

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.**

VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

PARASHAT HA-CHODESH

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT AND THE QUESTION OF THE *NESI'UT*

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THE *NASI* AND THE SACRIFICIES

The starting point of the *haftara* for *Parashat ha-Chodesh*, like that of many other *haftarot*, is subject to a difference in custom between Ashkenazim and Sefardim. According to the Sefardic rite, the *haftara* (*Yechezkel* 45:18-46:15) opens with a verse that speaks of a sacrifice offered on Rosh Chodesh Nisan and concludes with the sacrifices brought on appointed days and festivals. According to the Ashkenazic rite, the *haftara* (*Yechezkel* 45:16-46:17) starts two verses earlier with verses dealing with the role of the *Nasi* and concludes with several additional verses dealing with the obligations and rights of the *Nasi* with respect to issues of inheritance.

As we have suggested already in other cases (e.g., the *haftara* for *Parashat Zakhor*), there is room to argue here as well that the different starting and ending points reflect differences in emphasis between the two rites regarding the two main themes of the *haftara*, namely, the *Nasi* and the sacrifices. To test this argument, we must first analyze the *haftara*.

YECHESKEL'S SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

Let us open with the sacrifices. As is known, the sacrifices spelled out in the *haftara* are very problematic, for they do not correspond at all to the laws of sacrifices found in the Torah. This problem was discussed by *Chazal* (*Menachot* 45a), who suggested two approaches to the matter:[\[1\]](#)

"In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bullock without blemish, and purify the sanctuary" (*Yechezkel* 45:18). – A sin offering; surely it is a whole burnt offering!

Rabbi Yochanan said: In the future, Eliyahu will interpret this section.

Rav Ashi said: They offered *milu'im* in the days of Ezra, as they had offered in the days of Moshe.

Thus was it taught also in a Baraita: Rabbi Yehuda says: In the future, Eliyahu will interpret this section. Rabbi Yose said to him: They offered *milu'im* in the days of Ezra, as they had offered in the days of Moshe. He said to him: Let your mind be at rest, for you have set my mind at rest.

It is not our intention to focus on this question, the attempt to reconcile the words of Yechezkel with the books of *Vayikra* and *Bamidbar*, but only to understand the system that Yechezkel lays out before us in and of itself and as it is presented by the prophet. Most of the sacrifices mentioned in the *haftara* revolve around three dates: the first of Nisan, the seventh of Nisan, and the fourteenth of Nisan, which is the day on which the *korban Pesach* is brought. Of course, the direct connection between the *haftara* and *Parashat ha-Chodesh* is the sacrifice brought on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, spelled out at the beginning of the *haftara*.

AS THEY HAD OFFERED IN THE DAYS OF MOSHE

When we examine the model of the sacrifice mentioned here, we can discern the model of the *milu'im* familiar to us from the book of *Bamidbar*.^[2] As is the case with the sacrifice mentioned here, there too we are dealing with sacrifices brought by the *Nesi'im* beginning on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. In addition, in both places we are dealing with novel offerings that do not correspond to anything that is familiar to us from the sections dealing with the sacrifices, but rather they deviate from those types of sacrifices. The connection between the first day and the seventh day is also reminiscent of the *milu'im* offerings (the *milu'im* in the book of *Vayikra* brought by Moshe, and not the sacrifices of the *Nesi'im*). In light of this, we can understand Rabbi Yochanan's assertion that "they offered *milu'im* in the days of Ezra, as they had offered in the days of Moshe." This is not merely an answer suggested in order to resolve the problem of the contradiction between the books of *Yechezkel* and *Bamidbar*, but rather it is an exegetical argument that has strong foundations in the plain sense of Scripture.

As we emphasized above, the model offered here is the sacrifices brought by the *Nesi'im* at the dedication of the *Mishkan*, and not the *milu'im* offerings of the book of *Vayikra*, and therefore the *Nasi* stands in the limelight. However, even the *milu'im* offerings of the book of *Vayikra* appear in *Yechezkel* in the previous chapter (43:18-27), which even uses a term derived from the same root as the word *milu'im*:

These are the ordinances of the altar on the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings upon it, and to sprinkle blood upon it... a young bullock for a sin offering... Seven days shall they make atonement of the altar and cleanse it; and they shall consecrate (*u-mil'u*) it.

We see then that the *milu'im* order of the book of *Vayikra* is found in *Yechezkel*, and therefore it is very reasonable to assume that the sacrificial order of the dedication of the altar by the *Nesi'im* should be found there as well.

THE MILU'IM OFFERINGS AND THE KORBAN PESACH

Seeing the sacrifices mentioned here as *milu'im* offerings is significant in and of itself, and it sheds light on the relationship between the *milu'im* and the *Mishkan*. It seems, however, that another element is concealed in the *haftara*, for it connects the *milu'im* offering of Rosh Chodesh and of the seventh of Nisan with the *korban Pesach*. The implication is that even the *korban Pesach* is connected to the *milu'im* order and that this is its purpose. This assertion is strengthened by what is stated regarding the offering brought on Rosh Chodesh:

And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it upon the doorposts of the house, and upon the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and upon the doorposts of the gate of the inner court. (*Yechezkel* 45:19)

The sprinkling of blood on the doorposts is a unique trademark of the *korban Pesach*; its presence in the Rosh Chodesh offering constitutes proof of the connection between the *milu'im* offering of Rosh Chodesh and the *korban Pesach*. It also appears that this explains the seven days connected to Pesach in our *haftara*: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have Pesach, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten" (45:21). The seven days are needed not as a reminder of the exodus from Egypt, for that lasted only one day, but because of the aspect of *milu'im* of the *korban Pesach*.

The essence of *milu'im* is the resting of sanctity and the initial operation of a holy system or place. The dedication of the *Mishkan* sanctified the *Mishkan* and began the service therein, and the *korban Pesach* initiated the sanctity of the people of Israel. The underlying idea is that the *korban Pesach* serves not only as a reminder of the miracle that brought about our deliverance, but also as an expression of the beginning of the sanctity of Israel. First of all, the essence of the holiday includes both the idea of the selection of Israel ("And I shall take you to Me as a people" (*Shemot* 6:7), and also the idea of deliverance from bondage ("And I shall take you out from under the afflictions of Egypt, and I shall save you from their work" (*ibid.* v. 6). Accordingly, the sacrifice includes within it the making of a covenant between God and Israel,^[3] and in this it is similar to the offerings of the *Mishkan*. Moreover, that fact that it is the first sacrifice in which Israel is commanded invests it with the significance of *milu'im* for the institution of the sacrifices. This is the beginning of the sacrificial order, and therefore it embraces the element of *milu'im*.

THE STATUS OF THE NASI

Let us now move on to the second theme of the *haftara*, namely, the standing of the *Nasi*.^[4] Unlike the book of *Bamidbar*, where the *Nesi'im* merely represent the people and offer sacrifices on their behalf, here the responsibility to bring the sacrifices falls upon the *Nasi*. The meaning of the verse –

And it shall be the *Nasi's* part to give burnt offerings, and meal offerings, and drink offerings, on the feasts, and on the new moons, and on the sabbaths, at all appointed times of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meal offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make atonement of the house of Israel. (*ibid.* v.17)

is not that the *Nasi* himself must bring these sacrifices, but that the responsibility to see that that these offerings are brought falls upon him. In the continuation, in the second half of the *haftara*, the *Nasi* is given special standing in the *Mikdash*, and he turns into an important figure in and of himself in that sphere.

The Nasi's standing in the *Mikdash* may be understood from two perspectives:

1) The responsibility to bring the sacrifices falls upon the *Nasi* because of his role as leader. A leader must worry about the needs of the people, and this includes his spiritual needs. The sacrifice is brought as part of the Divine service, but inasmuch as the service is performed by the body and with one's hands, and not only in one's heart, an obligation rests upon the *Nasi* to assist in all aspects of the service, and to accept responsibility for its performance. Leadership implies worrying about the needs of the people, including the needs relating to the bringing of sacrifices.

In this context, it should be noted that Yechezkel, like other prophets, cast much of the blame for the grave spiritual situation that led to the destruction of the Temple upon the leadership of the people, including the *Nasi*.^[5] If regarding the destruction, the leadership failed and even led the processes of exploitation and wickedness, then part of the expected repair at the time of the redemption is a reversal of the situation and an establishment of leadership that will lead the people spiritually. The *Nasi's* bearing of the burden of the sacrifices follows from his role as a leader who is responsible for his people's welfare.

2) Another point is the special standing of the king in the *Mikdash*. Various *halakhot* testify that the king is not only a political leader, but that in addition to his role as a leader who is concerned about the needs of his people, he is invested with sanctity as God's anointed one. Just as God's representative in the *Mikdash* – the *kohen* – is a *shelucha de-Rachamana*, God's agent, so too His representative on earth – the king – is also a *shelucha de-Rachamana*, and not our agent. Besides the very anointing with the anointing oil, which is unique to the *kohen* and the king, it should be mentioned that "there is no sitting in the Temple courtyard other than for the kings of the house of David alone," and that a king or *kohen* who was unnecessarily anointed with the anointing oil is exempt from the punishment of *karet*, because neither one is regarded as a "stranger."^[6] In this context, we should also note what the Rambam says in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, comparing the law of "stranger" regarding the monarchy ("You may not set a stranger over you"; *Devarim* 17:15) to the law of "stranger" regarding the priesthood.

THE METAPHYSICAL STATUS OF THE NASI

To summarize, the monarchy of the house of David is not only political leadership; it also has metaphysical standing. It is not by chance that three times a day we include the hope for the restoration of the Davidic house in our prayers, nor is it by accident that the Rambam associated the crown of the priesthood with the crown of the monarchy.^[7] Indeed, Yechezkel already mentioned the restoration of the kingdom of the house of David as accompanying the future resting of the *Shekhina*, in the section that we read as the *haftara* of *Parashat Vayigash*:

So shall they be My people, and I will be their God. And David My servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also follow My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Ya'akov My servant, in which your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and My servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, which I will give them; and I will multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. And My tabernacle shall be with them: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Then the nations shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore. (*Yechezkel 37:23-28*)

In light of this, the special standing given to the *Nasi* in the *Mikdash* should be seen as reflecting his belonging to the world of sanctity and his being God's representative, similar to the *kohen*. Just as the *milu'im* mark a new beginning and the beginning of the resting of the *Shekhina* in the wake of the reconstruction of the *Mikdash*, so too the renewal of the monarchy is accompanied by the offering of special sacrifices. The offering of the special sacrifices of the *Nasi* on *Shabbat* and *Rosh Chodesh* and his standing opposite the people follow from his being the *Nasi* who stands before God similar to the *kohen*, and distinct from the people. In contrast, on appointed days and festivals when even the people reach the level of standing before God, then the *Nasi* does not stand opposite them, but rather he "shall be in the midst of them; when they go in, he shall go in" (46:10).

PRIVILEGES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE NASI

The *haftara* according to the Sefardi rite concludes at this point with the *Nasi* offering his sacrifices (46:15). Its focus is the offering of the *milu'im* sacrifices, when these sacrifices encompass the renewed sanctities, including the *Mikdash* itself, the renewal of the covenant between Israel and God that finds expression in the *korban Pesach*, and the sacrifices of the *Nasi*. All of these beginnings are very relevant to *Parashat ha-Chodesh*, for the essence of Rosh Chodesh Nisan is an absolutely new beginning and the creation of a connection between the people and God by way of that beginning.

The *hafatara* according to the Ashkenazi rite, on the other hand, continues with another three verses that deal with the *Nasi's* rights and obligations vis-a-vis the people, together with a severe warning not to exploit his position to wrong the people. Needless to say, such a warning is not issued in a vacuum; it is a reaction to a reality that is very familiar to us, both from general history and from the descriptions of the prophets. Yechezkel himself relates to this phenomenon and prophesies about it at length in chapter 22. Thus, the conclusion of the (Ashkenazi) *haftara* is bound to its beginning, which also expands on the matter of the *Nasi* and his obligation to offer the people's sacrifices. In this way the emphasis is shifted from the sacrifice itself to the obligation falling upon the *Nasi* to worry about it. In light of this, there is room to argue that the main motif of the *haftara* is the issue of leadership, into which the topic of the sacrifices is integrated, and the responsibility of the *Nasi* parallels the role of Moshe Rabbenu in *Parashat ha-Chodesh*. Or it might be argued that the *haftara* operates on two axes, one axis being that of the sacrifice, and the other the issue of leadership.

(Translated by David Strauss)

[1] As is evident, there is a certain asymmetry between the two approaches. One offers a substantive solution, whereas the second assumes that there exists a possible solution, but it is not known to us, and it comes only to set our minds at ease that there is no need to bury the book of *Yechezkel*. This has opened the door to the commentators to offer other solutions, for it may be argued/hoped that the solution offered is the interpretation that Eliyahu will give in the future.

[2] In truth, we are not dealing with *milu'im*, which are the sacrifices listed in the *Parashiyot* of *Tzav* and *Shemini*, and which Moshe offered prior to the dedication of the *Mishkan*, but rather with the sacrifices offered at the dedication of the *Mishkan* in *ParashatNasa*. But I refer to them as *milu'im* for the purposes of the present discussion in the way of the aforementioned Gemara in *Menachot*. The connection between these two orders of sacrifices is an important question in and of itself, but unrelated to our discussion. An interesting analysis of the matter may be found in Rav Shelomo Fischer's *Bet Yishai*, no. 32.

[3] The idea of *korban Pesach* as a sacrifice connected to a covenant is a fundamental principle in understanding the sacrifice, but this is not the forum to expand on the matter.

[4] I assume as obvious that the *Nasi* mentioned here is the political leader, as the term is used elsewhere in Scripture. Rashi, however, raises doubts, bringing a disagreement between himself and Rabbi Menachem (ben Saruk?): "I say that the '*Nasi*' refers to the High Priest, and so too all instances of '*Nasi*' in this context. I have heard, however, in the name of Rabbi Menachem that the verse refers to the king." The plain sense of the text supports Rabbi Menachem. The Radak was not all disturbed about the matter, and asserts that "it is self-explanatory." This assertion would be inappropriate if the word '*Nasi*' does not bear its usual meaning.

[5] See, for example, 7:27; 21:30; and 22:6.

[6] *Keritut* 6b according to Rabbi Yehuda. Even the dissenting view of Rabbi Meir does not follow from a disagreement about the status of the king, but from his understanding of unnecessary anointing, even with respect to priests.

[7] *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:1. The Ramban also coined a similar concept, namely, *hod malkhut*, the majesty of monarchy, which denotes the metaphysical element of kingship in addition to political authority. See Ramban, commentary to *Bereishit* 49:10.