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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.**

"I will surely have mercy on him"

THE SECOND DAY OF ROSH HASHANA

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO *HAFTAROT*

The *haftara* for the second day of *Rosh Hashana* (*Yirmiyahu* 31:1-19) is entirely different than the *haftara* for the first day. This is not only because the *haftara* regarding Chana is a narrative, at the heart of which stands an individual and his own personal story, whereas the *haftara* of "*Matza chen ba-midbar*" is a prophecy about the future that relates to the nation as a whole, but rather because of the differences in the spiritual world upon which each *haftara* is based. In the story of Chana, we read about a woman of amazing spiritual strength, whose prayer is answered and whose aspirations are realized by virtue of her actions. God remembers her in the wake of the self-sacrifice that she demonstrates and the powerful prayer that she offers. It is not by chance that Chana's prayer serves as the foundation for the laws of prayer for all generations. The ode of praise that breaks forth from Chana's

lips at the end of the *haftara* also testifies to the religious profundity that lies deep in her soul. In short, Chana is inscribed for life and receives her reward, because she emerges victorious in judgment.

REDEMPTION OUT OF WRETCHEDNESS

In the *haftara* read on the second day, on the other hand, we encounter the opposite situation. Yirmiyahu prophesies during the generation of the destruction, which he and other prophets had harshly rebuked for the longest time. He does not explain the redemption as following from Israel's merits, but from their wretchedness. It is very possible that by right they are culpable, but they will merit redemption because they are remnants of the sword in need of rest. The description of the redeemed is but a description of the survivors, and it reflects their situation accordingly:

For thus says the Lord; Sing with gladness for Yaakov, and shout on the hilltops of the nations: announce, praise, and say, O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travails with child together: a great company shall return there. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, in which they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Efrayim is My firstborn. (*Yirmiyahu* 31:6-8)

The redeemed are the remnants of the people who return to Israel with weeping and with supplications, and the goal of redemption is to bring them rest. Accordingly, what is emphasized in the continuation is the relief and pleasures that will be granted them:

Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow to the bounty of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be like a watered garden; and they

shall not languish in sorrow any more. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning to joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord. (31:11-13)

The goal of redemption lies in satisfying their needs, and the wheat, wine, oil and the young of the herd and the flock are the means to bring about that satisfaction. Everything is directed at bringing their soul to be like a watered garden, satiated with all goodness and knowing no further pain or sorrow.

The redemption described here does not follow from good deeds nor does it come in the wake of repentance. Rather, it is God's will to help those miserable souls, who have known so much grief and affliction, and to show them benevolence. Yirmiyahu teaches us that bestowing rest upon the remnants of the sword, in and of itself, has religious significance. Not only redemption accompanied by repentance and the love of God, but even the ingathering of miserable and wretched exiles and bringing them back to the land of Israel, has religious importance.

The reason for this is two-fold. First of all, God is abundant in His lovingkindness, merciful and gracious, and He acts charitably towards His creatures. As the Gemara states in *Sota*:

As He clothes the naked, for it is written: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them" (*Bereishit* 3:21), so do you also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: "And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre" (*Bereishit* 18:1), so do you also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Avraham, that God blessed Yitzchak his son" (*Bereishit* 25:11), so do you also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: "And He buried him in the valley" (*Devarim* 34:6), so do you also bury the dead. (*Sota* 14a)

A FATHER'S CONCERN FOR HIS SON

This is one reason, but there is also another reason, which is emphasized by the prophet:

For I am a father to Israel, and Efrayim is My firstborn.

The concern about the remnant of Israel and their suffering reflects God's relationship to His people as that of a parent to his children. This finds two-fold expression in the words of the prophet. First, in the remembrance of the past. As opposed to a slave who does wrong and is quickly sold and gotten rid of, a son who does wrong remains a son and his parent remains faithful to him as his child. The parent lovingly remembers the wonderful past and clings to it, and he tries to alleviate his child's suffering and to benefit him in the present. Remembrance of the past, yearning for those wonderful times, and hoping that they will return in the future comprise the famous conclusion of the *haftara*:

Is Efrayim my dear son? Is he a darling child? For whenever I speak of him, I earnestly remember him still: therefore my inward parts are moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord. (31:19)

The benefaction in the present because God is Israel's heavenly Father from time immemorial, who always cares and worries about them, is the prophet's starting point, when he says: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" and therefore "I have remained true to you" (31:2).

Second, this aspect of the *haftara* is the reason that it includes the prophecy of "A voice was heard in Rama" (31: 14), for that prophecy deals with the suffering of Israel and the worry of a parent for a child who is not. Rachel's weeping does not only stir up the merits of the Patriarchs; it emphasizes Israel's suffering in the exile, and how difficult that exile is for the parent. These are the critical points because of which God will bring redemption to Israel, and therefore they are mentioned here in this manner. The redemption that is promised to Rachel is not only by virtue of the

Patriarchs and the Matriarchs, but because those same factors that bring Rachel to weeping, are taken into consideration by God as well, He being Israel's father who worries about them.

REPENTANCE IN THE WAKE OF REDEMPTION

The final section of the *haftara* speaks about the beginning of a process of repentance. This takes place, however, not before the redemption, but after it; repentance does not bring about the redemption, but rather it results from it. When the people of Israel return to their land as the remnant of the sword and when they are brought to the height of Zion in order to satisfy their soul, they feel the intimacy and concern of God, and this stirs them to repentance. When He deals with them with a father's mercy and a parent's compassion, feelings befitting a son are stirred up in Israel and they regret their actions. They turn to God with the call of "Turn me back and I shall be turned" (31:17; they are incapable of returning on their own, but they ask God to worry about returning them to Him. Their world finds expression in the words, "after I had returned (= to God), I repented" (31:18). In other words, first they return to God and feel His fatherly closeness, and only afterwards can they improve their ways. As stated, repentance is the result of man's closeness to God, and not its cause.

This prophecy has an important message for our generation, in light of the Holocaust. Yirmiyahu teaches that God's providing of rest to the remnant of Israel, a people who were left of the sword, has religious significance. From this perspective, the State of Israel has religious importance, even without taking into consideration additional, more exalted factors that assign the state additional religious meaning. Therefore, even those who deny the thesis that sees the state as embodying an advanced state of redemption, can still attribute to it religious meaning inasmuch as it realizes the words of Yirmiyahu regarding rest and satisfaction. In this context, I will allow myself to cite what I once wrote on this topic:[\[1\]](#)

We learn from Yirmiyahu's prophecy that had the State of Israel only come into being in order to give rest to survivors of the Holocaust – that would be enough. Had they only come to Israel in fulfillment of the verse, "I will turn

their mourning to joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow" (*Yirmiyahu* 31:12), that would suffice to justify its existence from a religious perspective and to see in it a meaningful event and a fulfillment of the prophetic vision of the prophet of exile and destruction.^[2] Just as *Chazal* joined this prophecy to the story of the *Akeida* as the *haftara* for the second day of *Rosh Hashana*, so too we must connect the consolation that it offers to the *Akeidot* of our generation.

INSCRIPTION FOR LIFE IN ANY EVENT

Let us conclude this *shiur* by returning to the point with which we opened. On the first day of *Rosh Hashana* we read a *haftara* that speaks of inscription for good life by virtue of man's righteousness and actions. This is, of course, the desired model that we must aim for. However, not everyone merits, Chana's level being exceedingly high. We, therefore, read on the second day of *Rosh Hashana* a *haftara* that emphasizes the very opposite, namely, inscription for a good and peaceful life even if a person is unworthy. *Yirmiyahu's* prophecy regarding redemption that stems from the fact that we are the children of God who longingly remembers us and shows us mercy, allows us to hope that our Father and King will deal charitably and kindly with us even though we have no merits. This is the great message of the *haftara* for the second day. The *haftara* for the first day teaches us what is meritorious conduct; the *haftara* for the second day offers us the consolation that even if we lack that conduct, God will treat us graciously and with compassion.

(Translated by David Strauss)

^[1] "*Zekhor Lanu Berit Acharonim*," in *Sinai*, Jubilee Volume, Jerusalem 5762.

^[2] I have recently been informed that my revered grandfather, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *ztz"l*, emphasized a similar point, citing other verses that highlight this idea. We read in II *Melakhim* 14:23-28: "In the fifteenth year of Amatzyah the son of Yo'ash king of Yehuda, Yaravam the son of Yo'ash king of Israel began to reign in Shomeron, and he reigned forty one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from all the sins of Yaravam the son of Nevat, who made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Chamat to the sea of the Arava, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Yona, the son of Amitai, the prophet, who was of Gat-Chefer. For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter; for there was not any shut up, nor any left free, nor any helper for Israel. For the Lord had not said that He would

blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but He saved them by the hand of Yarov'am the son of Yo'ash. Now the rest of the acts of Yarov'am, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damesek, and Chamat (which had belonged to Yehuda), for Israel, are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel." Banging on the table for emphasis, the Rav read these verses and related them to David ben Gurion.