

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.**

TOLEDOT

"REJOICE WITH TREMBLING"

Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein

"YET I LOVED YAAKOV, AND I HATED ESAV"

The *haftara* for *Parashat Toledot* (*Malakhi* 1:1-2:7) opens with the selection of Israel, God's love for Yaakov, and His preference for Yaakov over Esav. In the opening verse, which constitutes one of the primary sources for those Jewish thinkers who discuss the idea of selection, the prophet proclaims:

I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, In what have You loved us? Was not Esav Yaakov's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Yaakov. And I hated Esav. (*Malakhi* 1:2-3)

On the face of it, the prophet asserts that Yaakov was chosen and Esav rejected, this being two sides of the same coin.[1] The selection of the one (Yaakov) necessitated the rejection of the other (Esav). However, if we examine the scriptural passage and pay attention to the punctuation, we see that the verse does not combine the two clauses into a single unit, but rather it separates between them. It does not say: "Was not Esav Yaakov's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Yaakov, and I hated Esav" as a single compound sentence, but rather it says: "Was not Esav Yaakov's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Yaakov." Here ends the first verse, which establishes God's love for Yaakov. But God's love for Yaakov does not necessitate His hate of Esav. It is certainly possible that God could love Yaakov and not hate Esav, but rather He could relate to him in a neutral manner, with no love and no hate. Therefore, God's hate of Esav is not part of the statement regarding God's love of Yaakov. The second verse, which deals with Esav's relationship with God, opens with an additional assertion that stands on its own: "And I hated Esav, and laid his mountains waste, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness" (1:3). This assertion does not follow from God's love of Yaakov, but rather it results from Esav's actions and wickedness, as is implied by the following verse which describes Esav's border as the "border of wickedness."

LOVE THAT DOES NOT NEGATE

There are, then, two separate statements. The first one which deals with God's love for Yaakov appears at the end of verse 2 and relates to what had been stated previously, whereas the second one which deals with the hate for Esav is found at the beginning of verse 3 and is connected to what follows. What lies at the heart of the matter is that the selection of Israel involves not a negation of the value of the other nations, but rather a unique relationship to God that is reserved for the people of Israel. Just as a person's love for his own sons and daughters does not negate the value of other children who are not related to him, but rather it establishes a unique relationship with those who are closest to him, and just as love for a friend does not necessitate hate for others, so too the selection of Israel and the love for the seed of Yaakov does not detract from the value of the other nations or from their own relationship with God. That relationship is evaluated by their actions. Therefore, the love for Yaakov did not have to detract from Esav's lot, but rather it was Esav's sin that caused God to hate him. Not only does Esav not recognize the selection of Yaakov (the *haftara* for *Parashat Vayishlach* will deal with this issue), but his actions cause him to be hated by God.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YITZCHAK AND MALAKHI?

It is possible to follow this dynamic in our *parasha*. At the beginning, Yaakov merits to receive a blessing, but this does not prevent Esav from being blessed in accordance with his own level,[2] as he himself argues: "Have you but one blessing, my father; bless me, even me also, my father" (*Bereishit* 27:38). However, Yaakov's taking the blessing of the birthright drives Esav crazy, and from sincere and profound disappointment he falls into wickedness, malice and bloodthirstiness.

Thus, the prophet's reaction to Esav is far sharper than what is necessary in Yitzchak's blessing. Yitzchak removed Esav from the birthright and established rules for the relative superiority and inferiority between the two brothers, but this is not reason to punish him. In the *haftara*, in contrast, the attitude to Esav is one of fury:

And I hated Esav, and laid his mountains waste, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness... And they shall be called, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord has fury for ever. (1:3-4).

The reason for the difference in attitude toward Esav between Yitzchak and Malakhi is clear: Esav's later development. Yitzchak does not see Esav as a negative personality, but rather as a figure whose blessings were denied him; he, therefore, has no reason to be angry with him. The prophet, on the other hand, takes into consideration the wicked acts of Esav who oppresses Yaakov and of Esav's descendants who follow in his ways. Seeing things from this perspective - that Esav tries to destroy everything that is good - there is no escape from being enraged by him and designating his border as the "border of wickedness." [3]

Following the prophet's harsh rebuke (verse 4), Esav exits the scene and from now on Malakhi focuses on the people of Israel. He delivers a lengthy prophecy that reproaches the people for defiling the sacrifices and the Temple. On the face of it, the prophet opens a new front. The prophet had begun with the selection of Israel, and now, after having had his say, he turns to a new topic – the way a person who brings a sacrifice relates to his offering and to God. Thus, we might have expected Malakhi's second prophecy to constitute an independent unit that stands on its own and is detached from the issue of the selection of Israel. Surely the reproach for offering sacrifices without the appropriate inner intentions is a familiar motif that appears prominently in several places

in Scripture, and is not connected in any of those places to the issue of the selection of Israel.

The impression received from our *haftara*, however, both from its form and from its content, is that the prophet chose to combine the two topics. First, there is no indication of any kind of stop between the two discussions, not by way of a *parasha petucha* nor even by way of a *parasha segura*. It is written as one continuous paragraph and as a prophecy dealing with a single issue. More important is the mention of the other nations in the continuation of the *haftara*, when the prophet castigates Israel saying that God does not need their sacrifices and meal-offerings, because of the respect shown to Him by the nations:

I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun until it goes down, My name is great among the nations; and in every place incense is burnt and sacrifices are offered to My name, and pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (1:10-11)

BELOVED SERVANT

In order to understand the connection between the selection of Israel and the problem of the sacrifices, we must consider the matter in the framework of the wider issue of the relationship between God and man. Scripture presents us with two basic models with respect to the relationship between man and God. The first sees man as a created being who is obligated to his Maker and as a small and lowly creature standing before the King, King of kings. God is the master and man is His obedient servant. Man's relationship with God is defined by the fact that he is commanded and obligated. "I have created you as My servant," says Yeshayahu, and from this perspective, man is God's servant. This is the quality of fear, as described by the Rambam (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:2):

And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil affrighted, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said: "When I consider Your heaven, the work of Your fingers... what is man that You are mindful of Him" (*Tehilim* 8:4-5).

Alongside this perception, Scripture also presents a second model of nearness and intimacy, in which man and God are exceedingly close. The clearest expression of this approach is the book of *Shir Ha-shirim* which likens the relations between man and God to the relations between a loving couple, but this is not its only expression. This attitude runs throughout the books of the prophets and finds prominent expression in Yeshayahu's prophecies of consolation which compare the Jewish people and God to a bride and groom: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God... as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels... And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (61:10, 62:5). The experience is one of joy and happiness, and it lacks the feeling of distance from the King, King of kings. God does not appear as toweringly high, but as a doting lover who brings man into his inner chambers. This conception is the perspective of the quality of love that draws man near to God and also emphasizes that God loves us with great and everlasting love. As noted above, this principle runs throughout Scripture, constitutes the foundation of our relationship with God, and is the basis of many issues and *mitzvot*. It is not our intention here to expand upon this model, but merely to use it for the purpose of explaining our *haftara*.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

Another point should be added in this context, namely, the argument that a distinction exists between Israel and the other nations. The double relationship that is founded on love and fear is unique to Israel, whereas the relationship that the other nations have with God is based exclusively on the principle of fear. The underlying assumption of this argument is that the basic relationship between man and God is the model of fear. The transcendental state of God constitutes man's metaphysical foundation; his dependence, his obligation, his weakness, and his transience as opposed to God's eternity and infiniteness are what dictate man's standing in the world. This is a universal condition affecting all men, Jew and gentile alike, and applying to every individual.

In contrast, the foundation of love is not man's standing but **God's desire**. Fundamentally and by its very nature, it is a relationship that adds love beyond that which follows from man's standing. Moreover, the model of love is unique to the people of Israel as a people, and not as individuals, and therefore it would be correct to say that this does not necessarily reflect a difference between a Jew and a non-Jew, but between the

people of Israel and the other nations of the world. The people of Israel are God's chosen people, it is they whom He chose out of His love for them, and therefore a dimension of love is found in His relationship with them.

This thesis depends on the various interpretations given to the book of *Shir Ha-shirim*. Commentators like the Rambam who shifted the moral of the book to the soul's search for its roots and origin do not accept this argument. But it does follow from the words of those who have understood the metaphor of the lover and his beloved as referring to God and the Jewish people, rather than to the relationship between God and the individual.

SACRIFICES

One expression of the difference between the two models of connection to God relates to the issue of the sacrifices. Sacrifices may be seen as fitting into the framework of the world of fear, a person offering a sacrifice in order to appease God and atone for his soul. As the Ramban states in his explanation of the reason for the sacrifices, sacrifices constitute a substitution and a ransom:

God commanded that when a person sins he must bring a sacrifice, rest his hands upon it corresponding to actions, and offer verbal confession corresponding to speech. He must burn in fire the innards and kidneys which are the instruments of thought and desire, and the legs corresponding to man's arms and legs which do all of his work. And he must burn the blood on the altar corresponding to his own blood, so that when he does all these things, he should think that he had sinned to his God with his body and soul, and it would be fitting for him to pour his own blood and burn his own body, were it not for the Creator's lovingkindness, who accepted a substitution from him, and this sacrifice atoned, its blood instead of his own blood, a soul instead of a soul, the primary organs of the sacrifice corresponding to his own organs. (Ramban, Commentary to *Vayikra* 1:8)

According to a second understanding, sacrifices are an expression of man's love for God. Just as a husband and wife present each other with gifts of flowers or chocolates as an expression of their love – the chocolate not being the essence, but merely an illustration of the love that expresses itself through the gift – so man brings an offering to

God as an expression of his intimacy and love. This seems to be the principle that underlies the concept of "sweet savor" appearing in Scripture and that finds expression in the continuation of the Ramban's comment that "every sacrifice [*korban*] denotes closeness [*kirva*] and union."^[4]

These two principles are interwoven throughout the laws of the sacrifices, and various halakhic-philosophical expressions in the laws governing the offering of the sacrifices rest upon them. One striking example of this relates to the sacrifice of a non-Jew. A non-Jew can offer a sacrifice, but it is governed by laws different than those that govern the sacrifice of a Jew. We cannot enter here into the details of the halakhic discussions; we will merely note that the sacrifices of a non-Jew express the element of fear in sacrifices. Thus, for example, according to Rav Huna in the Gemara in *Menachot* (73b), "the peace-offerings of a non-Jew are whole-burnt offerings." The reason for this is that peace-offerings express nearness and intimacy, it being an offering that is jointly consumed by man and God, whereas a whole-burnt offering is a sacrifice cast in the quality of fear, it being consumed entirely by the fire of the *Shekhina*. Other laws pertaining to the sacrifice of a non-Jew also support this approach.^[5]

NOT THIS AND NOT THAT

We are now ready to approach the words of the prophet. The prophecy opens with God's love for Israel and His hate for Esav. The subject of the prophecy is the love and intimacy between God and His people. As stated above, the hatred for Esav does not follow from the love for Israel, but rather from Esav's actions. In light of what is stated in the continuation, we can say that both Esav and Israel are subservient to God as a slave to his master and like a subject to his king, but Israel has the added element of nearness and intimacy that stems from love.

Malakhi confronts the feeling expressed by the people that their selection lacks meaning: "I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, In what have You loved us?" In the wake of this question, he begins to examine what is happening in the Temple that had just been rebuilt and with the sacrificial order that had just been restored. He examines these from the two aforementioned perspectives. A sacrifice can serve as an expression of love and of fear, but Malakhi reveals that in the actions of Israel there is neither this nor that. He opens with an examination of the sacrifice as an expression of man's subservience to God and as a reflection of the quality of fear. This is explicitly stated in

his introductory words: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is My honor; and if I am a master, where is My fear?" (1:6). The priests are designated in the continuation of the verse as "those who despise the name of God," an idea that belongs to the realm of fear, for honor and disgrace are indicative of a formal relationship, rather than intimacy. This line of thought continues in the coming verses, and finds its main expression in verse 8:

And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer a lame or sick animal, is that not evil? offer it now to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or will he show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts.

The contrast and the fury relate to the absence of fear of heaven, whereas there is fear of the flesh and blood of the king or the governor. Of course, the relationship with the governor is one of fear, and thus failure in the offering of sacrifices is a failure in the fear of the King of the universe.

ATONEMENT FOR DESPISING THE NAME OF GOD

The prophet continues with this line of thought. Atonement for Israel's attitude toward the sacrifices will not come through acts of love, but when Israel will pray to God and petition for mercy, just as one petitions a mortal king who has the power to decide between life and death. So too, the situation of the Jewish people is contrasted to what is happening among the nations, who recognize the greatness of the Creator and burn incense to His name:

For from the rising of the sun until it goes down, My name is great among the nations; and in every place incense is burnt and sacrifices are offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts (1:11).

On the face of it, the rebuke relates to Israel's very conduct and to their lack of recognition of God's kingship, but between the lines there is an additional reproach connected to the quality of love. Before Israel complain about the absence of love on the part of God, it would be better for them to pay attention to the fact that their conduct

relating to the sacrifices stands in total contradiction to love. For one who offers a defective sacrifice reveals that in his heart there is no love for the recipient of the offering. So too, their argument regarding love reveals another distortion, namely, the desire for love when they fail to recognize God's kingdom and the need to fear Him. It is impossible to talk about God's love for a person who does not recognize his own place, for in that way the love becomes distorted; it is not the love of the lofty Creator who in His great mercy connects to His creatures, but rather love conceived as coming from an equal. This idea seems to find its way into the verse: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering at your hand" (1:10), where the emphasis is on pleasure and acceptance.

The use that is made throughout the *haftara* of the term, "Lord of hosts," should also be seen as coming to emphasize the necessary combination of love and fear. Malakhi uses the aforementioned combination because it gives expression to the Tetragrammaton – the quality of mercy and love – combining it with the power and greatness of the Creator as ruler over the hosts of heaven and earth. The prophet's message is clear –loving God is possible only out of the recognition of His loftiness and exaltation.

The contrast with the other nations appears in yet another verse:

But cursed be the deceiver, who has in his flock a male, and yet vows, and sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and My name is feared among the nations. (1:14)

This verse comes to emphasize Israel's failure regarding the quality of fear, and also alludes that if Israel disregards its obligation of love, God will manage with the nations as King of the world, without the love of Israel.

SUMMARY

In summary, the *haftara* opens with love, but ends with fear, for love without fear is not a legitimate possibility, because it diminishes the glory of heaven and the meaning

of love. It is not by chance that the Rambam joined them together (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1-2) as a single essence and an interwoven experience, and refused to separate between them (despite the fact that he counted them as two separate *mitzvot* in the count of the *mitzvot*). However, the actions of Israel, who express their astonishment over the absence of God's love, reveal that they do not really understand the essence of fear.

After finishing with the rebuke of Israel, the *haftara* turns to the priests and guides them to give glory to His name, speaking about the covenant based on the fear of God:

My covenant was with him for life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear with which he feared Me, and was afraid of My name. (2:5)

It should, however, be added and emphasized that the proper foundation of fear will allow love to find its place, and then it will be possible to fulfill the prayer of the psalmist: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (*Tehilim* 2:11).

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This is also implied by Rashi (*ad loc.*) who understands that Esav was pushed aside because of Yaakov: "'And I hated Esav' – to push him to the land of Se'ir because of Yaakov his brother."

The Gemara in *Megila* 6a records statements that explicitly connect the two as being dependent upon each other: "Caesarea and Jerusalem – if someone tells you that both have been destroyed, do not believe him; that both are standing, do not believe him; that Caesarea has been destroyed and Jerusalem stands, or that Jerusalem has been destroyed and Caesarea stands, believe him. As it is stated: 'I shall be filled with her that is laid waste' (*Yechezkel* 26:2) – if this one is filled, this one is laid waste; if this one is filled, this one is laid waste. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: From here: 'And the one people shall be stronger than the other person' (*Bereishit* 25:23)."

The Gemara, however, is not discussing the selection itself, but rather the historical success of the two, and it might be necessary to distinguish between these two ideas. In

any event, our analysis is based on the plain meaning of the text, and is based on the division of the verses and the punctuation.

[2] To be precise, it is more correct to say that the original blessing received by Yaakov, and desired by Esav, prevents Esav from receiving a blessing, as argued by Yitzchak (*Bereishit* 27:35-37), for the entire blessing relates to the selection of the recipient as firstborn and heir. Esav, therefore, puts forward another argument, namely, that even if the blessing of the firstborn was given to Yaakov, there are still other kinds of blessings that he could be given, and Yitzchak accedes to this argument. However, since the original blessing had been taken away from him, Esav continues to hate Yaakov.

[3] *Chazal*, in the continuation of the Gemara in *Megila* 6a, note that Yitzchak wished to receive Esav (even after he gave the blessing to Yaakov), for his being pushed aside from being the firstborn does not necessitate his being pushed aside altogether. God, however, told Yitzchak that Esav's wickedness is what caused him to be totally rejected:

"R. Yitzchak said: What is that which is written: 'Let favor be shown to the wicked, who has not learned righteousness' (*Yeshaya* 26:10). Yitzchak said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, let favor be shown to Esav. He said to him: He is wicked. He said to Him: 'He did not learn righteousness.' He said to him: 'In the land of uprightness, he will deal unjustly.' He said to Him: If so, 'Let him not behold the majesty of the Lord.'"

[4] I have used the Ramban's formulation to clarify the position presented in the text, but this short citation does not adequately express the Ramban's own position. What is stated there is based on kabbala, and includes additional components. An analysis of the Ramban's position would take us beyond the mandate of this series and also beyond the permission granted by the Ramban himself in the introduction to his commentary to those studying his statements based on kabbala.

[5] We have presented our argument in brief. My student, Rav Yehuda Goldberg, has written an article (yet to be published) regarding the sacrifices of a non-Jew, in which he analyzes the relevant laws in detail and persuasively demonstrates the argument proposed above. What I say here is based on that article.

(Translated by David Strauss)