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The Haftarah- Its History and Holiness

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E18)

What do you think you know about the Haftarah?

The origin of the word הפטרה

The אבודרהם teaches that the word הפטרה derives from the expression taught in the Gemara¹ אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן, whereby we learn that nothing else can conclude the סעודה of פסח ליל after eating the פסח קרבן. The word מפטירין refers to a conclusion or finish. Hence, the word הפטרה refers to the portion of נביא which we read at the conclusion of שחרית or of קריאת התורה. It is then correct to refer to it as the Haftarah, not, as is commonly said, the Haftorah. Likely, since we just read Krias HaTorah, we started referring to the הפטרה as the Haftarah in a rhyming sort of way.

The history of the הפטרה

The אבודרהם dates the origin of the reading of the הפטרה to the בית שני period when the Assyrian Greeks (Antiochus) did their utmost to uproot the Torah from כלל ישראל (as we say in על הנסים that they rose up תורתך (להשכיחם תורתך).² The punishment for reading Torah in public was terribly severe and the Torah would be burnt ר"ל.

It seems, however, that they did not object to the Mussar messages of the נביאים which, in their view, did not imply living a Halachic lifestyle. Taking advantage of that 'loophole' חז"ל

identified a word, phrase or theme in the נביא which referred to the reading that was meant to take place that Shabbos and instituted its reading instead of the קריאת התורה.

Among many other teachings in his wonderful work, *Kol Dodi on the Haftaros*, Rav Dovid Feinstein זצ"ל points out the connection between each הפטרה and its associated פרשה.

Twenty-one פסוקים

Because the תקנה was to serve as a substitute for the קריאת התורה, the minimum number of פסוקים to be read is 21. This is another reminder of the seven Aliyos which each have a minimum of three פסוקים when reading from the Torah.

Why not from כתובים?

The תקנה was to read from the נביאים, not from the כתובים. The themes and wording of the נביאים lend themselves to align more closely with the words and themes of the פרשיות then do the כתובים.

A disagreement

The לבוש takes issue with the assumptions of the אבודרהם and says that there is no way that Antiochus would be more easy-going with נביא

*He had passed
the test that was
placed before
him by putting
the feelings of
another Jew
before his own.*

¹ פסחים ק"ט:

² אבודרהם סדר תפילות של שבת דף ס"ג דפוס ויניציא



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than with תורה. He asserts that the תקנה was earlier and that חז"ל wanted us to hear מוסר from the נביאים each week.

The tunes (Trop)

The נביא is read in a different tune to that of the תורה per all מנהגים. The ספר חסידים asserts that the difference between תורה and נביאים is a הלכה למשה מסיני (as is the difference between those and the tune for כתובים). This is alluded to in שמות יט:יט where we read that Moshe spoke and Hashem responded בקול, meaning not only with a 'voice' but with a tune.³

Keeping the תקנה with exceptions

Per the אבודרהם, the תקנה of reading from the נביא was kept even after Hashem defeated the army of Antiochus. חז"ל wanted to ensure, however, that people not place the הפטרה on an even footing with קריאת התורה and so they put some guidelines in place that would maintain the difference.

First, they declared that a person cannot be called to only read from the נביא. The one who will read from the נביא must first read at least three פסוקים from the תורה (known as the מפטיר).

Next, חז"ל permitted the נביא to be read from paper (a חומש or תנ"ך) and not only from קלף as is the case with תורה.

Further, חז"ל permitted a קטן to be called for הפטרה and reading the מפטיר.

Additionally, the שלחן ערוך, based on the Gemara⁴ mentions that since (or perhaps to indicate that) מפטיר is on a lesser level of significance than קריאת התורה, they gave priority to the בעל מפטיר to lead מוסף to 'compensate' for the lesser כבוד associated with reading from the נביא and not from the תורה. Indeed, many חסידים do not even have the בעל מפטיר read the נביא aloud but he recites the ברכות before and after and the ציבור reads the נביא to themselves.

When we read two פרשיות

When two פרשיות are read on one Shabbos, we read the הפטרה of the second. An exception to this rule is when אחרי-קדושים are read together. We then read the הפטרה of אחרי since the הפטרה for קדושים (יחזקאל כ) is a harsh description of the עבירות of ישראל and we avoid it when we can.

R' Dovid Feinstein זצ"ל points out that when קדושים is read alone the הפטרה is read as it is uniquely suited to the פרשה. It speaks about laxity in שבת, כיבוד אב, bribery and עבודה זרה, all themes that are echoed in the פרשה.

Reading the whole Sefer

On two occasions we read an entire נביא, the one being יונה and the second in פרשת וישלח when we read the one-chapter book of עובדיה. The story of the meeting and parting of יעקב and עשו feature prominently in both. When they part, the תורה tells us⁵ that שעיירה bids farewell until they meet שעיירה, a reference to הר שעייר, the portion of עשו. The נביא

³ ספר חסידים סימן ש"ב

⁴ מגילה כד.

⁵ בראשית לג:יד



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refers to this future meeting with the well-known פסוק (כא) telling us of the great day when:

וְעָלוּ מוֹשְׁעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן לְשִׁפֹּט אֶת הָרָע וְהָיְתָה לָהֶם הַמְּלֻכָה.

הפטרות Special

Rav Yisrael Belsky זצ"ל speaks about the Mussar given to כלל ישראל in the three weeks leading up to ט' באב. The first of these three, called the ג' דפורענותא, begins with the word דברי, the second with the word שמעו and the third with the word חזון. Rav Belsky זצ"ל asserts that these are the three components of the שנאת חינום for which we suffer our גלות. There is someone who says something negative (דברי), there is someone who hears something unflattering (שמעו) and there is one who sees something negative (חזון).⁶

The seven weeks of הפטרות that build up from ט' באב ראש השנה to ט' באב שבע דנחמתא are called the שבוע דנחמתא and they help us climb the ladder from the exiled sovereignty of Hashem (שכינתא בגלותא) up to celebrating the מלכות ה'.

Changes to the routine

There were communities where the הפטרה gave way to other occasions. One such change was when the community lost an אדם גדול ר"ל. On the following Shabbos they would read א ד: כא instead of the regular נביא which announces that the grieving of עלי הכהן (the daughter-in-law when עלי הכהן was taken captive). This parallels the loss of an אדם גדול.

⁶ My thanks to my son, R' Avrohom for citing this teaching from R' Belsky זצ"ל

Indeed, on the week that the רמב"ם passed away there were communities that read the opening of מספר יהושע, where we find the words משה עבדי מת, an appropriate reference to the great רמב"ם, as well.

עלייה Today an important

There appears to have been a shift over the generations whereby מפטיר which was a 'lesser' Aliyah and was even given 'compensation' is now viewed as a significant honor, perhaps even more so than a 'regular' Aliyah reading from the Torah. It is given to a בר מצוה, to a Chosson, a Yahrzeit, etc.

7 A story about an הפטרה

A couple from טבריה did whatever they could to be blessed with offspring but to no avail. His friends from the Kollel where he learned were already marking their sons' Bar Mitzvah's and they were still childless. Someone suggested that he go to receive the Brocha of the Norelna Rebbe in Bnei Brak, who was known as a great Tzadik and בעל מופת.

He went and poured his heart out to the Rebbe. With compassion the Rebbe asked him where he would be for Rosh Hashana. He responded that he would be, like all other years, with his Kollel in טבריה. The Rebbe suggested that he come to join him in Bnei Brak. After all, we read that שרה was miraculously granted a child and then we read the הפטרה wherein חנה was granted the miraculous gift of her child, שמואל. As the

⁷ Heard from Rav Yitzchok Isbee זצ"ל at the Agudah of Avenue L



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Rebbe put it, 'great things can happen' from this reading from the נביא.

After consulting with his wife, they decided to leave the 'Litvish' surroundings and spend ר"ה with the Rebbe. He did not know what the Aliyah might cost him, but he would stop at nothing to try to be blessed with a child.

After davening on the first night of ר"ה he stood aside while the חסידים made their way to the Rebbe to give and receive Brochos for the coming year. To his surprise, another man who was not a 'local' to the Chasidus also stood by and waited while the חסידים engaged with the Rebbe, waiting to greet the Rebbe.

They greeted one another and he was shocked to learn that this fellow was also childless and had also come to benefit from the blessing of reading the הפטרה, also per the recommendation of the Rebbe. Had the Rebbe forgotten that he had already invited him to come for that הפטרה?

He did not say anything, but he also did not sleep that night, tossing and turning in empathic agony over the other fellow whose heart was set, as was his, on getting מפטיר the next day. By the morning he had made up his mind. He would not take this away from the other fellow and crush his hopes. He found somewhere else to daven that morning and let the other fellow get מפטיר by the Rebbe.

That year they were blessed with a daughter.

The Rebbe had indeed said that 'great things can happen from this reading' and indeed a great thing came from it. He had not said that he would be called for the Maftir; he said that great things can come from this reading.

Apparently, he had passed the test that was placed before him by putting the feelings of another Jew before his own, and Heaven put his feelings ahead of the many obstacles in their way to having offspring.

Takeaway: I will try to pay attention to the מוסר being taught in the הפטרה.