

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.**

**This shiur is dedicated in memory of
Dr. William Major z"l.**

**SHOFTIM
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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR *HAFTARAH* AND THE *HAFTARAH* OF *NACHAMU*

The *haftara* for *Parashat Shoftim* (*Yeshayahu* 51:12-52:12) continues the series of *haftarot* of consolation that are read over the course of the summer, but also returns us to their point of departure. When we examine the opening verses of the *haftara*, we find a surprising similarity - which expresses itself in many parallels - between this week's *haftara* and the *haftara* of *Nachamu*.

Before we direct our attention to the stylistic parallels in the text, we should also note that the contexts of the two *haftarot* are extremely similar. Our *haftara* is preceded by uplifting verses that lyrically and joyously herald a vision of redemption:

Are You not it which dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing to Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (*Yeshayahu* 51:10-11)

This verse is, of course, reminiscent of the famous verses at the end of chapter 35:

No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up on it, they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (35:9-10)

Apart from the fact that chapter 35 deals with a land route over which the redeemed will pass, whereas chapter 51 prophesies about a route through the sea, we are dealing with identical verses and the same tiding. Each of the two passages concludes a prophetic unit with a prophecy of redemption, and the verses that follow open new units. In both cases Scripture continues with words of consolation, and with a new series of prophecies coming to encourage the people, on the assumption that they have not yet been redeemed or privileged to return to Zion with joy. The second instance of the prophecy that "the redeemed of the Lord shall return" in chapter 51 is followed by our haftara which opens with "I, even I, am He that comforts you." And following the first instance of that prophecy in chapter 35, the first prophecy directed at the people is "Comfort, My people, comfort them." 1[1]

Let us now examine the stylistic parallels between the two *haftarot*. First, both open with a doubling that is used for emphasis 2[2] (*Anokhi Anokhi, Nachamu nachamu*), on the assumption that the people are exceedingly depressed and in need of a great deal of encouragement. Second, both turn not only to Israel, but also to Jerusalem as an entity in need of consolation, and both do so by asserting that its punishment is complete and its suffering sufficient. In *Nachamu*, we read: "Speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry to her, that her war service is ended, that the iniquity is pardoned; for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (v. 2). And in our *haftara*, we read: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, who has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; you have drunk to the dregs, the deep bowl of staggering" (51:17). And third, grass is used as

1[1] Chapters 36-39 which separate between them are narrative chapters in which the prophecies are directed specifically at Chizkiyahu, and which do not contain prophecies directed at Israel as a nation. The place and function of these chapters within the framework of the book are not our concern here, but in light of their narrative quality, we can say that chapter 40 is in a certain sense a continuation of chapter 35.

2[2] The Midrash already noted that the doubling style is one of the stylistic characteristics of Yeshayahu's consolations, and it makes the general comment that "his prophecies were double prophecies – *Uri uri, Hit'oreri hit'oreri, Sos asis, Nachamu nachamu, Anokhi Anokhi hu menamchem*" (*Pesikta* to our *haftara*, *Piska* 33, s.v. *davar acher Anokhi; Vayikra Rabba, parasha* 10, 2, s.v. *Rabbi Azarya*). If we examine the examples cited here, we find that except for "*Sos asis*" they all come from our *haftara* or from the *haftara* of *Nachamu*, which attests to the fact that there is a localized use of this characteristic in the framework of our *haftara* and the *haftara* of *Nachamu* ("*Uri uri*" appears in our *haftara* and in one other place).

It should be noted that the combination of "*Anokhi Anokhi*" also appears in two additional places in the book (43:11, 43:25), and there too as a consolation.

a metaphor for the transience and nullity of man in both *haftarot*, and within the framework of the book of *Yeshayahu*, only in them.^{3[3]}

Based on all these considerations, we can say that there are many parallels between the beginning of the *haftara* of *Nachamu* and the beginning of our *haftara*. We must now inquire into the meaning of these parallels. From a literary perspective, repetition of this sort can theoretically serve a number of different functions. We can point to at least three possible objectives: 1) repetition for the sake of emphasis; 2) detailed treatment of a point that was mentioned the first time in more general terms; 3) developing an idea and advancing it beyond the point that it had reached the first time.

REPETITION FOR THE SAKE OF EMPHASIS

With reference to our *haftara*, the technique of repetition seems to fulfill all three objectives. First, as we have already seen, Yeshayahu uses repetition/doubling as a stylistic instrument of emphasis, on the sentence level (*Nachamu nachamu, Anokhi Anokhi*). This is particularly striking in our *haftara*, and thus we should not be surprised by the argument that not only the repetition of isolated words, but even the very existence of the chapter constitutes an overall repetition of the matter of consolation. At this point, it should be emphasized that consolation is not a logical issue whose rational underpinnings can be explained and demonstrated, and this suffices to comfort the mourner. Rather, we are dealing with an emotional process. Were the problems of consolation and exile merely intellectual, then the moment that Yeshayahu presented his arguments concerning God's greatness and exaltedness in his early chapters of consolation, this should have sufficed to convince the people that redemption is possible and that good will ultimately arrive. However, the experience of mourning and the feelings of abandonment and being forsaken are not merely metaphysical arguments regarding reward and punishment, but first and foremost emotional and experiential processes which require reinforcement. The mourner and the sufferer require emotional encouragement, both to confront the present and to strengthen the feeling that changing the situation is possible. Inculcating the message regarding the way out of the crisis is not an intellectual matter, but an emotional one, and for this comes the repetition. Repetition serves the function of emphasis and persuasion, based on tolerance and empathy.

Of course, this argument can be made with respect to all of Yeshayahu's prophecies of consolation, for from a certain perspective, more than ten chapters repeat the same basic message of consolation. The same argument also explains why we need seven *haftarot* of consolation, and relieves us of the responsibility to further analyze and explain the differences between them. Without minimizing the value of examining the development and differences between the various consolations, there is indeed a certain truth to this argument. In our *haftara*, however, this idea is doubly valid and meaningful, for the technique of repetition is consciously and strikingly used as one of its central components. Therefore, even if we don't accept the general argument regarding repetition

^{3[3]} To the best of my knowledge, and more importantly, to the best of the knowledge of the Bar Ilan Responsa Project. In addition to these places, the book of *Tehilim* also uses this image in several places for the smallness of man.

which would free us from having to analyze the *haftarot*, in this *haftara* – the development of the prophecies of consolation lies in the conscious use of repetition as a consoling factor.

REPETITION FOR THE SAKE OF DETAIL

A second function of repetition is to add detail. The *haftara* of *Nachamu* speaks in very general terms about Jerusalem's need for consolation, but it does not detail the fears, suspicions and feelings nesting in the hearts of the people. Here, in contrast, there is a great deal of expansion, Israel's fears being spelled out in detail. In short, we can say that our *haftara* focuses on Israel's fear of the nations and on their concern about what those nations are planning to do. Already at the beginning of the *haftara*, the need for consolation focuses on Israel's fear of their human oppressor:

Who are you, that you should be afraid of a mortal man, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass; and have forgotten the Lord your Maker, that stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as he makes ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor? (51:12-13)

In the continuation, present fears are understood in light of past experience, and therefore the prophet spells out what had happened in the past, and does not conceal the fact that that very mortal son of a woman who will dry up like grass had brought great suffering to Israel:

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, who has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; you have drunk to the dregs, the deep bowl of staggering. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she has brought forth; nor is there any that takes her by the hand among all the sons that she has brought up. These two things have befallen you; who shall console you? Desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort you? Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, like a bison in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of your God. (51:17-20)

This is no longer a general statement like in the *haftara* of *Nachamu* and the chapters that follow in its wake; Yeshayahu focuses on a specific point and treats it more deeply. Therefore, the arguments about God's greatness and His ability to overcome man are not put forward on the general metaphysical plain as in the *haftara* of *Nachamu*, where the prophet speaks of the nullity of man in contrast to the infinite power of the Creator. Here they are given tangible historical expression, which expresses itself both in the fact that we are dealing with a struggle between God and the nations, and in the more focused manner that the prophet relates to the Jewish historical process. The first point is linked by the prophet to the verses mentioned earlier and as a response to them:

Therefore hear now this, you afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine. Thus says your Lord the Lord, and your God that pleads the cause of His people, Behold, I

have taken out of your hand the cup of staggering, the deep bowl of My fury; you shall no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict you; who have said to your soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and you have laid your body like the ground, and like the street, to them that go over. (51:20-23)

The second point follows the second instance where the *haftara* employs the device of doubling to introduce a passage of consolation:

Awake, awake; put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose yourself from the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus says the Lord, You were sold for nought; and you shall be redeemed without money. For thus says the Lord God, My people went down aforetime to Egypt to sojourn there; and Ashur oppressed them without cause. Now therefore, what have I here, says the Lord, that My people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them yell, says the Lord; and My name continually every day is blasphemed. Therefore My people shall know My name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am He that speaks: Behold, here I am. (52:1-6)

As we can see, the prophet relates here to the history of the Jewish people in the concrete historical context of subjugation to Egypt and war with Ashur, clearly hinting that these two episodes ended with Israel's rescue from the hands of their enemy, and therefore the promise of future redemption is valid and trustworthy.

In essence, we can talk about the fact that these verses constitute a new and well-defined sub-unit in the framework of the *haftara*, both with respect to contents and with respect to style. Substantively, there is a transition from a general statement about Israel and the nations to a more concrete statement, whereas stylistically the opening words "Awake, awake" should be seen as the beginning of a new unit, similar to other cases of repeated words.

In light of all of the above, it might be suggested that from a stylistic perspective the *haftara* is divided into three parts, and that each part opens with a doubling of the first word:

- 1) 51:12-16 – *Anokhi Anokhi*. This section speaks in general terms about Israel's fear of its enemies and God's capability of defeating them owing to the greatness of His power that expresses and reveals itself in creation.
- 2) 51:17-23 – *Hit'oreri hit'oreri*. This section describes in detail Israel's past and present suffering at the hands of the nations, and God's war against the nations to rescue Israel. We are no longer dealing with God's greatness in creation, but rather with His fighting against the nations; concrete historical arguments, however, are not cited.
- 3) 52:1-12 – *Uri uri*. In this section, the prophet relates to the Jewish historical framework of Egypt and Ashur and to God's promise of redemption.

REPETITION FOR THE SAKE OF DEVELOPING AN IDEA

Thus far, we have spoken about emphasis and detail as the goals of the repetition of prophecies that had already been delivered. Now we must examine the third possible factor, namely, development of an idea. There seems to be room to suggest that the *haftara* does not focus on the exile in and of itself, but on fear. This point is primarily emphasized at the beginning of the *haftara*: "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a mortal man, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass... and you have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as he makes ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?" (51:12-13). The main problem is not the exile itself or the accompanying suffering, but rather the fear to which it gives rise. Fear that can paralyze a person and fill his consciousness may be found at two stages of exile: 1) At the stage of suffering, when the fear is based on the gloomy reality, in the sense of "And your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you shall fear day and night, and shall have no assurance of your life: in the morning you shall say, Would it were evening! and at evening you shall say, Would it were morning! for the fear of your heart with which you shall fear, and the sight of your eyes which you shall see" (*Devarim* 28:66-67). This is because of the fear of the next affliction that is on the way. 2) The fear that results from past traumas, even after the cause of the fear has already been removed. The fears that are stirred up by loud and sudden noises, the difficult associations that float into consciousness in all kinds of innocent situations, are common among people who have lived through traumatic and life-threatening experiences.

The words of the prophet seem to embrace the second type of fear and to be directed primarily at it. The opening verse which raises a question about Israel's fear of human beings can go one way or the other, and it is certainly possible that it is directed to fear of the first kind. But the second verse focuses on the fear itself as a problem: "[Who are you that...] you have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as he makes ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?" The oppressor is no longer present, but the fear remains. Thus, the prophet does not deal in this prophecy with the acute state of exile and suffering, but rather with the long-term ramifications and deep emotional processes that accompany exile. The prophet goes beyond what was stated in the previous chapters that dealt with exile from various perspectives, but did not deal with fear as a problem in itself, and thus there is development of the prophetic discussion concerning exile, and not only repetition of what was stated earlier.

In light of this, and in the wake of what was stated earlier regarding the division of the *haftara* into three units, we might add that the first section deals with the present, namely, the ramifications of exile on the people over the course of the extended exile, and not at the time of the destruction; the second section treats the past and describes the suffering at the time of the destruction and defeat; and the third section focuses on the future and the promised redemption. This transition from the present to the past and then to the future is logical and expected, if the prophecy is directed toward future generations that will live with the exile as a continuing reality, and not as a sudden and painful

destruction. First, one must deal with the present situation with its spiritual and emotional problems, and therefore the prophecy starts with that. At the next stage, it is fitting to go backwards to the root of the problem and in the concluding section one should turn to the future and to the promise for a better period ushered in by him who brings good tidings at the top of the mountains.

(Translated by David Strauss)
