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**Toldot Parshah and Haftara**  
**by Julie Zhuk on 2022-11-26**

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**Parsha Toldot**

The Parsha is the story of Rivka and Isaac. They have been together for twenty years or so. They have wanted children for a long time, and finally, after waiting so many years, they find out they can have children. Rivka has a really difficult pregnancy, G-d has informed her that the two children in her womb are struggling with each other. He also informs her that when the children are born, there will be two nations coming out of her womb. Once she's had the children, the first one that came out was Esau. He was considered to be a man of the field, always on the hunt searching for new animals to kill to bring back as food for his father, Isaac. Esau was known as an evil man his whole life. The second child that came out of Rivka's womb was, Jacob and he was known to be a tent dweller of learning. What was he learning you may ask? It was Torah, he was always so immersed in the word of G-d. It says in this Parsha that G-d favored Jacob. He loved Jacob, but even Esau his brother, G-d hated him.

The family, Isaac, Rebecca, and the two boys lived together until the boys reached adulthood. Sometime before Isaac died, he had a blessing to give to his firstborn son, Esau. Rebecca knew this was bound to happen, but she didn't want Esau to get that blessing. At this point in Isaac's life, he was pretty old, and they both knew he was going to die soon. Rebecca came up with a plan for Jacob to pretend that he was Esau and come before Isaac. This way, Isaac would give the blessing to Jacob. Jacob was not on board to do this at first; he was worried that he would be cursed instead of blessed. The reason for this was he worried that Isaac would think of him as an imposter. That was when Rebecca said she was willing to have that curse fall on her if he was to be cursed. With that, Jacob was on board and he decided to play along and put on the clothing that Esau would have worn, so when his father Isaac would feel him he would think he was Esau. Even though he really was being himself, Jacob. The only thing Jacob didn't change when he came before his father was his voice. So, when Isaac spoke to him, right before giving him the blessings, he stated that Jacob's arms felt like Esau. They were hairy he could feel that part. Still, the voice was Jacob's. In the end, Jacob got the blessing.

The blessings which Jacob received were no ordinary blessings. These blessings were beyond crucial for the recipients. They were the next link in the chain of Jewish leadership after Jacob. It was so important for the blessings to have gone to Jacob. For Jacob to have gotten his father's blessings was important, they determined the very fate and destiny of the Jewish people. In the present day, Jews say a prayer where they mention the names of Abraham and Isaac, and here the Parsha asks if we can imagine saying an additional name, Esau. The Parsha tells us that our nation wouldn't be what it is today if the blessing from Isaac had gone to the firstborn being, Esau. Luckily for all of us Jews, Rivka thought ahead about the future she wouldn't see obviously and had it arranged for Isaac to give the blessings to Jacob instead of Esau. The fact that his mother, Rebecca was willing to be cursed by the holy Isaac, gave enough proof to Jacob that it was important for him to get these blessings from his father. Rebecca had her reasons for coming up with the deceptive plan of Jacob getting the blessings from Isaac. This helps explain

how the holy patriarch Jacob, could involve himself in deception and impersonating his brother Esau in front of his father, Isaac. In the Present day, rabbis find it typical to be asked other Jews, how could Jacob lie? Especially lie to his own father?

In this Parsha, we learn that in order to save a life or more, deception is OK. So Jacob did it. His mother had his back the whole time. Jacob and his mother did this together to save the life and legacy of the Jewish people. This is why what they did was justified, and in the end, Esau came back from his hunting trip and found out the truth. Isaac may have been blind and old, but he was not stupid. Eventually, he understood what happened, that Jacob pretended to be Esau and that Jacob had gotten his father's blessings. Isaac didn't give Jacob a hard time about what happened. Instead, Isaac said the words, "Indeed, Jacob should remain blessed." Jacob was like most Jewish boys, he loved his mother. The Parsha here tells us that his mother and he really loved G-d. Both of them were fully aware of the sacred responsibilities on their shoulders to be guardians of the Jewish faith and the rest of the Jews. This was no game, no charade, and Isaac being blind, felt from the beginning that Esau should get the blessings. We won't ever know his reasoning for why he felt that, even though he knew what would happen. Rebecca, being a woman, had her own intuitions.

Thank G-d, it worked out in her favor for Jacob to have gotten his father's blessings. The Jewish lineage could continue flowing. Rebecca and Jacob planned things this way on purpose, they wanted to perpetrate the glorious nation it was meant to become. It is thanks to their courage, their commitment, the fact that they were prepared for whatever to happen, and everything they sacrificed the Jewish continuity was safe and assured for eternity. After Jacob was given his blessings, Esau found out what happened. Isaac learned the truth and then died. After Isaac's death, Esau threatened Jacob. This is where the Parsha has reached an end. Jacob decides to flee with his family and move to Charan. He wants to find a wife and start a family for himself; his mother's brother had daughters that were available. More of that will be in the next week's Parsha.

The ending of the Parsha gives us some insight into Jacob's voice and the hands of Eisav. Jacob came to Isaac for a blessing. Isaac was already suspicious. The son who had been speaking to him didn't sound like Eisav. Isaac touched Jacob to see if his arms were hairy because Eisav's hands were hairy. Isaac said some famous words such as the voice being the voice of Yaakov and the hands being the hands of Eisav. At the time Isaac didn't know it, but these words were actually a prophecy about the future. Here are some of the things that these words were getting at.

The secret of Jewish power will be in their voice, the Jews will defeat their enemies not because they are expert soldiers. It will be through their voice of prayers and Torah learning. Eisav's nations will have their power in their hands, that is the weapons they will hold in their hands to kill their enemies. When the voices of Jewish children can be heard learning Torah, then Eisav's nations will have no power over them. If Jews are not studying Torah or teaching their children Torah, they will suffer at the hands of Eisav's nations. The voice of Yaakov is hinting at the sounds of the screams and cries of a plethora of Jews who were killed by Eisav's descendants in the cities of Beitar and Alexandria. The hands of Eisav are talking about when Eisav's descendants destroyed our Beis Hamikdash.

## Toldot Haftara

In this week's Haftara, we will learn how G-d expressed His love for Jacob. He also shared how much He despised Esau. The Kohanim despised doing the avoda and their conduct was worse than the people from the non-Jewish nations. The other nations were found guilty of this same transgression and with the people's actions come consequences. These consequences were coming from G-d. The reason why G-d was punishing the kohanim and the rest of the nations was that they were not respecting G-d's honor. The Haftara will also describe the proper role of the kohen was.

Before reading this week's Haftara we learn from the Parsha how Esau had won his father's love. He did this by posing as a decent person and he covered up his crimes. G-d of course saw through Esau, He saw how despicable Esau was, and G-d was able to foresee that Esau's descendants were also going to be wicked. Our foremother Rivka was able to foretell that two nations in her belly would emerge from Esau and Jacob. This meant that the nations don't like Esau nor were they going to like the Jews. The Midrash tells us that the nation which would be hateful to G-d was going to emerge from Esau. By saying this in the Haftara, it's telling the Jewish people that G-d had a hatred towards Esau and his descendants. The reason for this was because of their wicked deeds. G-d said, Esau was Jacob's brother, yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau. This is found in the book of Kings 1:1.

Most of the Haftara is going to go over the Jewish people's disrespect for the service that took place in the Bais Hamikdash. It was true that G-d loved Jacob and his descendants, but the Jews had to prove themselves to be worthy of His love. The way they did that was by serving Him in the proper manner. There is a verse in the Haftara that clearly refers to Esau. It says a son honors his father, but where is my honor if I am a father? Esau was such an evil man, he had a tremendous mitzva to his credit, because he did honor his father.

The Jewish people were to take an example from Esau and learn just how to have the proper kind of honor to their Father in Heaven. Malachi was the last of the thirteen "Minor Prophets". They lived at the beginning of the Second Bais Hamikdash, it was with his death that the prophecy came to an end. In our Sages' opinion, Malachi is another name for Ezra, who was the great Scribe. After the Second Bais Hamikdash had been constructed, Ezra traveled from Bavel to Eretz Israel and brought a complete revival of Torah-observance there. Many Jewish people had married non-Jewish women and Ezra persuaded them to send these wives away. He also managed to re-establish the avoda in the Bais Hamikdash which had been neglected hitherto.

The name Ezra comes from Malachi, because Malachi means to be "G-d's Messengers." At the time the prophecy had almost gone extinct, the name testified that he had truly been sent by G-d. Malachi had a style, his prophecies were spoken in a very dramatic way. Often his prophecy had assumed the form of a dialogue with the Jewish people. The Haftara gives us an example of what that kind of conversation looked like between Malachi and the Jews. Malachi turned to the Jews and claimed that G-d loved them. The Jews were skeptical, they said they didn't believe that G-d loved them. They asked for Malachi to prove it somehow. Malachi tries to give them proof that G-d loved them. His proof was that the kohanim had despised G-d's name! The people didn't understand that and they asked how could this be. Malachi explained that the offering the Kohanim gave was disgusting food on the altar. The people still didn't understand

what was so gross about the food. G-d was not pleased with the kind of sacrifices the Jews gave because they used blemished and sick animals. They were doing that just to fulfill their obligations.

Malachi was getting his prophecies in this style because he wanted to catch the listeners' attention. Our Sages teach us that Malachi's generation was very argumentative, his prophecies reflected actual discussions with his audience. Malachi was always using the Divine Name when referring to G-d. He would call him G-d of hosts. This name signified the Almighty's control over "the hosts Above," the angels and "the hosts below" around mankind. It reminded us that no one's fate was subject to chance. The prophecy of the word of G-d to the Jewish people was through Malachi. The name of Mashiach wasn't used a lot to denote prophecy. It did signify something, it literally meant "burden" as in to carry. Every prophecy was termed "a burden", the reason for that was every prophet's soul received it when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai.

The prophet carried the prophecy around with him, until it was the proper time to reveal it to the Jewish people. The term "burden" is specifically mentioned in Malachi's case, to emphasize that even Malachi was the last of all prophets. He carried his prophetic message from the time the Torah was given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. When Malachi was alive, the prophecy he was given to the Jews almost came to a close. It was hard to reach such a high level, Malachi's prophecy had been termed as "a prophecy achieved and grasped by the prophet with great difficulty. We will discover in the Haftara, that Malachi's language was sharp. That was why the term Mashiach had "a strong prophecy towards it." Malachi used very drastic expressions because he was the last prophet.

Malachi made use of his strong language because he believed the people would listen to him more. G-d turns to the Jews and repeats how He does love them. He knows that they will question if His statement is really true. He asks them, "Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother; yet I loved Jacob? During the time that Malachi was alive, the Jews in Israel were pretty poor. They were plagued by famines and were attacked by their enemies. Many Jews found it hard to believe that they were G-d's favorite people. This was why the prophet had to begin his reproof and try to assure them of G-d's love. The Haftara asks us who was Jacob and Esau in this prophecy and why did G-d love one and hated the other. Malachi explains this in simple terms, by bringing up Yitzchak's two sons.

G-d loved the righteous Jacob and hated Esau because he listened to his baser instincts. He also hated Esau for leading a life of crime and violence. Jacob and Esau's descendants continued to tread in the paths that were blazed by their forefathers. On a deeper level, "Jacob and Esau" represented two opposite ideals. There was the pursuit of peace and goodness. It was versus that of "might and what was considered to be "right." Typically a firstborn gets a double portion of their father's property. It was Jacob, who was Yitzchak's younger son that got the double portion from G-d. Jacob was given both this world and the World to Come. In this world, Jacob inherited Israel. When that happened, Esau was sent to Har Sair. When Jacob died, he went to the next world and inherited that.

G-d expressed how he hated Esau, and the proof of that was G-d destroyed his mountains and gave his inheritance, the land of Edom to the snakes of the wilderness. The Roman emperor,

Turnus Rufus had once asked R. Akiva, "Why does G-d hate us, as the prophet proclaimed, I hate Esau. R. Akiva told the emperor he would respond to him the following day. The next day, R. Akiva didn't forget. He came to the emperor saying he had a crazy dream, that there were two dogs, one was named Rufus and the other Rufina. The emperor heard this and got really angry. He accused R. Akiva of calling dogs by his name and his wife's names. He even said he would have R. Akiva executed.

R. Akiva kept his cool, he asked what is really so different between yourself and a dog? It eats and drinks just like you, and it procreates like you, and then dies like you. Yet see how excited you become when I compared you to a dog! R. Akiva was trying to say that G-d is the immortal Creator of heaven and earth, yet you the descendants of Esau, call a piece of wood 'god.' R. Akiva asked the Roman emperor if he ever wondered why the prophet proclaimed that he hated Esau. The Haftara goes back to the question of why G-d destroyed Esau's land also known as Edom. The verse isn't clear in its explanation.

A Jewish source called Da'as Sofrim suggested that in the time when Malachi lived, the land of Edom was not filled with people. It was considered a wasteland. This was apparent from the fact that back then the Edomim didn't live in their land but in the southern part of Israel. We don't know when the land of Edom had been destroyed, maybe Nevuchadnetzar attacked it when he burned the First Bais Hamikdash. According to the Midrash, Edom was the Roman Empire. It further includes the world powers that descended from Esau to this day. Malachi's prophecy referred to the future.

Rome was going to rise to have great power, but ultimately even this mighty empire would crumble. The verse mentioned here should be read in the future tense saying, "I shall lay his mountains waste and shall give his inheritance to the snakes of the wilderness." Malachi's prophecy was regarding the future destruction of the mighty Roman empire that would become a source of comfort for all the Jews. These Jews had suffered a lot at the hands of these cruel Romans. If Edom was going to claim that, it is true they are now broken down and their land is desolate, they will have to rebuild the ruins. This was what G-d of hosts had said. They would build and succeed, but only for a short period. Ultimately, G-d would raze them completely and they would be called The Territory of Wickedness and The People With Whom G-d is Forever Angry.

Edom was Esau's wicked descendants. They were constantly rebuilding their military power. If they were defeated then they considered it a matter of chance. In the end, they would be destroyed forever. The Haftara shares a story for us to have a better understanding of what is being talked about here. There was a philosopher who once asked Rav Elassa, how can Malachi say that whatever Edom would build, G-d is going to destroy? We see that the Romans' buildings are standing quite firmly, they hardly appear in danger of falling down. Rabbi Elassa replied that the verse isn't referring to the actual buildings. It's talking about all the plans the Romans had for getting rid of the Jewish people. Since they had those plans, G-d came into the picture. The philosopher was amazed at the truth of R. Elassa's response.

The philosopher admitted that he and the Romans were always scheming to get rid of the Jews, but every time an old man comes and messes up our plans! The Midrash doesn't explain who

this old man is, maybe the Presence of G-d is made for us to believe it is "the old man." The other idea is that it could be the prophet, Eliyahu, or the tzaddikim of the generation in whose merit evil decrees will go away. There is a verse mentioned in the Haftara that states our eyes will see Edom's total annihilation and, it will be at the time of the redemption, if we look beyond Jewish borders, we will praise G-d. That He is Great. The verse is referring to the future punishment of Rome. Some commentators here explain that the prophet promised his own generation that they would witness the complete downfall of the Edomim people, who were their enemies. We learn something from the words, "if you look beyond the border, you will see Edom's punishment. Malachi predicted that our own eyes will see Edom's punishment.

This can be taken in the wrong way as a curse for the Jews to be exiled to Edom, where they would eventually see its punishment. The prophet also told the Jews that they would witness the punishment while they were in their own land. The prophet has established for the Jews that G-d hates Esau and loves the Jewish people. The prophet is now going to give the Jewish people a sharp rebuke because the Jews were proving themselves to be unworthy of His love. The Second Bais Hamikdash had just been rebuilt, but the avoda was not being conducted properly.

The Haftara provides a verse where it says that a son has to honor their father. At the same time, a servant has to honor their master. What this verse is saying is Jews should consider G-d to be their Father and they should honor Him. We are slaves to G-d, He is our Master, so we should honor Him. G-d of hosts told the Jews He wanted them to have Fear of Him. The reproof was addressed to the Jews, who said they despised His Name. The Jews asked how they despised His Name.

The Jews learn just how far one is obligated to go in order to honor a parent from none other than the wicked Esau. Every day he used to go out to hunt the best game for his father Then he cooked the meat himself and served his father Yitzchak served him as if he was a king. We also learn the proper way for a servant to honor his master from the wicked Babylonian general Nevuzadan. He had been so devoted to his master, King Nevuchadnetzar, that during the war against Jerusalem he always faced an image of Nevuchadnetzar that had been engraved on his chariot.

Nevuzadan stood at attention in front of the engraved image, with such reverence one could have thought his master was actually there in the present form. G-d complained to the Jews that in their daily lives, they didn't honor Him as their Father nor as their Master. G-d reminded the Jews that when they transgressed and needed salvation then they called for help. They would call their prophets to beg for G-d to Have mercy on Your children! The next verse in the Haftara covers why how the Kohanim despised G-d. They brought food to His altar, but it was disgusting food. G-d reminded them what they called it, The Table of G-d is despicable. During the time of Malachi, there were two nasty remarks that concerned the avoda circulating around the kohanim.

The sacrificial service is nauseating. The kohanim were saying they couldn't bear the sight and smell of blood being constantly sprinkled on the altar. The burning of the fat also bothered them. They wondered why they should work so hard in the Bais Hamikdash, for the tiny portion of bread or meat that they were getting in return. They didn't feel it was worth the trouble. Every

flour or animal offering needed to be divided among all of the kohanim on duty, each one actually received only a tiny bite-size portion.

When the Jewish people were tzaddikim, G-d's blessing rested upon the food. The kohanim were made to feel satisfied after eating a small amount, but in the time of Malachi, the kohanim were still hungry even after finishing whatever portion they had. The Haftara is asking us if the complaints of the kohanim were justified, if we look at the avoda in a superficial way, the court of the Bais Hamikdash appeared to be a regular butcher shop. Every day, animals were being killed and salted and washed there as well. After the required parts had been burned, what remained for the kohanim didn't make for very satisfying meals. The Kohanim should have looked beneath the surface, meaning G-d had commanded the offering of sacrifices in order to atone for the people's transgressions. This way G-d could bring many blessings upon the world.

The Kohanim should have offered up the sacrifices with joy and being in awe. In terms of eating their share of the sacrifices, the Kohanim caused the one who had offered them to be forgiven for his transgressions. The Kohanim should have been happy with all the work that they needed to do. They should have been eager to carry out their obligations. The Kohanim in the time of Malachi regarded the avoda as nothing but killing animals. That was why they were not particular about the quality of the animals they accepted as sacrifices. The Haftara says that even when you bring a blind animal to sacrifice on the altar, it's not evil in our eyes. If you bring a lame or sick animal it is not evil for the Kohanim either. Why did the Kohanim offer such an animal one who is sick or lame to their ruler? Will that animal atone for the person's offense or will that animal be in favor for you? That was G-d's question and response. G-d was furious with the Kohanim for presenting Him with an inferior animal.

The Torah didn't allow sacrifices on the altar of an animal with a defect, like being blind or lame. During the time of Malachi, the Kohanim did accept such animals for sacrifice. There were some commentators who said, the Kohanim weren't sufficiently careful when they checked animals for defects. Other commentators stated that Kohanim tried to find legal loopholes for allowing the defective animals to be brought to the altar.

Regardless, the prophet criticized the Kohanim people for their scornful attitude towards the avoda which resulted in the offering of unacceptable animals as sacrifices. The Kohanim now were coming face to face with G-d. They were wanting G-d to favor them, but He was not going to. He accepted only the prayers of the Kohanim who would honor Him. He told the Kohanim that they caused the curse should strike the people. He asked them do you think G-d is going to favor you and listen to your prayers?

It won't happen, as a result, he accused them of causing the Accusing Angel to criticize and evoke punishment. G-d was asking for there to be one person among the Kohanim who would shut the doors of the Bais Hamikdash. Then G-d would rather have no service at all than a service that shamed Him. G-d didn't want the Jews to light the fire on His altar in vain. He had no pleasure from them appearing in the Bais Hamikdash. He was not going to accept the mincha-offering and He was not going to accept them favorably from their hands. At this part of the Haftara, we learn that the Kohanim honor G-d even less than the non-Jewish nations had honored Him. G-d said, from where the sun comes up and until it sets, His Name would be so great among the nations.

Every place incense would be burned, and sacrifices would be brought to His Name. They would be pure offerings. His Name would be great among the nations. Malachi reminded the Kohanim that even non-Jewish nations were taking great care to offer only the best quality animals for sacrifices and they never accepted defective animals like the kohanim had been offering in the Bais Hamikdash. How was Malachi able to make that statement? It's clear that the nations during his time offered sacrifices to idols instead of to G-d. If we look at the verse, we can see that it doesn't say the nations offer sacrifices to Me. Instead, it says "To My Name." The non-Jews during the time Malachi was alive, had acknowledged the existence of a Supreme Being. They still believed in additional gods, as well. They worshiped the sun, or whatever else that they considered to represent to be, "the highest power." It was said to their credit that any sacrifices they had offered what they considered as "The Supreme Being, were the finest of animals. The verse is saying that G-d's Name is great among the nations. This was true even before the Bais Hamikdash was built.

In the times of the Judges, the Moabite King Eglon oppressed the Jews. G-d inspired judge Aihud to devise a plan for ridding the Jewish nation of the tyrant. Aihud covered a double-edged sword under his garment and came into the palace under the pretext that he had a secret message for the king. When he got into the king's private chamber, Aihud said that he had a message coming from G-d. When the Moabite King Eglon heard G-d's name mentioned, he arose in a respectful way from his throne. This supported the statement that G-d's Name was universally revered. Aihud took out his sword and put it into the king's body. He commented that indeed his message was from G-d, to put him to death with the sword that he secretly brought in. Aihud managed to run away from the palace by a special miracle.

It was G-d who caused a dense fog to envelop the area and it covered his flight. King Eglon had been an evil man, G-d did reward him for his act of reverence for Him. G-d said, that because king Eglon had stood up to honor Him, his descendant would sit on G-d's throne! His ancestor was King David, he came from the convert of Ruth. She was Eglon's granddaughter. The Haftara gives us another example of the reverence for G-d among non-Jewish nations. There was a righteous King Chizkiyahu, who lay mortally ill. G-d sent the prophet, Yeshayahu to tell him to give his last instructions to his household because the plan was for that king to die. Chizkiyahu, didn't accept the decree that G-d had set in motion. Chizkiyahu was praying for a recovery, he did this with all of his heart and for that his prayer was answered.

The prophet Yeshayahu, came this time with good things to say to the king. The prophet said that G-d planned to heal him, in three days and he would be able to go to the Bais Hamikdash. King Chizkiyahu requested for the prophet to give him a sign that G-d promised to heal him. Yeshayahu promised that the shadow on the king's sundial would indicate an hour that is ten hours less than the actual time! G-d miraculously lengthened the day by ten hours, and as a result of that, the whole world was thrown into confusion. In the city of Bavel, the King named Merodach Baladan woke up at the usual time. Noting the time of day, he had assumed his servants had let him oversleep a full day. He started to threaten them with death. The servants called him, "Your Majesty," and they protested that they were innocent.



They told him that the sun had actually turned back! When he realized his servants were right, king Merodach Baladan was filled with marvel. He said the sun that he was worshiping was not the highest god. He decided that the god-king Chizkiyahu' was worshiping, meaning G-d was superior to it! King Merodach Baladan decided to honor Chizkiyahu's powerful G-d and sent a message of goodwill to the Jewish king. It began with the words, "Peace unto Chizkiyahu, and may there be peace upon your G-d and in Jerusalem too. King Merodach Baladan sealed the letter and handed it to the royal couriers. When they went off with the letter, the king realized that he had made a big mistake. He felt silly to have praised Chizkiyahu, and only then his G-d. He thought to himself that he should have praised G-d first of all and he didn't think he could correct his mistake.

The king thought for a few moments and decided to take three steps toward one of his couriers. He told the courier that they need to go get that letter he had sent out to the Jewish king. King Merodach Baladan wanted the couriers to be quick about this as well. The king got lucky because the courier was able to catch up with the messenger who carried the letter. He returned the letter to King Merodach Baladan. The emperor tore the letter and replaced it with a corrected version where it said, "Peace unto Chizkiyahu's great G-d, and peace unto Chizkiyahu and peace unto Jerusalem too. G-d was going to give king Merodach Baladan a reward, it was for him taking three steps back in the honor of G-d. G-d's reward was three descendants who will rule over the whole world. These three descendants were, the kings Nevuchadnetzar, Evil Merodach, and Belshatzar. The Haftara shares that, if the Jews paid G-d less respect than the non-Jews, it is a disgrace to G-d. This is true during the time of Mashiach and it is true today as well.

Jews desecrate G-d's Name by saying; 'G-d's Table (meaning the altar) is disgusting because of the blood and fat that is on it. A frequent comment that was made was, its food is despicable. The prophet reprimanded the Jewish people for their approach to the avoda in the Bais Hamikdash. Jews were desecrating G-d's Name, by bringing unacceptable animals to the Bais Hamikdash. It says in the Haftara, that when a Jew would bring a skinny, weak animal to the Bais Hamikdash, they are complaining deceitfully. There were Jews back then who said, what a bother it was to carry a fat and heavy animal. These kinds of Jews were causing G-d sorrow with their disrespectful way and lying as well. This is how G-d was feeling. There were Jews who brought stolen, lame, and sick animals. The Jews were bringing these animals as a gift to G-d.

G-d asked the Jews if he should accept such a gift in a favorable manner from their hands. The words of Jews causing G-d sorrow should have been written in the first person, meaning You cause Me sorrow. The verse uses the third person because it is less direct in reference to G-d. It is not appropriate to ascribe pain to G-d. The Jewish source, Da'as Sofrim explains that "stolen animals" were in reference to animals bought with money that came from a dubious manner. We have to realize what a great sacrifice it was for the Jews to give up for sacrifices, there were only so many fat animals the people had. A lot of the people were quite impoverished and hungry most of the time, so the temptation to donate a second-class animal was overwhelming. Since they gave those kinds of animals, they got criticized. The next verse mentions Jews who gave these kinds of animals as cheaters.

They were giving up a male animal from their flock as a sacrifice, but it was an unhealthy one! G-d reminded the Jews how great He is and how people even among the nations fear Him. He wanted the people to stop giving sick animals as a sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. The Jewish source, Rambam, said that beyond the requirement to offer only animals that were free of any defects, the people were also obligated to donate their very best to G-d. It was not appropriate for the Jews to bring weak or ugly animals onto the altar. When the Jewish people remembered to be righteous, they imported choice rams from Moav. There were also special lambs coming from Chevron and the best doves from other places. Rambam's words apply to the Jewish people now too. We are inclined to buy first-quality furniture, as in clothing and food when applying lower standards to our religious needs.

When it comes for example to tefillin or a mezuzah, we have to be satisfied with a cheaper, inferior article. In the area of keeping kosher, we don't always apply the exacting standards with which we would scrutinize a purchase like a new carpeting set of dishes. Malachi stated that G-d was a great King and the best of whatever the people had they should give to Him. That would be the way to bring honor to G-d's Name. The Midrash shares a story with us to help us better understand what life was like for the Jews back then. There was Queen Helena and her son Monobaz, who ruled over a small Arabian kingdom. They converted to Judaism and they exerted themselves in a great way to honor the Almighty with their riches. King Monobaz made golden handles for all the holy vessels in the Bais Hamikdash that were made of wood. Queen Helena provided a golden menorah that was attached over the entrance of the Bais Hamikdash.

Queen Helena donated a special golden tablet, that was engraved with verses dealing with the sota. This is found in the book of Bamidbar. At some point, the kohen gadol was ready to inscribe these verses on parchment so they would dissolve in the bitter waters given to the sota, he would copy them from the golden tablets. This way, he didn't have to open a book of Torah for this purpose. There was Rabbi Zakai who asked his students in what honor did G-d let them live so long? One of the reasons he gave was even though it wasn't always easy for him, every week he made an extra effort to have kiddush wine for the Shabbat morning meal. Rabbi Zakai could have fulfilled his obligation by saying kiddush over the challos he had. What he really wanted to do was fulfill the mitzva in the very best manner.

There was one time, on the evening that Shabbat started, a situation in his house wasn't good and he didn't have a single coin to buy wine. His mother sold her head kerchief and replaced it with an old rag, that way she was able to allow me to buy wine for kiddush. Rabbi Zakai's mother made such a great personal sacrifice for them to have wine, and was blessed by G-d. She was blessed measure for measure. She went into the business of selling wine and was extremely successful. When she died, she left her son three hundred bottles of wine. Her son became even richer after that. When he passed away, his sons got a fortune from his three thousand bottles of wine. There is another Sage mentioned in this Haftara, by the name of Rabbi Hunna.

He once came into the Bais Hamidrash and wore an unusual rubber belt. His Rebbe asked him where the belt he usually wore was. Rabbi Hunna explained he ran out of money to buy kiddush wine, so he sold his belt. The Rav blessed him saying, may you be rewarded by Heaven with being clothed in silk! Just like that his blessing was fulfilled, Rabbi Hunna's son got married and

Rabbi Huna was resting on a couch in the bridegroom's home. His daughters and daughters-in-law removed their silk gowns and unwittingly deposited them on his bed. He was literally wrapped in silk. The Rav became aware that the blessing he gave was fulfilled, and he reproached Rabbi Hunna. He said I had blessed you, why didn't you respond, that you wish my master the same!? Maybe it was a time of Heavenly good will and your blessing would have also been fulfilled.

We can ask what was the importance of the wish that Rabbi Huna should become wrapped in silk garments. Maybe it was a sign of distinction, or perhaps the Rav used it as a figurative expression for wealth which would result in wearing beautiful garments. At the same time, his blessing came true in a manner that was different from what he originally meant it to be. Once the prophet had reprimanded the kohanim, it was a painful situation and it was their fault. The people were being pretty ignorant at the time, it was up to the kohanim, who were also the Torah teachers, to show the Jews how to do things in the right way. There was a commandment that was addressed to the kohanim. That was to not accept and offer defective sacrifices! G-d wanted the Jews to listen and pay attention to give honor to His Name. If they wouldn't listen to Him, He planned to curse them.

Their wine, grain, and oil would be cursed as it was written in the Torah. He would turn their blessing into a curse.

He would sow a lot and reap only a little. The people already had a curse upon them now, but only in a small amount. It was sent by G-d,b because they didn't take heart to care about His Honor. G-d warned that He would scold (meaning curse) the seed, because of the people, the kohanim and nothing would grow. He would spread the dirt on the Jews's faces; the dirt of the animals they had offered on their festivals. The Jewish transgression would bring them this humiliation. The prophet described a punishment that would be measure for measure. It would be for failing to honor G-d, it would mean the kohanim would be subjected to disgrace and humiliation. The reason they would suffer this way and be shamed for having the animal's dirt spread on their faces is that the offering of sacrifices needed to be a spiritual act. When the kohanim and the people brought sacrifices, they did it in a perfunctory manner. It was as though it was only for the cutting and burning of some animals. They were not sacrificing the animals in the right way, they were being meaningless about it.

What remained of it, on the lowest level, was the animals' dung. Malachi was very drastic when he explained things to the Jewish people and the kohanim. He was the last of the prophets, so his words had to last for a long time. After he would die, there would be no prophet to reinforce his message. Malachi's words contain a lesson for all generations. In the words of Rambam, Torah scholar has to be very careful about the way they eat. They should only eat healthy foods and in a limited quantity. They should never stuff themselves with food for its own sake. The words of the verse, "And I will spread dirt on your face is talking about the people who turn eating and drinking into life's major occupation. These people say to eat, drink, and be merry because the next day they are going to die. Thinking this way is considered eating as an evil person would. Our Sages teach that there are very harsh punishments after this kind of transgression.

The words of Rambam don't imply that Jews shouldn't eat well, it's saying the opposite. Jews are required to eat properly so that way, they can function well. The difference lies within the motive, a Jew doesn't live in order to eat. Instead, they eat in order to live. By living that way,

even eating becomes part of their service to G-d. G-d wanted the kohanim to know He delegated to them, the mitzvah of honoring Him through performing avoda, for the sake of His covenant with the tribe of Laivi. G-d made such a covenant with the tribesmen of Laivi to bring them honor. G-d made a covenant with Laivi to do with the time of Korach. Korach wished to prove that the tribe of Laivi wasn't a privileged category, and that was when he instigated a rebellion against Moses. For this, G-d punished Korach and his followers with death. G-d performed a miracle to show once and for all that Laivi was the tribe that was chosen to perform the avoda, for G-d's service.

Moses commanded the twelve leaders of the tribes, to each take a staff and put it into the Mishkan. Moses etched each prophet's name on his staff. The staffs that they used were left in the Mishkan overnight. The next day, Aaron's staff miraculously sprouted buds, blossoms, and almonds. This happened to testify that G-d had chosen the tribe of Laivi. Aaron's staff remained permanently in front of the aron. It was at that time G-d confirmed that the tribe of Laivi was his forever. They would be in charge of the avoda. The covenant that G-d made with the tribe's found, Aaron bestowed upon his life and peace. G-d granted the covenant to him on account of the fear with which he feared G-d. Aaron trembled before G-d's Name. The verse is implying that in Aaron's honor, there was a permanent covenant made with the entire tribe of Laivi.

The honor that Aaron had, included him and the entire tribe of the Leviyim. They excelled in having fear of G-d. They were very deserving of G-d's covenant. Aaron is compared to Pinchas, who was Aaron's grandson. He killed the evil Zimri, for the sake of G-d's honor. G-d promised Aaron life and peace, and not only did he actually live a long life. According to our Sages, Pinchas never died. Pinchas is also considered to be Eliyahu Hanavi who lives forever. Aaron taught the Torah of truth and there was no injustice on his lips because he never made a mistake in Jewish law. He made peace among fellow Jews for the sake of G-d. He went with G-d in the straight path, meaning that even when G-d dealt harshly with him, like when Aaron's sons died, Aaron still acknowledged G-d's justice. There were many fellow Jews who Aaron stopped from transgressing because he was able to reprimand them.

Aaron is praised for his acts of kindness. He was the nation's great peacemaker, when two parties would fight, he was the one to settle their dispute. He did this before their argument was brought in front of a judge. Aaron was so holy, he only used gentle words. People who were reprimanded by him wanted to do teshuvah. Aaron's son, Elazar, and his grandson, Pinchas also saved Jews from transgressing. All of the kohanim were admonished to follow in the ways of Aaron, his son, and his grandson. There is a verse mentioned in the Haftara about the kohen's lips.

His lips ought to guard Torah-knowledge, and the Jews need to seek Torah instruction from the kohen's mouth. The kohen is considered the messenger of G-d. At the end of the Haftara there is a description of the proper role of the kohanim. Especially the proper role of the kohen gadol it's to be the nation's Torah teachers. The words of the kohen being G-d's messenger means he is expected to act as holy as an angel, who doesn't have any kind of an evil inclination.

Aaron was very much like an angel, he had no evil inclinations inside of him. It was for this reason that the other kohanim got the privilege of wearing linen garments in which they resembled angels. Not only was a kohen, but every Torah teacher was required to be "like an

angel.” If the person didn’t have control over their evil inclination, they were not to be consulted on Torah matters. It didn’t matter how much knowledge they had. One more story from this week’s Haftara. There was once a great talmid-scholar, who despise his phenomenal knowledge of the Torah, and didn’t behave himself in the right way. The Sages were concerned about him. They couldn’t make up their minds, they thought to excommunicate him. At the same time, they needed his teachings. They remembered that his actions were a disgrace to G-d. Finally, they turned to Rabba Bar Chana and asked him with the verse Malachi 2:7, the kohen is G-d’s angel, only if he resembles an angel should we seek Torah instruction from him?

When Rav Yehuda heard these words, he went ahead and made a ban against that scholar. Later in life, Rav Yehuda got sick and the Torah-scholars came to visit him. The scholar was being placed in chairem among them. Rav Yehuda saw him come in and started to smile. The scholar asked him if it was not enough that he was put in the chairem, but why are you laughing at me? Rav Yehuda explained he wasn’t laughing at him. He was happy because he thought after he died, he would be able to tell the Heavenly Court that he didn’t even favor a scholar of the man in the chairem’s greatness.

Rav Yehuda did pass away and the scholar in chairem came to the Bais Hamidrash, he requested the Sages to free him from being banned. The Sages said that since Rav Yehuda put him there in the chairem, only someone as great as he was could remove him. Unfortunately, there was no one on his level. They told him to take his request to Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, maybe he would be able to remove the chairem. Then the case was brought before Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi. He was close to lifting the ban, but in the end, decided against it.

The talmid scholar left Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi’s house-d saved the community from such a hard situation. The Haftara teaches the proper role of a kohen as well as that of a Torah-teacher. Today the entire Jewish orthodox community is in a position of Torah-teachers. Any improper conduct on its part is used by Conservative and Reform Jews, it’s an excuse for not joining the ranks of the Orthodox. All Jews are in a position of being “kohanim.” They all can be regarded by the non-Jewish world unless they can behave themselves in the right way, they are not performing a disgrace to G-d.