the later generations who will not hear the prophetic voice. This is clear with respect to the concluding verses ("Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant" [v. 22]), but correct as well with respect to the entire chapter. The beginning of the *haftara* relates to the connection between past and future, promising that the offering of Yehuda and Jerusalem will yet be favorably received, as were the burnt-offerings that were sacrificed when Israel was close to God, or as the prophet puts it, "as in the days of old, and as in former years" (v. 4).

THE CULTURE OF "I DESERVE"

Immediately following this, the *haftara* shifts into a harsh and frontal attack on Israel, making reference to the Divine justice that will be executed "against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and who turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me" (v. 5). The spiritual atmosphere described by the prophet is one of moral and religious corruption, which finds expression in the trampling over the weak, the exploitation of the wretched, the collapse of the judicial system, and all this out of disregard for God, as if He does not exist or oversee. The egoism and the hedonism of the economic and social elites underlie the difficult situation revealed before us. A lack of gratitude towards God accompanies the social corruption, because they share the same roots, namely, the feeling that "I deserve" and the setting of pleasure and success at the center of one's aspirations. Thus, the people both oppress the poor, the widows, and the orphans, and also steal from God. Whether we are dealing with gifts for the poor or with gifts for the priests, no recognition is given to the need to demonstrated gratitude to God and walk in His ways by giving to those in need.

The picture that emerges from this prophecy and its context are very reminiscent of the closing chapters of the Torah. Moshe Rabbenu, as he is about to seal the Torah, describes a similar situation of

^{3[3]} Attempts have been made to connect this to the season of *bi'ur ma'asrot*, which occurs every three-four years during the season of *Pesach*. But it is difficult to see a law which has no practical application today as justification for reading a *haftara* (which did not apply during the period of *Chazal*, and has not applied since then) which is supposed to relate to our present existential situation. Whether or not the *haftara* was taken from *Parashat Tzav*, the existential basis for the contemporary practice cannot be *bi'ur ma'asrot*. These suggestions are brought, together with source references, in *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, s.v. *haftara* (vol. X, p. 23).

hedonism and disregard for God, where man follows whims of his heart, his pride swelling within him, on the assumption that God is indifferent to his actions and that man has no other goal but to satisfy his desires. Both Moshe and Malakhi are worried that with the end of their respective prophecies, Israel will forget God, bow down to desire and man, and exploit the weak for this purpose. Just as Moshe's taking leave of the historical stage, and the cessation of the level of prophecy that accompanied his leadership, will give rise to these phenomena, so too Malakhi warns about the phenomena that will accompany the final sealing of prophecy. Whether we are dealing with a lowering of spiritual tension as a reaction to the end of prophecy or whether it is human nature by its very essence that dictates the concern about such behavior which will eventually come, the prophet is obligated to warn about the spiritual evils that will befall Israel in the end of days.

Moshe explicitly proclaims:

For I know that after my death you will surely become corrupted, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands. (*Devarim* 31:29)

This is the same outlook that underlies the words of Malakhi.

GOD'S CONNECTION TO AND RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL CONTINUE

This pessimistic view, however, is not the entire story; there is also another dimension to the words of Moshe and Malakhi. Beyond Israel's disregard of God and their sins, there is a more basic relationship between Israel and their father in heaven. Even when God "hides" Himself, the deep connection between God and His people continues to exist. "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you sons of Ya'akov are not consumed" (v. 6). This gives rise not only to the punishment and the fury, as well as the call to repentance that goes unheeded ("Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you have said, With what shall we return"; v. 7), but also to the continuation of the relationship. The promise – that if they mend their ways and set aside *teruma* and tithes (i.e., if they demonstrate their gratitude to God for the bounty that He has bestowed upon them), their wishes will be fulfilled favorably – is based on the fact that God continues to maintain His relations with Israel and does not abandon them in the wake of sin.

THE SATIATED MAN IN THE CENTER

A most interesting point that rises in our *haftara*, and in great measure parallels that which is stated at the end of the Torah, is the focus placed upon interpersonal relations and upon the sin of religious indifference, rather than on idolatry. Despite the prophets' constant and consistent war against idol worship, the prophecy that seals the prophetic writings warns against the disregard of God and the idea that one need only serve Him to the degree that one gains therefrom. Setting man, his pleasures and his needs at the focus – and not the replacement of true spiritual service with false spiritual service – is the sin that our chapter struggles with as the greatest danger that will accompany Israel across the generations. Moshe Rabbenu's warnings in the *parashiyot* of *Nitzavim*, *Valekh* and *Ha'azinu* revolve for the most part around these issues. Man's abandonment of his spiritual aspirations in favor of pleasure and satiety, and his judgment of God's service on the basis of the benefit derived therefrom ("You have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts"; v. 14) are the dangers that the prophet warns about as prophecy comes to a close.

PROPHECY'S SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

The concluding verses well express the basic messages of Judaism, namely, the observance of Torah and *mitzvot*, and the hope for salvation, and these are directed at the people of Israel as the spiritual testament of prophecy. The values of "dealing honestly," "hoping for salvation" and Torah study, which the Gemara in *Shabbat* (31a)^{4[4]} sets before man as the criteria by which his life will be judged, emerge from the *haftara*, for they are indeed the cardinal principles by which a person must conduct his moral and religious life.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MOSHE AND ELIJAHU

In summary, the *haftara* opens with the renewal of the relationship between God and man by way of sacrifices and a restoration of the situation that had existed in the past, following a long period of sin. Thus, it parallels what happened in Egypt, for there too God remained faithful to His people and accepted their sacrifices, and thus the primal love that had existed between the patriarchs and God was restored. And the *haftara* closes with a reference to a prophet-messenger who will come and return the people to God, in the wake of which they will be redeemed. Moshe's role in the exodus from Egypt is passed on to Eliyahu, and just as Moshe parted from Israel to the wilderness of Chorev and returned to redeem them, so too Eliyahu who also reached an encounter with God at Chorev will return in the future and bring to the redemption of Israel.

(Translated by David Strauss)

^{4[4]} "Rava said: When a person is brought in for judgment, they say to him: Did you deal honestly? Did you fix times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you inquire into wisdom? Did you understand one thing from another?"