

Haftarah Weekly

Sefer Ovadiah

This week's haftarah is in fact the entire Sefer Ovadiah, the shortest book in Tanach. There is some doubt about the identity of this prophet – which Ovadiah was he? Chazal seem to be of the opinion that he was an Edomite convert who served, oddly enough, as a high official in the court of King Achav and Queen Izevel. This pair had a strong affinity for idol worship and their wicked nature is infamous. Izevel in particular harboured a strong hatred against the prophets of HaShem.

The obvious question that arises is why should Ovadiah specifically be selected as the medium for this message - a strong condemnation and public disapproval of Edom (Esav's descendant) rather than for any other message HaShem wanted to deliver? Rashi answers this problem using a parallel between Ovadiah and Esav. Ovadiah, who lived in close company to Achav and Izevel was able to ignore their evil influences and did not learn from their behaviour. In contrast, Esav, who lived in close proximity to his two righteous parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah *should* have learnt from their deeds and character. He did not, and for this reason Ovadiah was chosen to chastise Edom and warn them of their future punishment.

The Haftarah begins with one of the harshest expressions associated with prophecy namely, "Chazon," a dark vision of punishment. The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni on the Book of Iyov comments that HaShem, as it were, criticised Eliphaz the son of Esav, who was one of the so-called "friends" who came to comfort Iyov over his great losses. "You 'comforted' Iyov falsely and began with the word 'Chazon,' implying falsely that Iyov had sinned. So will I bring from the ranks of your own people a prophet who will denounce and proclaim disastrous punishment against your people, because of its sins."

The prophecy itself is a powerful prediction of the fate of Esav. For example, it says "if thieves come upon you... they will steal only what they need." The Novi compares the fate that will befall Edom to the victims of ordinary infringement. Usually, a robber will steal only what he needs to survive or the item that he most desires. However, when the time comes for the retribution of Edom, HaShem will completely vanquish him. It will be his end.

This is announced clearly in Possuk 18 where it states "The house of Ya'akov will be fire, the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Esav as straw, and they will ignite them and consume them. There will be no survivor for the house of Esav..." The Torah records that when Yosef was born, Ya'akov suddenly decided it was time to leave the house of Lavan. Only then did he feel ready for the confrontation with Esav which had been delayed for so many years. This sudden resurgence in confidence is somewhat puzzling. But perhaps our haftarah clarifies it. Only when the deadly combination of Ya'akov and Yosef materialises will there be a force formidable enough to destroy Esav. This combination could be identical to that of the 'Moshiach Ben Dovid' and the 'Moshiach Ben Yosef', the very combination which according to tradition will accomplish the salvation of the Jewish people. It is the conclusion of this prophecy that links to our Parsha. Just as in the Parsha, Esav confronts Ya'akov and scares him, yet Ya'akov emerges unscathed and victorious, so too throughout history Amalek, Haman and Nazi Germany will terrify the Jewish People, yet in the end, Ya'akov and Yosef will unite to serve HaShem and He will save us and destroy the evil with flame and fire.

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The Worries of Ya'akov

בראשית לביא קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמת

"I have been diminished (made small) by all the kindness and all the truth.

Ya'akov was worried that Esav would kill him. This is because he thought that he had been diminished by all the 'kindness and truth' that Hashem had already done for him.

It is also very interesting to point out that the Sefer Hazikoron explains the Passuk and Rashi (read on) saying that he had been diminished 'because' of all the kindness and truth. Thus the Sefer Hazikoron translates 'מכל' as 'כל בשביל' meaning because of all. This makes the Passuk easier to understand, Ya'akov was not diminished by all the kindness and truth of Hashem rather because of all the kindness and truth of Hashem.

However, we have a question on the above Passuk as Rashi seemingly brings two reasons as to why Ya'akov thinks he has been diminished by all the kindness, these being 'נתמעטו זכיותי' – 'Reduction in merits' and 'נתלכלכתי בחטא' – 'dirtied with sin'. Why do we need to mention both?

Furthermore, the mention of 'נתמעטו זכיותי' is especially suprising since we have learnt in שבת נה

'אין מיתה בלא חטא ואין יסורין בלא עון'

"There is no death without sin and there is no suffering without iniquity". Surely Ya'akov only had to be worried about חטא, and not his lack of merits?

Answers the Maharal, and many *Mephorshei Rashi*, that merits protect us from sin. Thus merits would protect Ya'akov from Esav. This explains why he was worried about both sin and lack of merit, for without any merit to counteract his sin (which causes punishment), he could truly be petrified of Esav.

However, the Ramban has a few problems with this. The key question being, why is Ya'akov worried about his merits after all Hashem told him of the fact that he is protected by his merits only at the end of Vayeitsei and there has not been time for his merits to have been used up yet?

The Maharal defends Rashi by explaining that Ya'akov's merits may already have been rewarded before he left the house of Lavan, and since he may have sinned after leaving and would have no more merits to protect him. Ya'akov realised it was time to worry.

Written by Yossi Shebson with input by Shimon Levy

Words of the Wise

When R' Yaakov Kamenetsky's wife was in hospital, she was told that her condition had worsened such that there was nothing more the medical staff could do, so she called her family to take her home. The next day R' Yaakov and the rest of her family arrived. They packed up all the Rebbetzin's belongings and carried them down to the car. R' Yaakov's wife was wheeled into the lift and then to the car to be taken home.

Suddenly, R' Yaakov stopped. He bent over and whispered something to his wife, who nodded and strode back into the hospital, accompanied by his surprised son. R' Yaakov made straight for the lift and pushed the button to the floor they had just left.

On the way up his son kept asking what they had forgotten that was so important - whether it was an item of clothing, or had

they mixed up one of his mother's belongings with those of another patient.

R' Yaakov would say nothing except that it was very important.

When the lift stopped and the doors opened, R' Yaakov made his way to his wife's former room. He stepped in and walked over to the other inhabitant of the room. "Please forgive me – in my haste to leave the hospital, I forgot to say good-bye to you. Please accept my apologies and may G-d send you a complete recovery."

Then he walked out of the room, nodded a greeting at the astonished nurses and took the lift back down to the car.

Adapted from Parsha Parables

M'lachah of the Week

Borer – (Selecting): This prohibits one to take away the unwanted from the wanted when they are mixed together. It is also prohibited with the normal utensils for separating, and when separation is not needed for immediate use. E.g. removing the bones of a fish, one needs to remove the fish from the bones, using no specific utensils for separation, and for immediate use (knives and forks are eating utensils and are therefore permitted by halacha).

When one cuts out a bone with some of the fish still connected to it, it is allowed because one is only separating fish from fish. One can also remove the bones from his mouth. In a case where it is impossible to get to the wanted like chicken with skin, and egg with a shell, one may remove it with the other conditions met (see above). This extends to objects where the separation line isn't clear. But this is very complicated as you can see, and there are many other details, so I urge you to look into this in detail.

To kill or not to Kill

בראשית פרק לב

(ח) ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו ויחץ את העם אשר אתו ואת הצאן ואת הבקר והגמלים לשני מחנות:

Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. So he divided the people with him and the flocks, cattle and camels into two camps.

רש"י בראשית פרק לב

(ח) ויירא ויצר - ויירא שמא יהרג, ויצר לו אם יהרוג הוא את אחרים:

Rashi z'l explains that Yaakov Avinu feared that some of the 'others' may get killed.

The Peninim Yekarim gives an alternative explanation as to what Rashi meant by 'others'.

Chazal say that Niron, Caesar of Rome (King of Edom – descendent of Esav) converted to Judaism and his great grandson was the holy

Tanna Rabbi Meir. (Gitin Daf 57.)

It is well known that whenever the Mishna mentions אחרים it refers to Rabbi Meir. (Horios Daf 13.)

Before Moshe Rabeinu killed the Egyptian he used his Ruach Hakodesh to scan through the Egyptian's offspring to see if any good would later come from him.

When he saw that no good descendents were due to come from him, he killed him.

Here too, Rashi hints in his wording, Yaakov Avinu was worried that by killing Esav, 'Acherim' – Rabbi Meir would not be born to this world...

Rabbi Y.L. Hager adapted from Peninim Yekarim

Gematria of the Week

At the beginning of the Parsha when Ya'akov is instructing his messengers what they should tell Esav, he says לי שור – I have oxen. The Gematria of this is 546, identical to that of שנוולד יוסף - that Yosef was born. In Moshe's blessing in Parshas V'zos Hab'rochoh, Yosef is compared to שור – an ox. This supports the Gematria which hints to the fact that when Ya'akov said he had oxen, he was subtly referring to his son Yosef.

(בעל הטורים לבו)

Riddle of the week

Which Mitzvah is described in the Torah with non-Hebrew word(s)?

Answer to last week's riddle:

What do the letters א"א"א"א"א stand for?

אין אומרים 'קל' ארך אפים 1)

2) "אמר אויב ארדה אשיג אחלק" (Shemos 15:9) - this is mentioned in davening every day