

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.**

PARASHAT PINCHAS

YIRMIYAHU AND MOSHE – TWO MODELS OF PROPHECY

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THREE PROPHECIES OF CATASTROPHE

This week's *haftara* (*Yirmiyahu* 1) opens the series of *haftarot* that are read during the Three Weeks, known as *telata de-pur'anuta* - "the three *haftarot* of catastrophe." Choosing a *haftara* that is connected to the calendar in disregard of the contents of the *parasha* is not merely a matter of custom, but rather it is based on the law of the Gemara in a passage at the end of tractate *Megila* (31b):

When *Rosh Chodesh Av* falls out on *Shabbat*, we read as the *haftara* "*Chodsheikhem u-Mo'adeikhem*" (*Yeshayahu* 1:14).

The Gemara speaks only about *Rosh Chodesh Av* that falls out on *Shabbat*, and does not relate to other *Shabbatot*, but the common custom expanded the principle to additional cases. The Rambam's testimony on the matter (*Hilkhot Tefila* 13:19) teaches us about a custom that covered all the *haftarot* read during the Three Weeks, but of a different composition than what is familiar to us:

It is the common custom to read as the *haftara* on the three *Shabbatot* preceding *Tisha Be-Av* words of rebuke; on the first *Shabbat*, we read as *haftara* "*Divrei Yirmiyahu*"; on the second, "*Chazon Yeshayahu*"; [and] on the third, "*Eikha Hayeta le-Zona*."

Our custom of reading the first two chapters of *Yirmiyahu* and the first chapter of *Yeshayahu* is brought by the *Tosafot* in *Megila* (s.v. *Rosh Chodesh Av*) as the prevalent custom, with the comment that this is the ancient custom of Eretz Israel, as reflected in the *Pesikta*. Indeed, the midrashim of the *Pesikta* arranged according to the holidays and special *Shabbatot* of the year, expound upon the three *haftarot* of the Three Weeks that are familiar to us (*Divrei Yirmiyahu*, *Shim'u*, and *Chazon Yeshayahu*), as the *haftarot* that are read during this period. This custom was codified by the *Shulchan Arukh* in sec. 428:8, and is common to both the Ashkenazi and Sefardi rites.

CONNECTION TO THE SEASON RATHER THAN TO THE PARASHA

Expanding the custom from *Rosh Chodesh* to the Three Weeks and the differences between the Rambam's custom and ours require discussion and explanation, and we shall try to do that in another two weeks in our *shiur* on the *haftara* read on *Shabbat Chazon*. In the context of the present *shiur*, it is more appropriate to emphasize what is common to both, namely, the very principle that the *haftara* that we read corresponds not to the *parasha*, but to the season. We have already noted in the past, and here is the place to emphasize once again, that this attests to the basic objective of the enactment of *haftara*, namely, to offer weekly spiritual guidance from the words of the prophets to the ordinary Jew, in accordance with his situation and needs. In the absence of special needs, the message that is chosen relates to the weekly *parasha*, but when the calendar dictates other needs, they take precedence and the spiritual message is chosen accordingly. Therefore, in the upcoming two (and a half^[1]) months none of the *haftarot* will be connected to the *parasha*, so that almost the entire book of *Devarim* lacks the exegetical accompaniment of the *haftarot*.

MOSHE AND YIRMIYAHU

Having said this, let us now turn to an analysis of the *haftara* itself. As might be recalled, this *haftara* serves also, according to the Sefardi rite, as the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*. There it serves the purpose of comparison and contrast between the selection of Moshe and the consecration of Yirmiyahu. Here as well we shall exploit this angle as an exegetical tool, and thus repay a debt that we undertook at the time, during the week of *Parashat Shemot*, to treat this *haftara* in the framework of our *parasha*.

When we compare the two stories, we see that Moshe strongly opposes the appointment cast upon him, whereas Yirmiyahu does not oppose it, but merely asks for support and strengthening. His argument that he is young and lacks maturity is a pertinent argument, and from the moment that he is promised God's support and assistance, he calms down and accepts the mission without further discussion. Moshe, on the other hand, does not put forward any relevant arguments based on his inappropriateness for the job.^[2] All that he presents are general arguments that could have been put forward by anybody upon whom such a mission would have been cast. The argument, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (*Shemot* 3:11)" testifies to Moshe's humility, but it does not constitute an explanation why he in particular is unsuited for the role. And this is certainly true about the question, "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I

say to them?" (ibid. v. 13). We are not dealing here with a flaw in Moshe's personality or abilities, but rather with a lack of desire on his part to accept the mission cast upon him. Unlike Yirmiyahu, who accepts the supportive words of God and abandons his arguments, Moshe is not set at ease even after he is promised by God, "Certainly, I will be with you" (ibid. v. 12), and he continues to argue with God.

PROPHET OF REDEMPTION AND PROPHET OF DESTRUCTION

The conclusion that emerges from all this is that Yirmiyahu is not afraid to accept upon himself his prophetic mission and that he merely voices a pertinent comment regarding his inappropriateness for the job; therefore God's promise to help him suffices. Moshe, on the other hand, does whatever he can do not to accept the mission and he only goes to Egypt after a long argument during the course of which God becomes angry with him. Were we to ask ourselves, from whom would we expect greater opposition, from Moshe, the prophet of redemption, or from Yirmiyahu, the prophet of destruction, we would say just the opposite. Moshe is sent to the people with the festive tidings of their redemption and the end of their servitude, whereas Yirmiyahu comes with harsh prophecies of rebuke and destruction. It is certainly far more pleasant to prophesy about the evil that will befall Pharaoh and Egypt, than to make similar prophecies about Israel.

While it is true that Moshe will also be sent as a prophet to Pharaoh who will refuse to heed his message and that the confrontation with Pharaoh will be unpleasant, Moshe's primary mission was still to Israel and it differs in its essentials from that of Yirmiyahu. And, indeed, even retrospectively, we see that Yirmiyahu suffered more than Moshe. He lived in harsh and constant tension with the members of his generation, he was persecuted by his neighbors and acquaintances, and he was cast into a pit. Moshe, despite his disappointment with the people and the tensions that accompanied the relationship between them throughout their joint years in the wilderness, was very far from the situations that characterized Yirmiyahu. Why, then, did Moshe oppose his prophetic mission so much more strongly than did Yirmiyahu?

LEADER OR MOUTHPIECE

In order to answer this question, we must examine the nature of the missions cast upon each of them. We find in Scripture various different models of prophecy, and these account for the difference between Moshe and Yirmiyahu. One model of prophecy is the prophet sent to lead the people and serve them as a guide. Fundamentally, we are dealing with human leadership. The prophet is chosen because of his unique spiritual-prophetic powers and because of his spiritual greatness, but he leads the people according to his own judgment, while exploiting his capability of communicating with God and in light of his spiritual perspective. In other words, we are dealing with a "prophet-leader," that is to say, a leader who is also a prophet. Of course, the tensions and doubts that accompany any leader who is forced to make difficult decisions and outline policy in complicated situations, are also the lot of the leader who is a prophet, for the prophet leads his people as a human being.

In contrast, there is another type of prophet, who does not approach the people with the spiritual powers that had developed within him to the point that he achieved prophecy, but rather

he simply serves as a convenient mouthpiece for God to pass His word on to the people. The prophet is a human loudspeaker that God uses to pass on messages relating to the needs of the people. If a prophet of independent stature is available, he will be chosen to bring the word of God to the people, but if no such possibility presents itself, it is not impossible that a person who does not meet the ordinary criteria for prophecy will be chosen, because the circumstances dictate transmission of the message.

It is precisely on this point that there is a significant difference between Moshe and Yirmiyahu. Moshe was appointed as a prophet sent to lead the people. God revealed Himself to Moshe through prophecy, and chose him because of his spiritual qualifications, but the office was one of political leadership. For reasons that we can not go into here, Moshe was afraid and tried to refuse, but it is important to emphasize that it was the position of prophet-leader that he tried to refuse. Yirmiyahu, on the other hand, was not appointed to serve as leader, but rather he was meant to serve as God's mouthpiece, and therefore he does not refuse, but rather he accepts God's support and agrees to prophesy.

YOUNG AND CONSECRATED

This point expresses itself in various ways. First of all, it is expressed in Yirmiyahu's selection despite his young age, for regarding the model of prophet as God's mouthpiece, there is no reason not to choose a young man, for he prophesies not on the basis of his spiritual accomplishments, but because he serves as a conduit for passing on messages. Needless to say, had Yirmiyahu been chosen to serve as a leader like Moshe, it would have been inconceivable to send him as a young man, with no experience or standing, despite his consecration. It was only because the job description was that of a prophet who is not a leader that it was possible to appoint such a young man.

Second, the emphasis on Yirmiyahu's consecration which is formulated with the terminology of bodily sanctity is connected to the fact that he serves as God's instrument. This is similar to the sanctity of a priest which is connected to the fact that the priest is a vessel of the sanctuary and that he serves God with his body. In this context, let us cite the words of Radak:

"I have sanctified you" – in the sense of sanctity. "And I have known you" – in the sense of greatness. According to the first explanation, one might ask: Surely all the prophets and righteous people, and similarly the wicked people, God knew and recognized them before they were formed. This teaches that [Yirmiyahu's] father and mother were careful regarding sanctity and purity during the pregnancy so that the prophet should be consecrated.

And the great Sage, Rabbi Moshe bar Maimon wrote that this applies to every prophet – he requires natural preparation from the time of his formation that he be prepared for prophecy with training. According to him, one can ask: Why was this not stated to any other prophet, but [only] to Yirmiyahu? We can say that because God, may He be blessed, knew that Yirmiyahu would refuse God's mission, He told him that He had been prepared for prophecy from the womb, in order to strengthen his heart to follow God's mission. Should you ask: Surely Moshe Rabbenu also refused God's mission, but He did not tell him these things, [the answer is that] He gave him a great sign to strengthen his

heart, namely, the sign of the burning bush and the other signs that He gave him to perform before Pharaoh.

According to the Radak's first explanation, when God says, "Before you came out of the womb I sanctified you," we are dealing with the concept of sanctity, in its plain sense, whereas the Rambam understood this as preparation for prophetic capability. According to both explanations, the Radak is bothered by the fact that this was not stated with respect to other prophets. His answer according to the Radak's first explanation is that only Yirmiyahu was sanctified with bodily sanctity from the womb, this owing to his parents' conduct during the period of pregnancy (apparently, following the precedent of Shimshon). It seems that this should be connected also to the point already mentioned, namely, that the emphasis on the prophet's bodily sanctity stems from the fact that he serves as God's mouthpiece. Since Yirmiyahu does this from an early age, his sanctity is from the womb. A prophet-leader, on the other hand, does not serve as God's instrument, but out of the human greatness within him, and therefore his definition is different. A comment is also in order regarding the Radak's answer in the framework of the Rambam's understanding. He assumes that the matter of sanctity was not unique to Yirmiyahu, but it was told to him in order to strengthen him since he did not want to prophesy. A question, therefore, arises regarding Moshe, for he too refused to prophesy, but he did not receive this kind of strengthening. The Radak answers that Moshe received other types of strengthening, for "He gave him a great sign to strengthen his heart, namely, the sign of the burning bush and the other signs that He gave him to perform before Pharaoh."

This answer fits in very well with what we have said. Yirmiyahu who was a prophet-mouthpiece was strengthened with respect to his sanctity, whereas Moshe who hesitated to accept the office of prophet-leader, was given tools that would strengthen his political skills, this being preferable for his needs.

PROPHET TO THE NATIONS

Third, the expression, "I have ordained you a prophet to the nations" (v. 5) seems to be connected to this as well. The expression is difficult, for Yirmiyahu's primary mission was not to the nations, but to Israel. The commentators offered various explanations to resolve this difficulty. However we explain these words, whether directed at Israel as a nation, or to all the nations including Israel, it is only in the framework of prophet as God's mouthpiece that Yirmiyahu could have been assigned the mission of turning to the nation and prophesying about it. Even if the reference is to Israel, the prophecy follows from the fact that they are a nation about which the prophet can prophesy, and this he does by delivering the word of God from the outside. Were he a prophet-leader leading the people, using the expression "prophet for the nations" when he guides and leads the people of Israel would be off the mark. For he would be leading them as part of them, and for that they should be called Israel and he shouldn't prophesy about them as a prophet who sees them as a nation from a prophetic perspective outside of them.

HAND AND MOUTH

In light of this, we can well understand the end of the dialogue: "Then the Lord put out His hand, and touched my mouth, And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your

mouth" (v. 9). Defining the consecration as placing the word of God in his mouth follows what we said that God uses the prophet as a mouthpiece, i.e., He puts His word in the prophet's mouth. This is also the reason that He touches his mouth, in contrast to Moshe who receives signs in his hand and in his staff, because the objective of the signs for Moshe is not the strengthening of his prophetic powers, but rather his leadership, and the symbols for that are not the mouth, but rather the staff and the hands which represent practical and political activity.

GOD'S MOUTHPIECE – A PRIVATE PERSON

In conclusion, it should be noted that in the continuation of the book, there is a sharp tension between Yirmiyahu the person who experiences the destruction and Israel's suffering, on the one hand, and the prophet of destruction who foretells the catastrophe that will befall them. Frequently, the book describes points of friction and near crises regarding this duality. This does not stand in contradiction to our claim that Yirmiyahu is God's mouthpiece, but rather it strengthens it. In the end, Yirmiyahu is also a private individual with personal experiences, but the duality and the tension stem from the fact that in his other half he is God's mouthpiece, and owing to the sharp differences of perspective, the sharp tension is created. Were he a prophet-leader, he would be able to faithfully represent the human angle even before God and soften the tension, but since his prophetic role is merely to express the Divine perspective, the tension is exceedingly severe.

THE ORDER OF THE PROPHECIES AND THEIR MEANING

Let us now briefly deal with another point, namely, the reciprocal relationship between the various parts of the *haftara*. It is easy to see that the *haftara* is composed of four prophecies:

- 1) the prophecy of consecration
- 2) the prophecy concerning the rod of the almond tree
- 3) the prophecy concerning the boiling pot
- 4) the prophecy concerning Israel's going after God in the wilderness

The prophecy of consecration is not a prophecy that was related to Israel, but only to Yirmiyahu, and it deals with the nature of his prophecy. The second prophecy regarding the rod of the almond tree also deals with the nature of his prophecy as "a prophecy about prophecy" and with Yirmiyahu's prophetic skills ("You have seen well" [v. 13]), and it is not meant to serve as Yirmiyahu's inaugural words to the people, but as sort of a "prophetic exercise" between him and God. In light of this, we must examine the third prophecy concerning the boiling pot, and this in light of two considerations.

First, unlike the prophecy of consolation at the end of the *haftara* about which it says, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem" (2:2), here it does not say that Yirmiyahu must go out and speak to the people. It should be emphasized that in many places in the book, the prophet is told to go to the people and prophesy to them, and thus this is not an expression unique to this prophecy of consolation. We see then that the prophecy of "Go out and cry in the ears of Jerusalem" was told to the people, whereas the prophecy of the boiling pot was not conveyed to the people, but rather it was a private message directed at Yirmiyahu alone. This fits in well with

the words, "And the word of the Lord came to me a second time" (v. 13), which emphasizes the connection between the prophecy of the rod of the almond tree and the prophecy of the boiling pot, for the word "second" creates a relationship between the two prophecies.

What is the meaning of the boiling pot to Yirmiyahu as a private individual, rather than as a prophecy to the people? It seems that the prophecy comes to warn Yirmiyahu that his primary mission will be to serve as prophet of doom. He must know and prepare himself for the fact that he will spend most of his time dealing with ruin and destruction. His visions will be visions of boiling anger ("boiling pot") and his predictions will be about foreign kings coming to destroy Jerusalem. Before he sets out on his mission, he is forewarned by God and prepared for what the future will bring him.

OPENING WITH CONSOLATION

If this is true, it leads us to another important conclusion, namely, that the first prophecy that Yirmiyahu delivers to the people is the prophecy of "I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, etc." (2:2-3). *Chazal* [3] indeed note that this is the beginning of Yirmiyahu's prophecy:

"Go out and cry in the ears of Jerusalem" – this is the beginning of the book. And why is it written here? Because there is no order in the Torah. [4]

This notion has great importance because, according to this, Yirmiyahu's first words to the people are not rebuke and warning of destruction, but consolation. In order that he should be able to reproach them with harsh words and decree destruction and exile, he must first present a prophecy that embraces long-term optimism - surely the "devotion of youth" under discussion took place hundreds of years earlier, but it is still valid – and show God's compassion and connection to them. Otherwise, the rebuke would bring the people to despair and to the feeling that God wishes their destruction. Only in the wake of such an opening can the prophet come with words of rebuke. In next week's *haftara*, Yirmiyahu will rebuke Israel for straying from God. It is therefore of exceeding importance that this week he opens with Israel's youthful devotion and bridal love.

(Translated by David Strauss)

[1] Today we speak of "three *haftarot* of catastrophe" and "seven *haftarot* of consolation," but the sources speak also of "two *haftarot* of repentance" which follow them and constitute the two *haftarot* of repentance of Tishrei. Thus, these two *haftarot* are fundamentally connected to the calendar and not to the *parasha*, though some of the *parashiyot* deal with repentance, so that the *haftarot* relate to them as well.

[2] The argument of "heaviness of mouth" and "heaviness of tongue" appear only at the end of the story of the burning bush, after he exhausts all his other arguments.

[3] *Mekhilta* on the Song of the Sea, on the verse, "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake" (*Shemot* 15:9).

[4] In light of our explanation, there is no need to invoke the idea that there is no order in the organization of the biblical books, for we can say that the previous prophecies are not the beginning of the book for the people.