

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.**

PARASHIYOT ACHAREI MOT - KEDOSHIM

**"AND I WILL BRING BACK THE CAPTIVITY OF MY PEOPLE OF
ISRAEL"**

Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein

THE DIFFERENCES IN CUSTOM

There are various different customs regarding the *haftarot* of *Parashiyot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim*. Generally speaking, we can talk about the end of the book of *Amos* (9:7-15, "Are you not as much mine as the children of Kushiym") as one possibility, and various chapters taken from the middle of the book of *Yechezkel* as the

alternative.^[1] So too there are different views as to the appropriate *haftara* when the two *parashiyot* are read separately. Some resolve the problem in such years (usually a leap year when there are more *Shabbatot*) in a simple manner by reading the *haftara* from *Amos* on one of the two *Shabbatot* and the prophecy of *Yechezkel* on the other (and here too there are different customs as to which to read for *Acharei Mot* and which for *Kedoshim*). Others reject this option and read again on the second *Shabbat* the same *haftara* that had been read the previous week.

The prevalent custom today in Israel – and in many communities outside of Israel – is to read the *haftara* from *Amos* in years when the two *parashiyot* are read together, and it is to this custom that we shall relate in the framework of this series. But before we analyze the *haftara* itself, let us examine the root of the differences in custom, inasmuch as this is the key to understanding the objective of our *haftara*.

"CAUSE JERUSALEM TO KNOW"

The starting point for our discussion of these *haftarot* is the Mishna at the end of the third chapter of *Megila* (28a):

We do not read as *haftara* [the account of] the *Merkava*; Rabbi Yehuda permits this. Rabbi Eliezer says: We do not read as *haftara* "Cause Jerusalem to know" (*Yechezkel* 16).^[2]

At first glance, Rabbi Eliezer seems to be right, for the sixteenth chapter of the book of *Yechezkel* constitutes a very caustic reproach, containing severe expressions that the prophet casts against Israel. Circumstances – time and place – forced the prophet to use such language, but of all the chapters of Scripture, is it necessary to choose precisely this chapter as a *haftara* to be read in public following the Torah reading? Indeed, a Baraita (*Megila* 25b) relates Rabbi Eliezer's emotional reaction to one who went ahead and read this chapter as a *haftara*:

It once happened that a certain person read before Rabbi Eliezer "Cause Jerusalem to know her abominations." He said to him: Before you examine the abominations of Jerusalem, go out and examine the abominations of your own mother.

The brazenness of airing out the sins of Jerusalem in public and publicizing its dissolute ways enraged Rabbi Eliezer who was concerned about the honor of Israel and Jerusalem. His reaction is, indeed, understandable and it speaks to our hearts, and we must, therefore, try to reach an understanding of the Sages who disagreed with him.

THE CONSOLATION IN THE REPROACH

We might of course argue that reproach is never pleasant, but nevertheless necessary, and despite all the problems it is better to take note of and publicize the sins of Israel in order to prevent another exile. However, other than on the *Shabbatot* of the Three Weeks when we read the three *haftarot* of calamity, we do not find that the *haftarot* consist entirely of reproach and threats without consolation, despite the great number of chapters of reproach in the Prophets. It seems, therefore, that we must argue that the Sages saw an element of consolation in this chapter as well.

The Gemara does not specify where the *haftara* "Cause Jerusalem to know" ends, nor does it discuss whether the endpoint is significant for the Sages' allowance to read the chapter as *ahaftara*. The chapter itself is very long (63 verses), but it seems that the Sages allowed it to be read as *haftara* on account of its end. In order to understand this point, let us cite the concluding verses:

For thus says the Lord God; I will even deal with you as you have done, for you have despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish unto you an everlasting covenant. Then you shall remember your ways, and be ashamed, when you shall receive your sisters, your elder and your younger: and I will give

them to you for daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. And I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall know that I am the Lord: that you may remember, and be put to shame, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done, says the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 16:59-63)

These verses follow a lengthy chapter filled with exceedingly harsh reproach, one that spells out the abominations of Jerusalem and its abandonment of God despite all the goodness that He had bestowed upon it. The concluding verses, however, offer great consolation. Despite everything that Israel did – that which is defined in these verses of consolation as "despising the oath in breaking the covenant" - God will not repay them in kind. Rather, He will keep to the covenant that He had made with them and recognize its continued validity. Despite the legitimacy of responding in a manner of measure for measure and judging them according to their present spiritual state, God remembers Israel's youthful love and sees the covenant as everlasting. There is no greater consolation than this, that despite their being at the lowest possible spiritual level, God recommits Himself to an everlasting covenant. It is not by chance that *Chazal* chose to include this verse in the framework of the *Zikhronot* blessing on *Rosh Ha-shana*. When we come to present verses that prominently proclaim the idea of remembering the covenant, a place of honor is reserved for this verse.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL IS INTACT

Let us now return to the *haftara* from *Amos*. Throughout the book and without mincing words, Amos reprimands Israel. In two important places, however, Amos clarifies that God continues to maintain a relationship with Israel and has not abandoned the covenant. The first place is in the *haftara* of *Vayeshev*, which states that punishments fall upon Israel not because of their breaking the covenant, but because of the selection of Israel and their continued connection to God: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities" (*Amos* 3:2).

The second place is in our *haftara*, the verses with which the book of *Amos* comes to a close. In conclusion, Amos once again emphasizes that the

relationship between Israel and their Father in heaven remains intact, despite everything that had been said throughout the book. This idea is stated explicitly in the *haftara's* opening verses:

Are you not as much mine as the children of Kushiyim, O children of Israel? says the God. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Peleshtim from Kaftor, and Aram from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Yaakov, says the Lord. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. (*Amos 9:7-9*)

At first glance, the phrase "as the children of Kushiyim" is quite astonishing, for its plain sense, that Israel is similar to the children of Kush, seems to be inappropriate, both with respect to its content, in and of itself, and with respect to the context. Therefore, most of the commentators, while offering a variety of explanations,^[3] assume that these words come to describe a special relationship between God and Israel, and that they are connected to the two following verses. In the second verse, it is explicitly stated that God will differentiate between Israel and the nations, and that despite the fact that throughout the book He had threatened Israel with severe punishments, the distinction between Israel and the nations remains clear. Israel will not be destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth, but rather they will be punished, whereas the other sinful nations will be utterly obliterated. This idea repeats itself in the third verse, which uses the metaphor of the sieve to present punishment as a means of Israel's repair rather than its destruction.

THE FALLEN TABERNACLE

In the continuation of the prophecy as well, Amos emphasizes the tension that exists between the punishment together with the pain that it causes and the promise that God will remain faithful to Israel. On the one hand, "all the sinners of My people shall die by the sword" (v. 10), but on the other hand, God will raise up the tabernacle of David that has fallen, repair its breaches, and rebuild it as in days of old. The metaphor of the fallen tabernacle is very interesting. Ordinarily, a fallen tabernacle is not raised up, but rather it is destroyed and a new one is built in its place. One might

invest in a shaky building and restore it, but a falling tabernacle is allowed to fall, and with its beams a new tabernacle is constructed. Israel is likened here to a tabernacle whose existence depends on the wind and other environmental conditions and is not independent in the way of a permanent building, because Israel's existence is dependent upon its relationship with God. The prophet, therefore, emphasizes that despite the "tabernacle" element in Jewish existence, Israel will be rebuilt and will not be replaced by any other nation.

This idea is emphasized again in the following verse:

That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the nations, who are called by My name, says the Lord who does this. (ibid. v. 12)

According to the commentators, the expression, "who are called by My name," relates to Israel, and the verse informs us that those who are called by God's name will take possession of the remnant of Edom. In other words, Israel is the tabernacle upon which God bestowed His name, and therefore He will not allow it to collapse, whereas the houses of the nations which are not attributed to God will be destroyed if they stray from the principles of justice and morality. It might perhaps also be suggested that "who are called by My name" relates to Edom, but on condition. That is to say, as long as they walk in the path of God, they are called by His name, but as soon as they veer from the path, God no longer watches over them. This is because the bestowal of His name upon them depends on their actions, whereas the covenant between God and Israel is everlasting.

The concluding verses of the *haftara* (and of the entire book) present us with an optimistic picture of "the coming days" that await Israel. These will not be days of famine and want as punishment for their sins but rather days of abundance accompanied by an ingathering of the exiles and taking possession of the land. The promise is given that they will not be uprooted again from the land of Israel, but rather they will be planted there forever more.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL RECOMPENSE

What is the significance of this *haftara* for *Parashat Acharei Mot* and/or *Kedoshim*? To answer this question, we must go back to the section dealing with forbidden sexual relationships and to what is stated there regarding the nations who practiced all those abominations and were cast out of the land:

Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations were defiled which I cast out before you: and the land was defiled: therefore I do punish its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out her inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourns among you: for all these abominations have the men of the land done, who were before you, and the land is defiled; that the land vomit not you out also, when you defile it, as it has vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the persons that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall you keep My ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were practiced before you, and that you defile not yourselves in them: I am the Lord your God. (*Vayikra* 18:24-30)

The meaning of these verses is clear and ominous. The nations engaged in abominable activities and were spewed out by the land. Israel must not act engage in such abominations, so that their fate be not the same as the fate of those other nations. The principle of recompense in the *parasha* is invoked in equal measure against Israel and against the nations. "That the land vomit not you out also, when you defile it, as it has vomited out the nations that were before you." If Israel sins and engages in those same abominations, its fate will be evil and bitter.

EVERLASTING COVENANT

Corresponding to this point, the *haftara* comes to console Israel and present another perspective. The *haftara* from *Yechezkel* which Rabbi Eliezer so opposed argues that there is an everlasting covenant between Israel and God that will eventually be restored. The Sages who disagreed with Rabbi Eliezer seem to have

intentionally looked for a prophecy that speaks of the abominations of Jerusalem. It is precisely a prophecy that presents the abominations in all their severity and defines them as such, but nevertheless asserts at the end that the covenant will be remembered and reestablished as an everlasting covenant, that has the power to console Israel regarding the dreadful punishment implicit in the admonitions in *Parashat Acharei Mot*. If we would read a *haftara* that does not speak specifically about abominations, there would be room to argue that while other offenses are subject to pardon, those guilty of abominations will be vomited out by the land and not permitted to return. It is, therefore, necessary to choose a *haftara* that rules out the possibility of such an argument.

Our custom, in the wake of Rabbi Eliezer's argument, is not to dwell at length in public on the abominations, but the objective of the *haftara* remains the same, namely, to console Israel that they will not be sent out of their land for all time, but rather in the end the covenant will be remembered.

Thus, the end of the *haftara* takes us back to the beginning, the contrast/comparison that the prophet makes between Israel and the nations. "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? And the Peleshtim from Kaftor, and Aram from Kir?" It is precisely with this sensitive point about which Israel is most concerned – namely, that God moves nations from place to place, and just as He removed the nations from the land of Israel and planted the people of Israel in their place, so too He can do to them – it is precisely with this point that Amos opens his prophecy. And it is against this background that the consoling words of his prophecy should be understood.

The commentaries differ as to the meaning of this verse. Some understand the verse as asserting contrast. While it is true that God moved the Pelishtim, Aram and Israel and transferred them from place to place, the meaning of these moves is not the same. For His connection to Israel is different from His connection to the nations as is explained in the continuation of the prophecy, and therefore Israel has no reason to be concerned that its fate will be like that of the nations. Thus, the prophet's words complement what is stated in our *parasha* by sweetening the quality of justice and turning it into mercy. In contrast, others understand the verse as a comparison and a warning to Israel, similar to the message of our *parasha*. According to them, the consolation coming at the end of the *haftara* is based on this comparison, namely, that

even though Israel is no different than the other nations, inasmuch as they are subject to the same Divine laws that govern history, there is still a difference between them in that God will never destroy or abandon Israel. If they will be exiled from the land, they will yet return, for in the end, the prophetic promise that concludes the book leaves no doubt about the matter:

And I will bring back the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the wasted cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink their wine; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God. (*Amos*9:14-15)

By comparing the concluding verses of Amos' prophecy with the concluding verses of *Acharei Mot* which severely warn of the price to be exacted for the practice of abominations, we can appreciate the consolation offered by the *haftara*.

(Translated by David Strauss)

[1] *Yechezkel* 22, "Now, you son of man, will you judge," is the chapter commonly read as the *haftara*, but there were other customs which recognized other chapters as the *haftara*. A full description of the various customs may be found in the list of *haftarot* found at the end of vol. X of *Encyclopedia Talmudit*.

[2] Neither the Mishna nor the Gemara mentions the *parasha* to which this *haftara* would be read. So too the Baraita in tractate *Soferim* which is cited in the Gemara about the person who read the *haftara* of "Cause Jerusalem to know" before Rabbi Eliezer does not specify the *parasha*. There are, however, good reasons to believe that we are dealing with the *parashiyot* of *Acharei Mot* and/or *Kedoshim*: the reproach regarding the abominations of Israel, the connection made by the prophet between their abominations and the actions of the Canaanites, and the mention of the slaughter of their children as part of the

abominations. The reproach in this prophecy draws its force from the fact that the prophet relies on the scriptural verses that prohibit illicit sexual relations – in the literal sense - as abominations, and adds to this the metaphoric baggage of idolatry as fornication, such that the prohibition of idol worship which is likened to fornication is illuminated in the full negative light of the abomination of illicit sexual relations in their literal sense.

So too it is reasonable to assume that the *haftarot* proposed for these *parashiyot* from the book of *Yechezkel* were an attempt to remain faithful to the spiritual approach of Yechezlel as fit for these *parashiyot*, without reading the prophecy specifically rejected by Rabbi Eliezer (despite the fact that the law does not follow his view), and this too supports the assumption that "Cause Jerusalem to know" was meant for *Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim*.

It should be noted that the Rambam (list of *haftarot* at the end of *Sefer Ahava*) and the Abudraham list "Cause Jerusalem to know" as the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*. The *haftara* that they speak about is not the entire chapter but merely its beginning, and thus the entire meaning of the *haftara* is changed. Since Yechezkel opens his prophecy with a description of the goodness that God bestowed upon Israel in the past before he begins with his reproach, terminating the *haftara* after these verses removes its harsh elements. The abominations spelled out in the prophecy do not appear in the *haftara*, and all that is left is the harsh opening verse. Thus, it is appropriate for *Parashat Shemot*. It seems however that the Tannaitic dispute relates to the reading of the entire prophecy and for a different *parasha*, which in our opinion could well have been *Acharei Mot*.

[3] See Radak, Ibn Ezra, Abravanel, and Malbim. Rashi and Mahari Kra interpret the phrase according to its plain sense. See below.