

# **Ekev: The Difference Between Nachamu and and the Haftara for Parashat Ekev**

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.**

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

***EKEV*  
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "NACHAMU"  
AND THE HAFTAROT FOR PARASHAT EKEV  
Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein**

The *haftara* for *Parashat Ekev* (*Yeshayahu* 49:14-51:3) constitutes another link in the chain of prophecies of consolation, and is one of the longest among them. As we shall see, the prophet struggles with several issues, and presents the people with a variety of perspectives in response to and as a consolation for their tribulations, thus necessitating a more expansive treatment.

The prophecy's starting point is Israel's feeling of having been abandoned and forsaken by God, and in this, our *haftara* differs from the *haftara* of "*Nachamu nachamu ami*" that we read last week, and from the other *haftarot* that we will be reading over the course of the summer. In the *haftara* for *Shabbat Nachamu*, the prophet turns to the people on his own initiative and tries to comfort them because he feels the enormity of the calamity and the distress. As we saw last week, his words of consolation revolve around three axes (the completion of the punishment – "that her war service is ended"; redemption for the sake of the glory of heaven – "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed"; and redemption for the sake of Israel as God's people – "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd"). Common to all three of these axis is the fact that the people are not complaining about having been forgotten or abandoned, and God on His part turns to them with a message of consolation.

It seems that *Yeshayahu*'s words of consolation are arranged in ascending order with respect to the development of the state of the people and their redemption. We already cited in an earlier *shiur* the words of *Tosafot*: "It is the way of consolations to be

increasingly consoling." It is not only the content of the consolations that changes; the existential reality of exile within which the people are living also changes, and with it also the people's level of expectations. Yeshayahu utters his first prophecy of consolation during the initial period of Israel's exile when the shock of exile is still very strong and the feelings of sin and failure exceedingly acute.<sup>1[1]</sup> His primary concern, therefore, is to counter the deep despair that these feelings are liable to give rise to. Thus, he places great emphasis on the very fact that Israel's exile is not final and irreversible and that there are various ways to escape from it. At this initial stage, the differences between these escape routes are of little importance; Yeshayahu's primary message is the light at the end of the tunnel, whatever the cause and reason.

Therefore, the words with which Yeshayahu opens his chapters of consolation, which are the opening verses of the *haftara* of "*Nachamu*," are filled with reasons for terminating the exile (three important reasons are presented to the people over the course of eleven verses), the common denominator being very low. In the stages of redemption described in the *haftara* of "*Nachamu*, not only do the people not engage in repentance; they do not even turn to their father in heaven, or give expression to any kind of relationship between Israel and God. The primary image that is used in the promise of consolation, besides the very mention of the fact that the nation of Israel are God's people, is the metaphor of the shepherd and his flock. If we examine the meaning of this metaphor a little more carefully, we will see that the relationship is one directional. A shepherd recognizes his responsibility and connection to his flock that follows from the very fact that he is their shepherd, but the sheep do not recognize this and they are certainly not aware of a reciprocal relationship between them. The reflection of Israel's situation in the mirror of the metaphor of the shepherd and his flock attests to the spiritual state that the prophecy of "*Nachamu nachamu ami*" is struggling with, but this is precisely the point. The prophecy recognizes the shock and muteness that took hold of Israel when they went into exile, and its primary objective is to treat the shock and despair as an immediate danger that threatens the people. The treatment of the muteness and the development and rehabilitation of the relationship between Israel and God will have to wait until after first aid is administered to counter the despair. This is the mission of the *haftara* for *Shabbat Nachamu*, and therefore it provides solutions that lack the majesty of the complete redemption, but serve as a shield against the calamity of despair. Once the people understand that the suffering of exile and the burden of subjugation will come to an end, they will have hope and not perish in their grief.

Our *haftara* is located at a much more advanced point, both with respect to the time line of the exile and with respect to spiritual progress.<sup>2[2]</sup> The people of Israel no

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<sup>1[1]</sup> Even though the words of Yeshayahu were said about the situation of exile in the abstract, and are not necessarily directed at a particular generation that experienced the trauma of exile on its own flesh – as opposed to Yirmiyahu who turns to the generation that sees the approaching destruction before their very eyes – we can still see in the literary structure of the prophecies of consolation the progressive stages that are characteristic of the experience of exile. His words were stated as words of prophecy, by a prophet who can sense and experience the future, and they were transmitted as a text with literary contours and stylistic forms that are suited for human literature.

<sup>2[2]</sup> Let us not forget that in the book of *Yeshayahu*, the two *haftarot* are separated by nine chapters, in which the previous points that arose in the *haftara* of *Nachamu* were further developed.

longer suffer from the shock of the exile and are no longer dumbfounded, but rather they react to the new situation that had come into being. The exile which serves as the backdrop of the dialogue presented in our *haftara* is not the initial blow and the sharp pain, but rather the fact that the exile has continued for so many years. The conclusion regarding God's having forgotten His people that the prophet puts into their mouths follows from the length and meaning of the exile. The argument of having been abandoned and forgotten ("But Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me"; 49:14) expresses the feeling of God's long-term disappearance and continuous absence, rather than the anger stirred up by punishment that is felt at the time of its infliction.

### God's Consolation

The response of the prophet who consoles the people in the name of God adopts a two-fold tactic. First of all, the immediate response involves a promise that the redemption will quickly arrive and the exile is soon to end:

Your children make haste; your destroyers and they that made you waste go away from you. Lift up your eyes around about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall surely clothe you with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on, like a bride. For your waste and your desolate places, and your devastated land, shall now be too narrow for the inhabitants, and they that swallowed you up shall be far away. The children that were taken away from you shall say again in your ears, The place is too narrow for me: make room for me that I may dwell. Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, a solitary, and exile, and a wanderer to and fro? and who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these where have they been? (49:17-21)

As can be seen, the prophet emphasizes the speed of the response and its immediacy: "Your children **make haste**"...shall **now** be too narrow for the inhabitants." He also stresses the possibility of an upheaval that is capable of changing the face of history from one extreme to the other in the most surprising manner. Israel will stand before the redemption in astonishment, for when it arrives, it might arrive in a most supernatural manner that skips over the ordinary historical process and the graduated steps built into it, so that man will not understand where it came from.

Second, the prophet presents the relationship between Israel and God and demonstrates that it has not been severed, but rather it continues and will continue to exist for the long term. This is the crux of the prophecy, and therefore we will focus upon it.

The prophet does not inform us of the reason that Israel gives for their feeling abandoned. Truth be told, it is possible that they dare not bring a theological explanation, but only express the existential feeling that the length of the exile attests to their having

been forgotten and disregarded. In any event, this feeling is clearly rooted in a certain understanding of the relationship between Israel and God, for the argument of abandonment assumes a certain relationship. Indeed, when *Chazal* put an argument of this sort in the mouth of the generation of the destruction, this point is emphasized:

In the manner that Israel said to Yechezkel, as it says: "Certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me" ([Yechezkel 20:1](#)). They said to him: A servant who was sold by his master, does he not leave his domain? He said to them: Yes. They said to him: Since God has sold us to the nations of the world, we have left his domain. He said to them: Surely a servant who was sold by his master on condition that he return – does he leave his domain? (*Sifrei, Bamidbar 115, s.v. lema'an tizkeru*)

The relationship which serves as the backdrop of the discussion between Yechezkel and the people is the relationship between servant and master. The people assume that their connection to God is proprietary, rather than existential, and therefore given to change. It cannot be denied that the Torah uses the servant-master relationship as an expression of the connection between Israel and God, and in this the people are not mistaken. But their mistake regarding the severance of that connection is two-fold: 1) We are not dealing here with a proprietary-commercial connection, but rather an existential one. It is defined as servitude, because it involves dependence and it stems from the fact that man is the creation of the master of the universe ("I formed you as My servant"), but it is not a utilitarian relationship. Man's being God's servant is a spiritual phenomenon, and it is meaningful both from man's perspective and from God's perspective; therefore, He will not sever it. 2) Between man and God there exists a servant-master relationship, but this is not the only relationship; alongside it there are other connections and relationships.

Yeshayahu's early chapters of consolation (40-44) are based on the principle of Israel being God's servants, and the consolation that they offer is based on the redemption that reaches man on account of his being His servant.<sup>3[3]</sup> Indeed, Yeshayahu confronts the first argument already in these chapters, in the wake of Israel's feeling of God's disappearance. The prophet relates to the question directly – "Why say you, O Ya'akov, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God" (40:27) – and after raising the question, he answers it at length.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL – THREE ADDITIONAL MODELS**

In our *haftara*, where the relationship between servant and master is not the only or primary relationship, the essence of the consolation lies in the emphasis given to the existence of other relationships between Israel and God, and to their stability in the face of crises. Thus, Yeshayahu presents three models of relationships, and regarding all three

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<sup>3[3]</sup> These chapters serve as the *haftarot* of *Bereishit*, *Lekh-Lekha*, and *Va-etchanan*, and in the *shiurim* on these *haftarot* we dealt with this idea at length.

of them he emphasizes their strength and resilience even in the face of traumas and serious breaches of trust between the two sides.

## I. Parents-Children

The first and most basic model is the relationship between parents and children, with which the Yeshayahu opens his prophecy:

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you upon the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me. Your children make haste; your destroyers and they that made you waste go away from you. Lift up your eyes around about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall surely clothe you with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on, like a bride. For your waste and your desolate places, and your devastated land, shall now be too narrow for the inhabitants, and they that swallowed you up shall be far away. The children that were taken away from you shall say again in your ears, The place is too narrow for me: make room for me that I may dwell. Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, a solitary, and exile, and a wanderer to and fro? and who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these where have they been? Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and set up My standard to the peoples: and they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. And kings shall be your foster fathers and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet; and you shall know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. (49:15-23)

In the Torah, the people of Israel are most commonly defined as God's children. This definition already appears at the very outset of Israel's journey as a nation, and vis-a-vis the outside world, when God instructs Moshe to stand before Pharaoh and declare: "Thus says the Lord, Israel is My son, My firstborn; and I say to you, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your son, your firstborn" ([Shemot 4:22](#)). And it appears in the fortieth year of Israel's trek through the wilderness in Arvot Mo'av, and for internal consumption, in the introduction to the section dealing with forbidden foods in the book of *Devarim*: "You are the children of the Lord your God" ([Devarim 14:1](#)).

The centrality of this idea stems from the fact that it embraces the obligation and the hierarchical standing of lordship on the one hand, and the love and compassion of relatives, on the other. The master-servant and lover-beloved relationships are very powerful, but they lack the multi-level complexity of the relationship between children and parents, because the relationship between children and parents upon both of these elements.

From the perspective of the prophet and the consolation that he offers, the advantage of the parent-child relationship lies in the fact that it can never be denied. First of all, a person does not choose his parents, nor do parents choose their children. As opposed to the acquisition of a servant or the taking of a spouse which involves the consent of the parties involved and therefore the transactions can be undone, parents and children cannot undo that which they did not create. Seen from a different perspective, the parent-child relationship can be defined as a metaphysical relationship, rather than a social or commercial one. The identity of parents and children are intertwined, the child serving as the parent's future in this world, and the parent being the child's connection to his past and to his roots. In this light, the significance of Yeshayahu's comparison is not just that God has compassion upon Israel, but that His identity – in the framework of His revelation in this world - is connected to His being the God of Israel, just as part of a parent's identity is that he is child's father. This is the idea of "And You called us by Your name," namely that Israel's identity depends on their connection to God, and so also the converse, as it emerges from many midrashim which connect God's name to Israel. What follows from all this is that the package cannot be unraveled and therefore Yeshayahu uses this idea to console Israel.

It should be added that it is not by chance that Yeshayahu chose to emphasize the mother in this context, for her compassion is intuitive and natural and more intimately connected to her very identity. [Yeshaya will repeat this tactic in other *haftarot* to be read during the summer, and we will encounter it again in the metaphor of "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you" [66:13)].

We should also note the interesting use that the prophet makes of the transition between the metaphor and reality. He opens with the metaphor of Israel being God's children, but in the continuation he speaks of the sons and daughters of Israel who will return and gather together. In this manner, the promise of consolation and its justification help one another. On the one hand, the promise that a woman will not forget her sucking child is strengthened by the description of the returning children that illustrates the reality of the connection between parents and children. On the other hand, the emphasis placed on God's connection as Israel's father helps to strengthen the feeling that the children will gather together in the future and return.

## II. Precious Treasure

The prophet now proceeds to his second argument, namely, that Israel is God's precious treasure, and therefore He will never give them up:

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captive of the victorious delivered? But thus says the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contends with you, and I will save your children. And I will feed them that oppress you with their own flesh; and they shall be drunk with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I, the Lord am your deliverer and the mighty One of Ya'akov is your redeemer. (49:24-26)

This idea is also rooted in the Torah, namely, the principle of "and you shall be a select portion (*segula*) unto Me above all the peoples" ([Shemot 19:5](#)), and as Rashi emphasizes in his commentary to that verse: "*Segula* – a cherished treasure, the same as 'and treasures of kings' ([Kohelet 2:8](#)), costly vessels and precious stones which kings store up. In the same manner shall you be unto Me a cherished treasure more than other peoples." A warrior does not pass up on his spoil, both because of its preciousness and importance, and because it attests to his might. Here too, God will not give up on Israel inasmuch as it was He who redeemed them.

### III. Divorcee, Rather than a Harlot

The third point that the prophet deals with is that Israel distanced themselves from God and are now like a woman whose husband divorced her. If in the *haftara* for *Shabbat Chazon* we read "How is the faithful city become a harlot" ([Yeshayahu 1:21](#)), this should suffice to forbid her to her husband and to serve as valid grounds for divorce, which finds expression in exile from their land. In this context, we should mention the harsh words of Yirmiyahu, who brings this idea to the surface: "It was said, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? but you have played the harlot with many lovers: and will you yet return again to Me? says the Lord." ([Yirmiyahu 3:1](#)). When engaged in rebuke, the prophet emphasizes the distance and the potential threat latent in the people's conduct. But when engaged in consolation, he clarifies that we are not dealing with pollution of the land and abomination, because Israel does not meet the criterion of "becoming another man's." if someone should ask, surely Israel worshipped idols, which the prophets define as harlotry – the answer is that they did not turn their connection to idols into a permanent relationship, but rather they regarded it as a casual affair.

Moreover, God never sent them away, and even from His perspective Israel's actions are viewed as a temporary lapse, and not as an abrogation of the very relationship. He therefore remains faithful to the commitment:

Thus says the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorce, with which I have put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have you sold yourselves, and for your transgressions was your mother put away. (50:1)

### The Challenge of Redemption

Here the main part of the prophet's consolation comes to an end. Most of the consolation involves an attempt to prove and demonstrate that the connection between God and His people is eternal, this as a response to their feelings of having been abandoned. The prophet now moves on to the second half of the *haftara*, where the prophet turns things upside down and invites the people to respond to the challenge of redemption. He does this by sounding arguments in the name of God and lamenting that

while He is ready for redemption, the people of Israel are not yet ripe for it and manifest a lack of faith:

Why, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish rots, because there is no water, and dies for thirst. (50:2)

Another tactic that Yeshayahu uses is to present his own personal situation as that of a prophet whom nobody listens to and nobody is ready to believe, as well as the frustration that this causes. What he is trying to do is to present the people with a mirror that will reflect their lack of faith. In other words, the people complained about how God had abandoned them, but the prophet argues that just the opposite is true, and it is the people who are not sufficiently prepared. All this is meant to arouse them to prepare themselves for redemption but it is also a response to the argument that God has forgotten them, for it becomes clear that the essential reality is the very opposite of their claim.

In the wake of this, we come in the end to the third point, namely, the connection to the past and to the covenant that had been made with Israel's forefathers. As we know, from time to time, Israel uses God's covenant with the patriarchs as an argument that God should show compassion to Israel and redeem them. The people view themselves as being connected to the patriarchs and all that they must do is argue before God that He should take this factor into consideration. Here, Yeshayahu argues the very opposite, and demands of the people that they should remember God's covenant with the patriarchs and thereby they will believe in their redemption. There is no question that God remembers the covenant; here it is the people of whom the demand is made to see themselves as having a connection to the patriarchs, and in that way they will be redeemed. There is no better way to end this *shiur* than by citing the closing verses of the *haftara*, which are doubly meaningful in these times:

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found in it, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. (51:3)

(Translated by David Strauss)

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