

## ***Parashat Toldot – Haftarah – Malachi 1:1-2:7 – November 6, 2021***

In *Parashat Toldot*, we read about two parents each having their favorite child, and the competition between Jacob and Esau for their father Isaac's blessing. The family becomes split by the competition, each parent taking a different child's side. Rebecca favored Jacob and Isaac favored Esau, to be Isaac's heir. Rebecca tells Jacob to lie to his father and to take Esau's blessing from him. Jacob worries that he will be found out and will be cursed. Rebecca responds that the curse will be on her (Genesis 27:13). Genesis 25:34 states that Esau despised (ויבז - *va'yivaz*) his birthright. We read in Genesis 26:5, God promised many blessings to Abraham and Isaac because Abraham guarded God's commandments, laws, and teachings.

The Haftarah that is read *b'yachad*, together with *Parashat Toldot* is from Malachi 1:1-2:7, we read that God prefers Israel (Jacob) to Edom (Esau). The Haftarah begins by stating that Edom, a descendant of Esau, will be destroyed, they will never recover, but Israel or Jacob will continue to exist. However, despite the fact that Israel survives, they are insecure about God's love and needs reassurance. The same word, (ויבז - *va'yivaz*) is used in the Haftarah to say that the priests of Israel despised the table of Adonai (Malachi 1:6-7 and 1:12). We see in the haftarah that the priests, who are responsible for teaching God's laws, lie and cheat by exchanging the people's good quality sacrifices for bad ones. In return, God curses the priests (Malachi 1:14). In the final verse of the Haftarah, the priests are reminded that their role is to guard and teach God's teachings.

## ***Parashat Vayetzei - Haftarah - Hosea 12:13 - 14:10 (Ashkenazic) Hosea 11:7 - 12:12 (Sephardic) – November 13, 2021***

*Parashat Vayetzei* begins by stating in Genesis 27, that Jacob had to flee his home because his brother Esau wanted to kill him for having stolen his blessing. Jacob asks God to provide for his needs, be with him, guard him (שמר) and help him come back in peace (Genesis 28:15, 20 and also 31:29). God was a support and guide to Jacob during hard times (Genesis 28:15). In the Torah reading, Jacob served seven years for Rachel (Genesis 29:20), and was given Leah instead. He then served seven more years for Rachel. Leah, Rachel and their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, were the mothers of all Jacob's children, the ancestors to the entire people, the children of Israel, *b'nai yisrael*. In Genesis 31:30, household gods appear in the story without outright condemnation. Laban, Rachel and Leah's father, owns Idols. Rachel steals those idols to take with her when she leaves her father's house to move to Canaan. Her theft seems to be condemned by Jacob and Laban, but the ownership of those household Idols itself, does not seem to be condemned. In the Torah reading Laban objects to Jacob having left secretly and protests that if only Jacob had told him his plans, "I would have sent you off *b'simchah*." *B'simchah* is usually translated as "with joy," or "with willingness, alacrity, enthusiasm and generosity."

The Ashkenazic Haftarah that goes *b'yachad*, together with *Parashat Vayetzei* is from Hosea 12:13 - 14:10. The haftarah begins by stating that Jacob served for one wife, and for another wife, he guarded. The haftarah continues to state that one prophet God brought Israel out of Egypt, and another prophet guarded them. Prophets and wife seem to be described in parallel fashion: how Jacob took wives, but not what the wives did for him is compared to what prophets did for God, but not how God acquired them. Wives gave birth to the people, Moses the prophet helped "deliver" the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt and the other prophet "mothered" them until they developed into a nation. Jacob immediately loved Rachel and was willing to serve her father to earn the right to marry her. Jacob acquired Rachel by acting as a servant. In contrast, the prophets were called by God to serve God. Moses is often referred to as "the Servants of God." Hosea 12:13 refers to Jacob's need to flee from his home and sojourn in Aram, where he earned his wives by guarding (שמר) the sheep. Hosea 12:14 continues by saying that God assigned prophets to guard (שמר) Israel when they came up from Egypt and when they lived in Israel. Hosea encourages the Israelites to consider God their only source of help (Hosea 12:14 and 13:4-9). Idols are condemned by Hosea (13:1-2).

In the haftarah (14:5), we learned that if the prophet could convince Israel to stop sinning and repent God, would love Israel generously (נדבה). The haftarah (14:5) says that God will love Israel generously. The haftarah's term (נדבה) generously and the Torah reading's term *b'simchah* have very similar meaning. The word disgrace (חרפה) appears in the Torah reading and in the haftarah. In the Torah reading, Rachel has been childless and suffered shame for many years because of it. In Genesis 30:22-23 she finally has a child and says "God has taken away my disgrace." In the haftarah, since Ephraim has brought disgrace upon God through Ephraim's sins, God will pay Ephraim back for the disgrace. The word שובה *shuva* meaning "return," appears in both the haftarah and the Torah reading (Hosea 14:2 and Genesis 28:15 and 21, 29:3, 31:3 and 13). The word שובה *shuva*

also forms the basis for the Hebrew word “repentance.” To repent, then is to return. This implies that those who have sinned were once in the right place, but have strayed.

The Sephardic Haftarah that is often read b’yachad together with *Parashat Vayetzei* is from Hosea 11:7 - 12:12. Furthermore, this haftarah is read by some Ashkenazim for next week’s Torah Reading, *Parashat Vayishlach*. Before Jacob leaves the Land, God promises in Genesis 28:15, to bring him back to the Land, which God does in Genesis 31:3. According to Hosea, God will call the exiled Israelites from exile to return to their Land (Hosea 11:10-11). Hosea 12:3 states that Jacob was punished according to his deeds. Beth El is mentioned in Parshat Vayetzei (Genesis 28:19 and 31:13) as well as in the haftarah, Hosea 12:5. In Parashat Vayetzei, Jacob kisses Rachel and cires (Genesis 29:11). In the haftarah, it is stated that Jacob fought with an angel and wept (Hosea 12:3-5).

## ***Parashat Vayishlach - Haftarah - Ovadiah 1:1 - 21 – November 20, 2021***

The entire book of Ovadiah 1:-21, is the haftarah for *Parsahat Vayishlach*, according to the Sephardim and also read by many Ashkenazim. However some Ashkenazim read Hosea 11:7-12:12 as the haftarah for *Parashat Vayishlach*.

In the Torah reading, Jacob and Edom, or Esau enjoy a peaceful reconciliation. Unfortunately, as the haftarah shows, the relationship between the descendants of the two brothers is anything but peaceful and reconciled. In the haftarah, Ovadiah says that Edom will get its punishment for its treachery toward Israel. Edom is seen as a villain in the haftarah, and in Jewish tradition in general. In Genesis 33, Esau, or Edom greets his estranged brother Jacob with hugs and kisses and wants to travel with him and even offers him some of his soldiers for protection. In Genesis 35, Esau helps Jacob to bury their father Isaac. In Genesis 36, Esau voluntarily moves to another land, so that he and Jacob will not get in each other's ways.

In the Torah reading, Dinah's brothers kill all the men in the town of Shechem in retaliation for raping Dinah. The commentators discuss whether or not this punishment went beyond the principle of measure for measure punishment, since only one man raped Dinah, but the brothers killed all the men in the town of Shechem. There are many examples of opportunists in both the Torah reading and the haftarah. In the Torah reading, the people of Shechem plan to benefit economically from a situation created when Shechem raped Dinah (Genesis 34:23). Jacob's sons wait for the men of Shechem to be in pain from their circumcisions, and then take advantage of this opportunity to destroy the city. In the haftarah, Edom seems to have taken advantage of a situation that they did not create, by attacking the defeated and fleeing Israelites (1:11-14).

## ***Parashat Vayeshev - Haftarah - Amos 2:6 - 3:8 – November 27, 2021***

In the Torah reading, *Parashat Vayeshev*, Joseph tells his dreams, which some see as prophecies, to his brothers who do not want to hear them. Clothing is an important symbol in both the Torah and haftarah. In the Torah reading, Joseph, the favorite child of his father Jacob, is given the coat of many colors. This gift makes Joseph's brothers very jealous. Both the Torah and the haftarah provide shocking examples of hard-hearted behavior. In the Torah Reading, Genesis 37:24-25, Joseph's brothers ate after they threw Joseph in a pit. According to a *midrash*, a rabbinic legend, the brothers moved away from the pit, so as not to hear Joseph's calls for help. A central theme in both the Torah and haftarah, is the issue of personal responsibility. Reuben understands in Genesis 37:30 that as the oldest in the family, he should have protected his younger brother Joseph. He realizes that he will be held responsible for Joseph's fate by their father Jacob. In verses 38:1-11, Judah neglects his responsibilities towards Tamar, his daughter-in-law. On the other hand, Tamar does all that she can to fulfill her responsibility to continue the family line, even possibly risking her own life (Genesis 38:12-30). The Torah reading is filled with examples of people being punished measure for measure for the sins of their past. For example, Jacob's parents played favorites with their sons, ultimately hurting them both. Jacob plays favorites among his sons, ultimately hurting them all. Jacob lied to his father Isaac and Jacob's sons lied to him. The blood of a goat is used to trick Jacob into thinking that Joseph was dead. Jacob had used a goatskin to fool his own father Isaac into thinking that he was his brother Esau. The coat of many colors is used to trick Jacob into thinking that Joseph was dead. Joseph's brother, Judah, is later tricked by the clothes that Tamar wears. Joseph's brothers show his bloody coat of many colors to Jacob, and ask him if he can "recognize this." Tamar later sends Judah's staff back to him, and asks "recognize this". Both the Torah reading and the haftarah provide examples of how you cannot stop a good person from doing good. In the Torah reading, Joseph was a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, who was turned into a slave by his brothers. Furthermore, there is an example in the Torah reading, of a *tzadikah*, a righteous woman, Tamar, who lowered herself in order to fulfill her mission.

In the haftarah that is paired *b'yachad* together with *Parashat Vayeshev*, Amos 2:6 - 3:8,

Amos has a message from God that the people do not want to hear. In the haftarah, Amos states that even the mighty will be stripped naked of the garments that give them strength. In the haftarah the children of Israel insensitively exploited the poor and profited from their exploitation. In the haftarah, the children of Israel neglect their responsibility to protect the poor. Amos takes his responsibility to publicize God's words very seriously, even if the others do not want to hear the message. Amos 3:2 states that God will call Israel to account for all its sins - and there are many examples how this statement holds true in our Torah reading. In the haftarah, prophets and Nazarites are *tzadikim*, righteous people, who are robbed of their power and in effect enslaved by the Israelites. The prophets emerge victorious, because after all, we continue to read the books of the Prophets and are generally influenced by their ideas even until today. The self-control of the nazirites in the haftarah stands in opposition to the self-indulgent behavior of Judah, Joseph's brothers.

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