

DIVISION OF FATHERS AND SONS

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Today's Learning:

Pesachim 4:8-9

Orach Chaim 275:9-11

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 16

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 12

The haftarah that is read this week in honor of Shabbat Hagadol, the Shabbat before Pesach, concludes with the words: "Behold - I send you Eliyahu Hanavi, before the great and awesome day of Hashem. He will restore the heart of fathers to children and the heart of children to their fathers . . ." (Malachi 3:23- 24). In an essay entitled "The Fathers and the Sons," R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (died 1951) writes:

"There are many aspects to redemption and each brings salvation in some form. However, if even one aspect is missing, the redemption is incomplete. Moreover, a darker situation may arise as a result.

"Every division is a form of galut (literally: 'exile') and every coming together is a redemption.

Certainly, however, the most dangerous division is the division between fathers and sons. Thus, when Hashem chooses a metaphor for the exile, He says (see Berachot 3a), 'Woe to sons who have been exiled from their father's table.' In contrast, the highlight of the redemption will be when the hearts of fathers will be restored to their children and the heart of children to their fathers.

"The redemption from Egypt, the root of all redemptions, began by revealing the wonders of Bnei Yisrael's allegiance to their families. Just as 'with Yaakov, each man and his household came' (Shemot 1:1), so, when they left, the sons were attached to their fathers. 'And it shall be when your children say to you . . .' (Shemot 12:26 & 13:14). Even the wicked son, although he asks with chutzpah, he nevertheless bows his head to his father and grandfather and awaits an answer. (Mei Marom: Ma'ayanei Ha'yeshuah, Ikvita De'meshicha Ch. 2)

R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema") writes of a custom to read part of the haggadah on the Shabbat before Pesach. Why? The Vilna Gaon z"l explains that it was on that day that our ancestors set aside animals for the Korban Pesach; thus, it can be considered the beginning of their redemption. However, the Vilna Gaon then rejects this answer based on the following midrash (which is quoted in the haggadah): "I might think that one can fulfill his obligation to read the haggadah on the first day of Nissan . . . but the Torah teaches me that the mitzvah of haggadah applies at the same hour as the mitzvot of matzah and maror." If the Shabbat before Pesach has a claim to being the beginning of the redemption, asks the Vilna Gaon, why does the midrash, which considers several possibilities for when the seder should be held, not entertain a suggestion that it should be on Shabbat Hagadol?!

R' David Cohen shlita answers this question as follows: The halachah states that the haggadah should begin with the low point of Jewish history and build up to the redemption. What is that low point? Rav (a Talmudic sage) says, "In the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshippers." Shmuel (another sage) says, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." What is the basis of their dispute? R' Cohen suggests that they disagree whether the primary redemption was spiritual (Rav) or physical (Shmuel). Such a disagreement would be consistent with other disputes between them, such as whether mashiach will come as a result of our repentance (Rav) or suffering (Shmuel).

Ramban, in his Torah commentary, appears to accept Rav's view, for he writes as follows (in explaining why the building of the mishkan is described in the book of Exodus): "Even though our ancestors had left Egypt, they were not yet free until they had built a mishkan and Hashem's Presence rested among them." When did the redemption start? Perhaps Rav would say that it started on the day when the Korban Pesach was set aside (i.e. Shabbat Hagadol), since the purpose of the Korban Pesach was to free Bnei Yisrael from their spiritual bondage. When Rema writes of the custom to read the haggadah on Shabbat Hagadol, he is accepting the view of Rav, as Ramban did before him. As for the midrash which troubled the Vilna Gaon, perhaps that represents the opinion of Shmuel and others who disagree with Rav. (Mas'at Kapi II, p.60)

The material that follows is adapted from the forthcoming book *The Haftarah: Laws, Customs and History* by Hamaayan's Editor-in-Chief

Shabbat Hagadol The Day's Special Name

The Shabbat before Pesach is called "Shabbat Hagadol." Some say that the name derives from the great ("gadol") miracle which happened on that day, i.e., that Bnei Yisrael set aside sheep, which the Egyptians worshiped, for the Korban Pesach, and the Egyptians were powerless to stop them. (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 430:1)

R' Moshe of Przemsyl (Poland; 16th century) writes: if the Shulchan Aruch's explanation were really the origin of the name, the day would be called "Shabbat Rabbah," because the Jews of old spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew. Rather, R' Moshe writes, the name "Shabbat Hagadol" is taken from the haftarah which many communities read on this day.

Specifically, the haftarah that is read contains the final prophecy of the last prophet. In it, that prophet (Malachi) rebukes Bnei Yisrael for their laxity in performing mitzvot. He warns that the Day of Judgment will come, and that it will then be apparent to all who has been found to be worthy and who has not. The haftarah concludes: "Behold, I will send to you Eliyahu Hanavi, before the coming of the great ('gadol') and awesome day of G-d" -i.e., the day of the final judgment and redemption. We prepare for the celebration of the first redemption from exile by reading of the future, Final Redemption, and the day on which we read of the "Yom Hagadol" is known as "Shabbat Hagadol." (On the other hand, writes R' Moshe, if the day were named only for the haftarah it would be called "Shabbat V'arvah" after the haftarah's first word; thus, the reason cited by Shulchan Aruch above is needed as well.) (Mateh Moshe 542)

R' Yissachar Yaakovson z"l (Israel; 20th century) suggests the following additional connection between the haftarah and the occasion: Pesach, more than any other holiday, is a family- oriented celebration. Eliyahu Hanavi, the haftarah tells us, will work to reunite families and "restore the heart of fathers to children and the heart of children to their fathers" (Malachi 3:24). (Chazon Hamikra)

R' Mendel Hirsch z"l (son of R' S.R. Hirsch; died 1901) writes that, in fact, the verse just quoted should be translated, "He will turn the thoughts of fathers towards their sons, and the thoughts of sons towards their fathers." The accomplishment of Eliyahu Hanavi will be that he will bridge the generation gap which has so divided society. (The Hirsch Chumash Vol. VI, p. 575.)

When Is This Special Haftarah Read?

There are varying customs regarding when this haftarah is or is not read. Specifically, some read this haftarah on every Shabbat Hagadol, some read it only when Erev Pesach falls on Shabbat, some only when Erev Pesach does not fall on Shabbat, and some never read it. (See Sefer Maharil [Machon Yerushalayim ed.] p. 417)

R' Mordechai Jaffe z"l (Poland; died 1612) offers the following explanation for the custom to read this haftarah only when Shabbat Hagadol falls on Erev Pesach: the very reason that this haftarah is read at all is that it contains a reminder to bring ma'aser, a mitzvah whose deadline is Erev Pesach (every third year). (Levush Malchut O.C. 430:1)

Among the chassidic rebbes who followed Levush's view was R' Menachem Mendel of Rimanov z"l (died 1815). However, R' Menachem Mendel gave a different reason for this custom.

As mentioned above, this haftarah refers to the coming of Eliyahu. R' Mendel of Rimanov argues that Eliyahu is most likely to appear on Erev Pesach which falls on Shabbat. On the one hand, we believe that mashiach will come on Pesach and Eliyahu will precede mashiach. On the other hand, the gemara (Eruvin 43b) says that Eliyahu will not come on erev yom tov so as not to distract us from holiday preparations. When, then, can he come? asks R' Mendel. On Erev Pesach which falls on Shabbat, when all of our preparations have been made on the day before. (Menachem Zion: Shabbat Hagadol)

The Vilna Gaon's custom was to read this haftarah only if Erev Pesach fell on a weekday. Rav Yissachar Ber of Vilna explains that there is no purpose to giving a reminder about ma'aser on Erev Pesach which is Shabbat; by then, it already is too late to bring the tithes from home. Only if some weekdays separate the reading and Erev Pesach is the reminder helpful. (Ma'aseh Rav 176, with the commentary Peulat Sachir)

R' Chaim David Halevi z"l (Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv) notes that the above explanation is correct only according to the view that the deadline for bringing ma'aser is Erev Pesach. However, some say that it is the sixth day of Pesach. (Aseh Lecha Rav, Vol. II, siman 32)

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