

DEVARIM

SHABBAT CHAZON

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ROSH CHODESH AV THAT FALLS ON SHABBAT

Most of the *haftarot* that we have dealt with over the past year are not discussed in the Gemara and the selection of the prophetic section that is read each week is based on customary practice. The exceptions are the *haftarot* read on the festivals and other special days that are spelled out in detail at the end of tractate *Megila* (31b). That list includes two *haftarot* taken from *Yeshayahu* 1:

When *Rosh Chodesh Av* falls out on *Shabbat*, we read as *haftara*: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble to Me" (*Chodsheikhem u-mo'adeikhem*) (*Yeshayahu* 1:14)... On *Tisha Be-Av* itself, what do we read? Rav said: "How is the faithful city become a harlot" (*Eikha hayeta le-zona*) (v. 21).

While it may be inferred from this citation that *Chazal* viewed the chapter as containing important messages that are fitting for the objectives of the *haftara*, we cannot relate to this as the source for the *haftara* for "*Shabbat Chazon*." For the Gemara sees the first *haftara* as the *haftara* for *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh* adjusted for *Rosh Chodesh Av*, but it does not recognize the *Shabbat* that precedes *Tisha Be-Av* as having any special significance that requires a special *haftara*.^{1[1]}

^{1[1]} This can be proven from the context in which this statement appears: "On *Rosh Chodesh* – '*U-be-roshei chodsheikhem*.' **On *Rosh Chodesh* that falls out on *Shabbat*** we read as *haftara* '*Ve-haya midei chodesh be-chodsho*.' **If it falls out on Sunday**, on the previous day we read as *haftara* '*Va-yomer lo Yehonatan, Machar Chodesh*.' Rav Huna said: **When *Rosh Chodesh Av* falls out on *Shabbat***, we read as *haftara* '*Chodsheikhem u-mo'adeikhem*....' ...On *Tisha Be-Av* itself, what do we read? Rav said: '*Eikha hayeta le-zona*.'"

As we can see, the statement regarding "*Chodsheikhem u-mo'adeikhem*" is the last in a series of rulings relating to *haftarot* read on *Rosh Chodesh*. One might argue, however, that the continuation of the Gemara

THE SHABBAT THAT IMMEDIATELY PRECEDES TISHA BE-AV

The custom of reading a special *haftara* on the *Shabbat* immediately preceding *Tisha Be-Av* was, however, known to the *Rishonim*, though we find diverse customs. The Rambam (in his version of the liturgy) testifies that:

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*."

The *Tosafot* (*Megila* 31b, s.v. *Rosh Chodesh*) refer to the custom that prevails today, and prove that this clearly follows from the *Pesikta* (which apparently reflects the common practice in Eretz Israel during the period of *Chazal*):

We do not do this, but rather we read as *haftara* from *Yirmiyahu*, "*Shim'u devar Ha-Shem*," and on the *Shabbat* before *Tisha Be-Av*, "*Chazon Yeshayahu*." And the reason is that we are accustomed on the basis of the *Pesikta* to read three *haftarot* of doom before *Tisha Be-Av*, namely, "*Divrei Yirmiyahu*," "*Shim'u devar Ha-Shem*," and "*Chazon Yeshayahu*."

If we analyze the meaning of these two customs, rather than content ourselves with the mere fact that this was the customary practice, we might be able to reach an understanding of the objective of the *haftara*. For this, however, we must begin with a more general introduction.

deals with the *haftara* of *Tisha Be-Av*, and so the statement regarding "*Chodsheikhem u-mo'adeikhem*" doesn't prove anything, because it is unclear whether to connect it to what precedes it regarding *Rosh Chodesh* or to what follows it regarding *Tisha Be-Av*. However, the fact that the passage speaks only about *Rosh Chodesh Av* that falls out on *Shabbat* (implying that the *haftara* is not read if *Rosh Chodesh* does not fall out on *Shabbat*) clearly suggests that fundamentally we are dealing with a *haftara* for *Rosh Chodesh* that is adapted for the month of *Av*. The connection to the *haftara* of *Tisha Be-Av* lies in the fact that Yeshayahu's prophecy is considered relevant and fitting to be heard during this time of the year, and therefore it is the most appropriate among the prophetic chapters that mention *Rosh Chodesh*. But we are still talking about a fulfillment of the *mitzva* of reading a *haftara* for *Rosh Chodesh* based on the law of "Each and every day mention its blessings" ([Berakhot 40a](#)), and not a fulfillment of the laws of the Three Weeks.

REBUKE AND LAMENTATION

The key word in the *haftara* set by the Rambam as the *haftara* that is read this week is the exclamatory word with which it opens – *Eikha*, "How." This is, of course, the very same word that is so familiar to us from the *megila* that bears that name, the scroll of *Eikha*. *Chazal* discuss the meaning of the term in the context of the book. The Tannaim disagree as follows (*Eikha Rabba* 1,1):

Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemya [disagree]. Rabbi **Yehuda** says: The term *eikha* denotes rebuke. As it is stated ([Yirmiyahu 8:8](#)): "How (*eikha*) can you say, We are wise, and the Torah of the Lord is with us, etc." And Rabbi **Nechemya** says: The term *eikha* denotes lamentation. As it is stated ([Genesis 3:9](#)): "And the Lord called to the man, and said to him, Where are you (*ayeka*)" – woe to you (*oy lekha*). And when was the *megila* of lamentations said: Rabbi **Yehuda** said: In the days of Yehoyakim. Rabbi **Nechemya** said to him: Does one weep over the deceased before he dies? Rather when was it said? Following the destruction of the Temple. This is the solution: "How does the city sit solitary" (*Eikha* 1:1).

To understand the disagreement, we must appreciate the tremendous gap between the two concepts proposed here: rebuke and lamentation. Rebuke is designed to point out a person's errors, to explain to him the difference between right and wrong, to cause him to repent and to bring him to appropriate conduct. The prophets rebuked Israel so that they would mend their ways, and every Jew is commanded to rebuke his fellow Jew. We see then that the operative concept that underlies rebuke is that of repentance. Its basic outlook is optimistic, for it assumes that man is capable of change and of renouncing his sins in the here and now. In this way, punishment will be averted, and there will be no destruction. Moreover, this optimistic spirit relates not only to the future, but even to the past. For if the rebuke is successful, then even the sins of the past will not condemn the people to exile, for repentance will have its impact and intentional sins will be regarded as having been committed unwittingly.

A lamentation, on the other hand, is fundamentally pessimistic. It does not come to lead a person to repent, but to weep with him over his bitter fate and lament about it. It is based upon weeping and despair in the face of a situation that cannot be fixed or improved. The sins of the past are etched in stone and all that can be done now is emphasize and feel the magnitude of the lost opportunity and to wail the ruin and destruction. The fundamental concept underlying lamentation is not repentance, but mourning.

REPENTANCE OR WAILING

Rabbi Nechemya and Rabbi Yehuda disagree about which of the two concepts finds expression in the word *eikha* and what is the objective of the book – repentance and rebuke or wailing and mourning? Rabbi Yehuda sees the call for repentance as the focus of the book of *Eikha*, and he therefore explains the opening word of the book as call to repentance. Yirmiyahu encourages his audience to come to spiritual conclusions and change direction from evil to good. Rabbi Yehuda's position in the continuation of the midrash that the book was composed prior to the destruction in the days of Yehoyakim is of course connected to this, because the book's mission is to bring Israel to repent and thus to prevent the destruction, and so it must have been composed prior to the destruction. Rabbi Nechemya's dissenting view sees in the book of *Eikha* a work of lamentation, wailing, and mourning. The cry of *eikha* does not come to elicit operative conclusions, but rather it expresses shock and astonishment in the face of a cruel and changed world, following the disappearance of the pleasant and familiar world that no longer exists. Thus, the book was written not before but after the destruction, for his argument is: "Does one weep over the deceased before he dies?" and the book is one long weeping over the dead.

These differences in approach and perspective underlie a considerable portion of the laws and customs of *Tisha Be-Av*, and we shall return to this duality in future *shiurim*.

ONE CHAPTER – MANY PRINCIPLES

Let us now return to the verse, "How (*eikha*) is the faithful city become a harlot?" Not only must we raise a similar question about the meaning of the word *eikha* in this context, but *Chazal* even emphasized the connection between the various instances of the word.^{2[2]} Here too we must ask whether Yeshayahu's goal is rebuke or lamentation.

^{2[2]} "Three prophesied with the word '*Eikha*' – Moshe, Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu. Moshe said: 'How can I myself alone bear your care' ([Devarim 1:12](#)); Yeshayahu said: 'How is the faithful city become a harlot' (*Yeshayahu* 1:21); Yirmiyahu said: 'How does the city sit solitary' (*Eikha* 1:1).

Rav Levi said: This may be likened to a matron who had three friends. One saw her in her happiness, one in her recklessness, and one in her disgrace. Thus Moshe saw Israel in their glory and happiness, and said: 'How can I myself alone bear your care.' Yeshayahu saw them in their recklessness and said: 'How is the faithful city become a harlot.' Yirmiyahu saw them in their disgrace and said: 'How does the city sit solitary'" (*Eikha Rabba* 1:1).

The first half of the first chapter in *Yeshayahu* is without a doubt a prophecy of rebuke. The prophet himself says this:

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. **Come now, and let us rebuke, says the Lord:** though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. (vv. 16-20)

These verses bring the first half of the *haftara* to a conclusion, with a call for repentance and learning of lessons, which is defined by God himself as an act of rebuke. The chapter continues with the verses beginning with, "How is the faithful city become a harlot" (v. 21). They include a description of a deteriorated moral state which is followed by several verses of consolation, but these verses do not turn to the people with a call to repent and to desist from evildoing. In light of this, the custom brought by the Rambam divides the chapter into two *haftarot*, this despite the fact that the second one is very short. This seems to be based on the understanding and the assumption that "How is the faithful city become a harlot" expresses lamentation, rather than rebuke. They cannot be joined together, because they are based on different principles and have different objectives. Accordingly, they are read on two separate *Shabatot*.

Truth be told, even after the destruction, it is possible to approach the event from the perspective of mourning over that which no longer exists, but it is also possible to use the lessons learned from the past in order to repent in the present. This point is emphasized by the Rambam himself in the famous *halakha* that defines the objectives of the fasts:

There are days on which all Israelites fast on account of the troubles that occurred on those days in order to stir up the hearts and open the paths of repentance. This should serve as a reminder of our own evil deeds and those of our forefathers that were as our present deeds to the point that they caused them and us these troubles, so that by remembering these things we should repent and do good. (*Hilkhot Ta'anivot* 5:1)

According to the Rambam, then, the *haftarot* read during the Three Weeks divide as follows: On the first two *Shabbatot* we read a *haftara* of rebuke and repentance, and on the *Shabbat* that immediately precedes *Tisha Be-Av* we read a *haftara* of mourning.^{3[3]}

OUR CUSTOM

We must now examine the custom that is cited by the *Tosafot* and prevails today. In light of what has been said thus far, the *Tosafot* seem to have viewed the entire chapter as a single prophecy, and therefore they did not divide it into its parts, but rather they read the entire chapter as a single *haftara*. It also seems that the prophecy as a whole should be viewed as a rebuke rather than a lamentation, for we have already seen that a portion of it is clearly a rebuke. Thus, the verses of consolation at the end should be understood not only as a consolation for the destruction that occurred, but as an incentive and challenge for repentance. This seems to be the way to understand this custom, which was the ancient custom of the *Pesikta*.

We must, however, pay attention to the end of the *Tosafot*. It would have been possible to justify the custom with the very assertion that in liturgical matters, midrashic sources like the *Pesikta* have halakhic weight that equals halakhic sources, and especially when they reflect the custom that prevailed in their day. The custom reflects the understanding that the *haftara* is a rebuke, and therefore it is read as a single unit on the *Shabbat* that immediately precedes *Tisha Be-Av*. The *Tosafot*, however, propose a different explanation to justify our custom, bringing another halakhic factor into the picture. They write as follows:

We do not read the *haftara* of "*Chazon*" on *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Av* because we maintain that there is mourning only during the week of *Tisha Be-Av*. Rav who says that we read the *haftara* of "*Chazon*" maintains that the mourning begins immediately with *Rosh Chodesh*, but the law is not in accordance with this view. So too explained Rabbi Eliezer of Metz. Accordingly, we read as the *haftara* "*Shim'u*." And similarly our common practice follows tractate *Soferim*, in that we

^{3[3]} I see this analysis as exceedingly persuasive and reasonable. It should be noted, however, that it contradicts what the Rambam says in *Hilkhot Tefila*: "It is the common custom to read as the *haftara* on the three *Shabbatot* preceding *Tisha Be-Av* words of rebuke." As we can see, the Rambam defines all three *haftarot* as "words of rebuke." Nevertheless, what we said still seems to be correct. First, it is not clear that the Rambam meant to clarify his position on this question when he wrote this. Second, even if his words reflect a clear position on the matter (and this fits in with his position in the fifth chapter of *Hilkhot Ta'anuyot* cited above), we can still propose what we said as a justification of the custom attested to by the Rambam as the common practice.

read "*Va-Yechal*" on fast days, even though the Mishna says that we read the blessings and curses.

THE HAFTARA AS AN EXPRESSION OF MOURNING

The *Tosafot* are saying that the *haftara* of "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" that is mentioned in the Gemara as the *haftara* of *Rosh Chodesh Av* is not a *haftara* of *Rosh Chodesh* as we have suggested thus far, but rather it is a *haftara* of mourning that gives expression to the mourning of the Three Weeks. Accordingly, the *Tosafot* argue that the Gemara's statement that we read this *haftara* on *Rosh Chodesh Av* depends on a second dispute ([Ta'anit 29b](#)) whether the mourning that precedes *Tisha Be-Av* begins already on *Rosh Chodesh Av* or only at the beginning of the week of *Tisha Be-Av*. Since we rule that by strict law mourning practices are observed only during the week of *Tisha Be-Av*, the *haftara* must be pushed off to that week of mourning. You might ask: Why then do we read a *haftara* of doom on the previous *Shabbat*, when there is no mourning? The simple answer is that the *haftara* of "*Shim'u*" is not a *haftara* of mourning, but rather a *haftara* of rebuke that calls for repentance (as is clear from the very first verse which calls upon Israel to obey the voice of God), and therefore there is no problem to read it before *Rosh Chodesh Av*. Mourning can only be observed in real time, and after the appropriate time has already arrived, but rebuke is not limited to the time of wailing, but rather it is fitting any time that the lesson of the destruction is relevant.

It is clear then that, according to the *Tosafot*, the *haftara* of "*Chazon*" is entirely a *haftara* of mourning. The rebuke included therein is an expression of the mourning that leads to repentance; it is a side-product that expresses the mourning, but not the goal of the prophecy. In this the *Tosafot* disagree with the Rambam, according to whom there are two prophecies, one of rebuke and one of mourning, and we clearly see the chapter's division into separate units, whereas according to the *Tosafot* there is only a prophecy of mourning that is comprised of various elements.

THE ASHKENAZI HALAKHIC POLEMIC

As previously suggested, however, it seems to us that if we wish to see "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" and "*Eikha hayeta le-zona*" as a single unit, they should be defined as a prophecy of rebuke and not as an expression of mourning. Indeed, the position stated in the *Tosafot* was already the subject of discussion during their day, and the argument that the *haftara* is not an expression of mourning, but rather a rebuke, was raised by the Ravya, one of the great Ashkenazi halakhic authorities of the twelfth century. According to him,

the *haftara* of "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" is indeed appropriate to the Three Weeks period, but the common practice follows a different order than that found in the Gemara, according to which the meaning of the *haftara* does not lie in mourning.

Inasmuch as the words of the Ravya were stated in the context of a halakhic polemic with his colleagues the Tosafists, and they were not meant from the outset for a *shiur* in the Virtual Bet Midrash, his words allow us to appreciate the workings of halakhic argumentation, as well as the talmudic passages relevant to the Nine Days. I will cite his words in full for those readers who are accustomed to such texts; anyone who lacks the necessary training can rely on the summary brought earlier. This is what the Ravya has to say about the matter under discussion (*Sefer Ravya*, no. 595):

We learned in our Gemara: Rav Yehuda the son of Rav Shemuel bar Sheilat said in the name of Rav: "When *Rosh Chodesh Av* falls out on *Shabbat*, we read as *haftara* 'Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble to Me' (*Yeshayahu* 1:14)," that is to say "*Chazon Yeshayahu*." This is not our custom; rather we always read "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" on the *Shabbat* that immediately precedes *Tisha Be-Av*. It already once happened that Rabbenu Efrayim wanted to institute in Worms to read [the *haftara*] in accordance with the view of Rav Yehuda, but they did not listen to him. And my master Rabbi Eliezer, *ztz"l*, sent to him that Rav Yehuda bar Sheilat in the name of Rav agrees with that authority who said at the end of tractate *Ta'anit* that mourning is observed from *Rosh Chodesh* until the fast [*Tisha Be-Av*]. This is a subject of dispute between Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda and Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel. And we rule there: Rava said: The law is in accordance with Rabbi Meir and the law is in accordance with Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, and regarding both, for leniency, that nothing is forbidden before or after, but only during the week of *Tisha Be-Av*. **The *haftara* of "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" is customarily chanted with the melody used for *Eikha*, and it is an expression of mourning.** And even though the *Shabbat* on which we read this *haftara* is not part of the week of *Tisha Be-Av*, since on a weekday there is no *haftara*, the *haftara* is read on *Shabbat*. I raised the objection against my master that according to him there is a contradiction between two statements of Rav, for regarding the Mishna Rav says: This applies only before [*Tisha Be-Av*], but afterwards it is permitted. Moreover, a question is raised against Shemuel from a Baraita which states: The week of *Tisha Be-Av*, before [*Tisha Be-Av*] it is forbidden, afterwards it is permitted – this is difficult according to Shemuel. The implication is that it supports Rav. [We see then] that only during the week of *Tisha Be-Av*, do we say that before [*Tisha Be-Av*] it is forbidden. And you cannot say that he said this according to the Tanna of the Mishna, but he disagrees, for in that case, why does he ask from one Tanna to the next. **Rather it seems to me that Rav maintains that the *haftara* is not absolute mourning like haircutting and laundry, but rather it is like diminishment of joy.** And we learned: When *Av* enters we diminish joy. And we

who read "*Chazon Yeshayahu*" on the *Shabbat* that immediately precedes *Tisha Be-Av*, it seems to me that we rely on the order of the homilies on the *haftarot* in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*. And the mnemonic – *deshach, no'a, arak, shadash* – *Divrei Yirmiyahu, Shim'u davar, Chazon Yeshayahu, Nachamu nachamu, Va-tomer Tziyon aniya, Anokhi, Rani kumi ori, Sos asis, Dirshu, Shuva*. Anyone who is not familiar with the midrashim and external books should not destroy the structure constructed by the ancients and their customs. And if there is emptiness, it is he who is empty.

(Translated by David Strauss)
