

Haftarah Weekly

Ashkenazim read from Shoftim (4:4 – 5:31). S'phardim read only Perek 5.

The period of the 'Shoftim' – 'Judges' was the period linking the era of Y'hoshua to the era of the first king – Shaul. Devorah, the main personality in this week's haftarah was the only woman who was both a judge and a prophetess.

In this week's haftarah, the Jewish People are being oppressed by Yavin, King of Canaan and his fearsome general Sis'ra. Hashem informs Devorah in a prophetic message that it is time to fight against Canaan and regain the Jewish People's freedom. The man to accomplish this task would be Barak Ben Avinoam – Devorah's husband. In response to the imminent attack of the Jews, Sis'ra assembles an enormous army, including 900 iron chariots, which contributed to a formidable arsenal! Surprisingly, the B'nei Yisroel completely subjugated the Canaanites, including the additional armies from other kings of Canaan which had come to assist Sis'ra. Only Sis'ra survived and he fled to the tent of Yael. She 'encouraged' him to fall asleep by feeding him some milk, and then killed him by driving a tent peg into his temple. This tremendous battle turned the war in favour of the Jews who were then able to turn the tables on Yavin and live in peace for 40 years.

Completely overjoyed, and overflowing with gratitude, Devorah and Barak burst into song, praising Hashem and analysing the amazing events. In the song, she thanks Hashem for saving the Jewish People yet again. She explains that before this amazing battle, Yisrael could not live in open cities and had to take detours in order to stay safe. But now, thanks to Hashem, they are able to live in tranquility and security. She also praises the tribes who helped but reserves special superlatives for Yael who heroically killed Sis'ra.

The Radak, explaining some of the miracles recounted by Devorah, says that a phenomenon such as a meteor

shower (or perhaps shooting stars) fell from the sky, scalding the Canaanites. They would then jump into the River Kishon to cool themselves, which would overflow violently and kill them.

There are countless comparisons to be made between the parsha and the haftarah. The obvious similarities include the fact that both contain a song of gratitude to Hashem for miraculously saving the Jewish People; with both songs being sung by women (Devorah and Miriam). Additionally, the word 'Vayohom' is used in both cases, meaning that Hashem confused the enemy armies with loud, thunderous noises (Rashbam on B'shalach). Yet this connection is deepened by the essence of the miracles themselves. Both miracles include the use of the basic elements fire and water. In the parsha, there is the water of the *Yam Suf* and the pillar of fire. Similarly, in the haftarah, there is the scalding fires of the shooting stars and the overflowing waters of 'Nachal Kishon'. Interestingly, both Pharaoh and Sis'ra, the two enemy leaders, were left alive after their respective miraculous defeats.

Nevertheless, perhaps the deeper, more meaningful connection between the haftarah and parsha does not lie in the songs. Rather, it is the cause of the attack of Amalek and the reason why Hashem allowed Yavin to gain control over the Jews. As explained in this week's Gematria, the reason why Amalek were permitted to attack was because the Jews stopped following the Torah! So too, in the 3 p'sukim leading up to the haftarah, the Novi says "ויסיפו ה בני ישראל לעשות הרע בעיני ה" – "And the Jewish People continued to do bad in the eyes of Hashem". If we had been keeping the Torah and following its holy laws, Hashem would never have let Canaan attack us. Yet due to our misdeeds, He forsook us and punished us through Yavin. The striking message of the week must therefore be that in order to live in peace and tranquility, we must adhere to the Torah. If not, Hashem will punish and exile us.

<i>Editorial Team:</i>	Adam Gaventa Rafi Katten Shimon Levy
<i>Technical Editor:</i>	Jonny Fishel
<i>Editorial Advisor:</i>	Rabbi D Rowe
<i>Contributors:</i>	Rabbi A Landau Anonymous
<i>Under the direction of:</i>	Rabbi D Meyer

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The Essence Of Song?

What is the essence of song in the Torah?

In pedestrian life we speak in prose such as "how was your day?", "what's for dinner?" or "there's a phone call for you!" etc.

When is song expressed? Imagine an individual who has just learned that his Lotto ticket was the £80,000,000 winner. When he calls home to his wife, will he express himself in prose or poetry? Will he say "dear, we won the Lotto today!?" To this she'll reply "and I made your favourite meal for dinner tonight". "It was £80,000,000 dear" he'd insist, and she'd calmly wish him a safe trip home from the office.

Who would imagine that style of dialogue!? More likely he would begin with some stuttering to hold back the sudden cascade of emotion. At once he would blurt out almost incomprehensible combinations of words, that could only be understood by those who knew the true context.

What is song? Rabbi Shimshon Raphoel Hirsch defines it as "an inspired or rapturous expression of what some external event has revealed to the inner self, that which the physical eye can not see, but what has become clear to the mind's eye".

Perhaps this helps to explain why "The Song" of the Jewish Nation by the sea is written in a block form with intermittent open spaces. Sometimes the silence of what is not said is often more profound than what is actually expressed. The "bank account" of emotions and ideas is an ocean compared to the few drops of ink scrawled on the tiny "check". When the inner world of feelings swells beyond what the mouth can express, the result is potentially...song.

What was the depth of emotion which expressed itself as the Song at the Sea? What was revealed to the inner-self in the collective soul of the Jewish Nation?

There is a controversy recorded in the Talmud regarding the sefer "Song of Songs", written by King Shlomo. There

were those who did not want to include it in the scriptures because its content can be misunderstood. The sefer is an analogy of the love between G-d and the Jewish People in terms of the love between man and woman. The gemara quotes the great Rabbi Akiva who spoke in defence of the inherent holiness of King Shlomo's "Song of Songs". He said that all of "the writings" are holy and "Song of Songs" is the holy of holies.

The Torah is filled with many harsh rebukes and criticisms of the Jewish People and its leaders. We are called a "stiff necked people," and almost no one, not even Moshe, escapes sharp and scathing criticism for a seemingly slight error. One might wrongly conclude, that somehow we are the least-favored nation in the Almighty's world. King Dovid reminds us in his Tehillim: "Praiseworthy is the man whom G-d disciplines etc." The superficial appearance is that the one who is haunted with difficulty and criticism is despised. That is the superficial mask. What is the heart of the matter, however? The Song of Songs tells us that an intense love exists deep down. The caring teacher drives the promising student to fulfil his or her potential. Loving parents correct their child's imperfections for the sake of the child. More love is contained on the inside than can ever be understood by those who do not see the true context."Song of Songs" is the expression of the inner world of feelings between G-d and the Jews. It is the world behind the mask. That is what makes it "Holy of Holies".

The Jewish nation stood by the Sea of Reeds in the surprising repose of safety, only a short time earlier escaping for dear life. They expressed in exalted song their clearest cognition that the pain and suffering of the Egyptian exile was truly not excessive, but in fact, rehabilitative. The dawning recognition of Divine love instantly eclipsed 210 years of physical and spiritual privation. This resulted in spontaneous song. This is the essence of the song in the heart of hearts of the Torah!

Adapted from a D'var Torah given by Rabbi Label Lam and contributed anonymously

Words of the Wise

A man once came to Rabbi Dov Ber, the famed "Maggid of Mezeritch," with a question.

"The Talmud tells us," asked the man, "that 'A person is supposed to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses Him for the good.' How is this humanly possible? Had our sages said that one must accept without complaint or bitterness whatever is ordained from Heaven -- this I can understand. I can even accept that, ultimately, everything is for the good, and that we are to bless and thank G-d also for the seemingly negative developments in our lives. But how can a human being possibly react to what he experiences as bad in exactly the same way he responds to what he experiences as good? How can a person be as grateful for his troubles as he is for his joys?"

Rabbi Dov Ber replied: "To find an answer to your question, you must go see my disciple, Reb Zusha of Anipoli. Only he can help you in this matter."

Reb Zusha received his guest warmly, and invited him to make himself at home. The visitor decided to observe Reb Zusha's conduct before posing his question. Before long, he concluded that his host truly exemplified the Talmudic dictum which so

puzzled him. He couldn't think of anyone who suffered more hardship in his life than Reb Zusha had. He was a frightful pauper, there was never enough to eat in his home, and his family was beset with all sorts of afflictions and illnesses. Yet Reb Zusha was always good-humoured and cheerful, and constantly expressed his gratitude to the Almighty for all His kindness.

But what is his secret? How does he do it? The visitor finally decided to pose his question.

So one day, he said to his host: "I wish to ask you something. In fact, this is the purpose of my visit to you, our Rebbe advised me that you can provide me with the answer."

"What is your question?" asked Reb Zusha.

The visitor repeated what he had asked of the Maggid. "You raise a good point," said Reb Zusha, after thinking the matter through. "But why did our Rebbe send you to me? How would I know? He should have sent you to someone who has experienced suffering..."

Adapted from Chabad.org

M'lachah of the Week

Gozez - Shearing

Gozez is the first of the 2nd 'set' of melachot. This set involves the preparation of fabrics – used in the Mishkan in the making of the curtains.

The first step is obtaining the raw material – in this case wool – from the animal. Shearing removes a growing part of a sheep, which leads to the prohibiting of removing (with an instrument) a growing part of an animal (or human), whether alive or dead.

An example of something prohibited under gozez is cutting one's nails – biting one's nails is also prohibited, although not by as strong a form as that which prohibits cutting them.

An Abundance of Blessing – in a 'Manna' of Speaking

There is a fascinating מדרש concerning the מן in this week's סדרה. It tells us that when הקב"ה provided בני ישראל with מן in the מדבר, the amount was enough to suffice for each person for 2,000 years. An incredible statement, on a number of levels – especially when you consider the fact that anyone who tried to collect more, or kept any over, failed in their endeavours. [It is worth looking at the שלוחה מ, where the איוביציא deals in more detail with this group, who he shows to have possessed פסולה – a misplaced sense of low self-esteem.] In any case, what is the point of such an abundance of מן – it even seems, dare we say, a bit of a waste. We know that the מדרש is not there to tell us a cute story; there must be a deeper reason for the vast amounts of מן appearing each day.

Rav Dessler זצ"ל has a beautiful insight into the above מדרש. He says in מכתב מאליהו חלק א, that we are being taught a profound lesson. We know that the מן was representative of פרנסה [the בני ישראל received this as the equivalent of physical sustenance because of the incredibly high level on which they stood]. If one has בטחון and אמונה – which means a reliance on הקב"ה, and not, as is sometimes badly mistranslated and misunderstood, blind faith – one will realise that He provides much, much more than we really need.

Indeed, as the שער הבטחון in חובות הלבבות tells us, 'ה' has a track record of giving us more than we ask for. One just has to open one's eyes to see this, and then one can appreciate it properly. Of course, we must put in our השתדלות, but sometimes we go a little overboard in this regard. It is true, that it is hard to know how much the השתדלות is for each one of us, but occasionally, if we only paused for breath, we would see that getting caught up in the rat race of everyday living, at the expense of our family and friends is surely one step too far.

Once we grasp this idea, we can begin to understand another מדרש about the מן. The פסוק tells us that the מן which was left after everyone had finished collecting theirs would melt. The מדרש says that it would flow into rivers for others to drink. It indicates that if one can appreciate what ה' provides for us and recognise the abundance in which He does so, every facet of the physical becomes meaningful and beneficial, even that which did not seem directly relevant to us.

By being aware, one becomes grateful. And through the gratefulness, comes a wonderful appreciation of the gifts given to us. This is true שמחה.

Written by Rabbi A Landau

Riddle of the Week

The number 176 has a certain significance regarding both the Tanach and the Gemoro. What is it?

Last week's riddle:

In which word in Tehillim is a letter written three times consecutively?

Answer:

"הגנני" (Tehillim 9:14)

Gematria of the Week

In the last passage of this week's parsha, Amalek come to fight with the Jewish People in R'feedim. The possuk says עם ישראל ברפידים – 'with Yisroel in R'feedim'. This has the same Gematria as מפנות ידיו – which means 'they weakened their hands from the Mitzvos'. Indeed Chazal saw significance in the name רפידים and explained that it is a contraction of מפנות ידיו. Chazal, with the additional support of the Gematria are coming to teach us that the sole reason why Amalek were even able to come and fight the Jewish People was because they weren't keeping the Torah. This theme has repeated itself throughout history. Only when we fail to follow the Torah do we become vulnerable and susceptible to attack.

(שמות יג:ז) - Based on Ba'al Haturim