

# HAFTORAH COMMENTARY PARSHAS TOLDOS

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Malachi 1:1 - 2:7

This week's haftorah warns the Jewish people to cherish their relationship with Hashem and never to take advantage of it. Although we enjoy a special closeness with Hashem, we are reminded to approach Him with reverence at all times. The prophet Malachi addresses the Jewish people shortly after their return from their Babylonian exile and admonishes them for their lack of respect in the Bais Hamikdash. Malachi says in the name of Hashem, "I love you...but if I am your father where is My honor? The kohanim disgrace My name by referring to My altar with disrespect." (1:2,6) Rashi (ad loc.) explains that the kohanim failed to appreciate their privilege of sacrifice in Hashem's sanctuary. Although the Jews had only recently merited their return to Eretz Yisroel and the Bais Hamikdash it didn't take long for them to forget this. They became so accustomed to the daily service of sacrifice that they began viewing their sacred sacrificial portions like ordinary meals. If, due to the abundance of kohanim, small portions were distributed to each kohain, their response was one of great disrespect. Even the order of sacrifice was treated lightly and at times they would offer lame or sick animals on Hashem's altar, demonstrating tremendous insensitivity towards their sacred privilege.

The prophet Malachi reprimanded them for their inexcusable behavior and reminded them of the illustrious era of the first Bais Hamikdash, only years before. The kohanim in those generations did have the proper attitude towards the service of Hashem and conducted themselves with true reverence. Hashem says about the kohain of those days, "My treaty of life and peace was with him, and I gave him (reason for) reverence. He revered Me and before My name he was humbled." (2:5) In particular, these passages refer to Aharon, the earliest Kohain Gadol to serve in the Sanctuary. They speak of a man so sacred that he was granted permission to enter the Holy of Holies. And yet he always maintained a true sense of humility and displayed proper reverence whenever he entered Hashem's private quarters. The Gaon of Vilna reveals to us that Aharon's relationship was so unique that it extended far beyond that of any other Kohain Gadol. In fact, Aharon was the only person in history who was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies at any point in the year, given certain sacrificial conditions. Yet, this special closeness never affected Aharon Hakohain. He never became overly comfortable with Hashem and always maintained the proper reverence.

Parenthetically, Malachi draws special attention to the stark contrast between our relationship with Hashem and that of the other nations. Their relationship with the Creator is defined as one of formal respect and reverence. Malachi says in the name of Hashem, "From the east to the west My name is

exalted amongst the nations....But you (the Jewish people) profane it by saying that the altar of Hashem is a disgrace." (1:12) The Radak (ad loc.) explains that Hashem's name is exalted by all nations because they do recognize a supreme being which they respectfully call the G-d of the gods. They afford the Creator the highest title and honor and never bring any disgrace to His name. This is because they always direct their energies towards smaller powers and false deities and never approach Hashem directly. This relationship with Hashem results in one of perfect formal respect and reverence and allows Hashem to remain exalted in their eyes. The upshot of this is that their relationship with Him is a distant one which leaves no room for familiarity and disgrace.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, enjoy a very close relationship with Hashem. They are privileged to be identified as Hashem's sons and are the focus of Hashem's love and favor. They are granted permission to enter Hashem's holy chamber and sense the warmth of Hashem inside His sacred abode. This special relationship leaves room for familiarity and, at times, can even be the cause of insensitivity and disrespect. In the second Bais Hamikdash this special feeling of closeness was so tangible that the kohanim lost sight of the true reverence and respect they owed Hashem. Hashem therefore says, "I love you but where is your reverence?" The Jewish people are entitled to a special close relationship but they must never abuse this privilege. Special care must always be given to maintain their proper respect and reverence for the Master of the universe.

This vast difference between the Jews and the nations in their approach to respect finds its origins in the relationships of their predecessors, Yaakov and Eisav. The Midrash (Breishis Rabba 65:12) quotes the great Tanna, Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel saying that he never served his father with nearly the same degree of respect that Eisav served his father, Yitzchok. Rabban Shimon continued and explained, "Because Eisav wore his kingly robes even when doing menial household chores for his father, but I perform these chores in my ordinary garments." This displays Eisav's tremendous sense of respect and reverence for his father. However, we find that this very same approach produced a cold and distant association between Eisav and his father. This can be deduced from the Torah's narrative about the service of Eisav to his father while receiving Yitzchok's blessing. The Torah quotes Eisav addressing his father in the following manner, "Let my father rise and eat from the provisions of his son." (Breishis 27:31) Eisav always addressed his father like a king in the cold and distant albeit respectful third person. Yaakov, on the other hand is not credited to have served his father with the extraordinary reverence of Eisav. Yet, even when attempting to impersonate Eisav, Yaakov couldn't help but speak to his father in a warm and loving tone, "Please rise..." (27:19) (see R' Avrohom ben HaRambam ad loc.)

We the Jewish people follow the footsteps of our forefather Yaakov, hence the Jewish approach to respect and honor is one of warmth and closeness, not coldness and distance. True, Yaakov never reached ultimate levels of reverence, but his relationship with his father was always one of love and warmth, of inner feelings and true appreciation. And with this same approach we relate to our Heavenly Father, with warmth and love, yet with respect and reverence. The nations, however

maintain the approach of their predecessor Eisav. Therefore their association with the Creator is one of coldness and distance, albeit with great respect and reverence.

In truth this difference in approach finds its expression in our attitude towards our miniature Bais Hamikdash, today's synagogue. Although a synagogue is dedicated as the home of Hashem, wherein His sacred presence can be found, a sense of warmth and love permeates its atmosphere. We the Jewish people are privileged to feel very close to Hashem and enjoy His warmth and acceptance. But we must always harken to the stern warning of Malachi, "Hashem says, 'I love you like a father does his son, but if I am your father where is My reverence?'" We do enjoy a very close relationship with Hashem but we must take great care never to abuse it. We, like Yaakov must maintain the proper balance when relating to our Heavenly father, yes a relationship of warmth and love, yet one of respect and reverence.