

Tell a story
Haftara Leviticus
by Julie Zhuk on 2023-04-29

Comments

This week's haftarah covers why there is a purpose for the Jewish people. They were reprimanded by prophets because of their attitudes towards sacrifices as well as a promise that their teshuva would be honored. The Jewish people deserved to be punished and there was a promise from G-d of future blessings. We find out in this week's Haftara that G-d is unique. Part of the reason for the Jews needing to be punished was the absurdity of idol worship. The prophets have always encouraged the Jews to do teshuva. Doing teshuva would bring about the redemption they were waiting for. This haftarah deals with the procedures that involve different sacrifices. The Torah declares that these offerings were to atone for the sins that the Jews had committed.

The smoke coming from the Jews was a pleasing aroma for G-d. This also holds true only if the person who offers the sacrifice sincerely is seeking to purify themselves. In the time of Yeshayahu, the laws of sacrifices were adhered to; however, the Jews who brought the sacrifices worshiped idols. In this week's haftara, Yeshayahu spends time reprimanding and ridiculing the Jews who worshiped idols. Yeshayahu addressed his message to the Jews of the Babylonian exile. He was doing it to strengthen their religious commitment. As these verses contain criticism of the sacrificial service, how can they apply to the exiled Jews that were exempt from this. Maybe, while the chapters before and after this prophecy were addressed to the Jews of Bavel.

This prophecy is to be taken out of context. It was addressed to Yeshayahu's contemporaries who still lived in Israel, before the Babylonian exile happened. These contemporaries were guilty of abusing the sacrifices. There was another reason, Yeshayahu was prophesying to the Jewish people who would one day come back from the Babylonian exile to build the Second Bais Hamikdash. He was reprimanding them in advance, admonishing them to be sincere in their offering of sacrifices. He wanted the Jews to purify themselves from any idolatry they had been around. The haftara gets to the part where it explains the purpose of the Jewish people. The Jewish people, G-d had formed for Himself. He wanted to declare His praise.

The haftara asks us how do the Jews announce G-d's praise? Literally, by proclaiming His greatness and acts of kindness in their prayers. G-d says, "If not for the songs and praises with which the Jews praise Me daily, I would not have created the universe!" We see how much G-d loves the Jewish people, even though He has myriads of angels to glorify Him, He wants the praises of the Jewish people. G-d says, "When do I become elevated in the world? When the Jews come together in their houses of prayer and offer praises to Me." At that time, G-d said to the angels to come and see how this nation praises Him! It was also at that time, G-d became enveloped in splendor and glory.

This Midrash should not be misunderstood to imply that G-d is dependent on the Jewish people's praises. G-d is perfect, He doesn't require any praises from mortals whom He himself created. It is in His infinite kindness. He told the Jews that He "enjoys" their praises. It's important to praise Him, because we are becoming close to Him. It is how Jews grant G-d, "the pleasure" of rewarding us with eternity.

When Jews, "proclaim G-d's praises" we are doing this by living as Torah observant Jews. A Jew who will fulfill all of the mitzvos and abstain from sin is an embodiment of G-d's praise. The Jewish nation exists only to proclaim the Creator's praise. There is a verse in this week's haftara, where G-d is expressing his anger of the Jews turning to idols instead of him.

It is in verse 43:22 and it goes as follows: But you, Oh Yaakov, have not called on Me. You have turned to idols instead. You have grown weary of Me - of My service in the Bais Hamikdash. Oh Israel. It's important to keep in mind that in biblical times, when G-d referred to Jews as "Yaakov" they were on a low level. Meaning when He called them "Israel" He thought of them to be on a much higher level. G-d complained to the Jewish people that they had appealed to other gods, but not to Him. There were 365 temples of idol worship in Damascus. Everyday the Damascans worshiped a different god. One day was set aside annually for the joint worship of all gods. When the Jews stooped to idolatry, they surpassed even the Damascans. The fanatical ones among them worshiped all the idols of the surrounding nations each and every day, but they never considered to include G-d in their service at all.

In their eyes, He didn't even rank with these other gods. They were refusing to include Him on their list of gods. The situation was similar to that of a general who prepared a lavish banquet for all the soldiers of the king's army. To this feast he also invited the ministers of the court. The only one whom he didn't invite was the king himself. The king finds out about this event and that he is not invited and feels angry. He asked in a demanding way, "Do you consider my honor to be inferior to that of a common soldier?" Here, G-d is saying the same to the Jews. He said, "My sons refuse to include Me in their worship. They have not called on Me at all. He is referring to the Jews as "Yaakov." G-d says to the Jews You have omitted my Name completely.

Reprimanding the Jews, G-d said "You have grown weary of Me." This applied to all generations of Jews. G-d was complaining that, "A Jew does not tire of happily chatting about worthless matters all day long. The minute he gets up to pray, he feels exhausted.

The haftara asks us why one's limbs feel very heavy when it comes to matters that have to do with G-d's service? There is a Yiddish folk song that goes like, "Eating and drinking are automatic, but what can we do about praying and learning, which are not?" The answer is that when a person feels he is doing something for himself, he never feels tired. If he is doing a job for someone else, he gets weary in no time. Two people can be carrying equally heavy packages, but for the employee the burden is going to be heavier than his boss. This is because the employee is laboring for someone else. If a Jew is convinced that by serving G-d the gain is his alone, he will serve with joy and enthusiasm. G-d reaches out to the Jewish people in the next verse.

"You have not brought to Me the lambs for your daily burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your other offerings, even though I have not burdened you by demanding of you an expensive meal offering. It merely required the burning of a handful of flour on the altar. Neither have I wearied you out by demanding much of a spice used for the daily meal. I was only asking for a small amount to be burned on the altar. The haftara gives us two ways to understand this verse. The first way is that Yeshayahu was censuring the Jewish people for offering sacrifices while sinning. They hope to "bribe" G-d with their multitude of sacrifices. They should know that such offerings are not pleasing or honorable to G-d. This was why Yeshayahu warned the Jews, "You have not brought the lambs to Me, in My honor, for I derive no pleasure from them: and you do not honor Me with your offerings. The verse was

referring to a generation when the service in the Bais Hamikdash had come to a complete standstill. One such generation was that of King Achaz.

King Achaz ruled over the kingdom of Yehuda, but his ardor for idolatry matched that of the kings over the kingdom of Israel. Everywhere he went, he erected idolatrous statues. He even passed his sons through fire for the gods. G-d punished him by sending Tiglas Pileser, who was a king of Ashur to besiege Yehuda. King Achaz was under a lot of stress and he reacted by alienating himself even further away from G-d. He began sacrificing to the Damascan gods. He was trying to reason with them. He said, "These gods are assisting the Assyrians! If I honor them, they will help me too!" Achaz was collecting all of the sacred vessels of the Bais Hamikdash. He hacked them to pieces and locked up the Sanctuary. The purpose of this sacrilegious act was to force the kohanim to use his idolatrous altars for their service.

When King Achaz died, he was not interred in the royal graves due to his unsurpassed wickedness. King Achaz's course had been reversed by his son, Chizkiyahu. He was an outstanding tzaddik. In his first year of being in power, he reopened the doors of the Bais Hamikdash. He got rid of all the idolatrous statues and any etchings that had to do with his father. His father called it "decorating" the Bais Hamikdash with images calling it the House of G-d. Chizkiyahu assembled all of the kohanim and the leviyim. He addressed them saying, "Our fathers rebelled against G-d. They forsook His word. They locked up the Bais Hamikdash, they extinguished the menorah, and stopped offering ketores and animal sacrifices. G-d was really angry, it was why He caused the Jews to die by the sword and to fall into captivity.

Chizkiyahu was now saying, "Let us return to G-d and He will no longer be angry with us. Chizkiyahu reminded the Jewish people that it was G-d Who chose the Jews to serve Him. The next verse in the haftara goes on to reprimand the Jewish people. They were performing the avoda, which G-d would have been happy about. Unfortunately at the time, the Jews were committing all sorts of sins, and this displeased G-d. G-d turns to the Jews and says in verse 43:21, You did not need to acquire for Me the spice that is used for the ketores with money. It grows abundantly in Jerusalem. You didn't satiate Me with the fat of the shlamim-offerings. I derive no enjoyment from your sacrifices. I didn't impose a difficult service upon you, you have imposed on Me. You have burdened Me with your sins, and consequently with sin offerings; you have wearied Me with your iniquities.

The Midrash is explaining how the Jews "imposed upon G-d." G-d said to the Jews with their sins, they were compelling G-d to burn His House to destroy His city and to exile His sons. The Jews were causing G-d to dwell in loneliness and go into a period of mourning. The reason for this is they were 'forcing him' to banish the Jewish people from Jerusalem all together. G-d was reminding the Jews how it was Him in the past who had blotted out, and it is Him who was still blotting out even after the Jews had rebelled for their sins for His own sake. G-d did not want His name to be desecrated and He would not remember their unintentional sins. G-d told the Jews He didn't want them to sin and then to offer sacrifices. G-d wanted the Jews to do teshuva, because it achieves forgiveness even for intentional sins. For the many sins that the Jews did, they got a just punishment.

G-d expressed that the Jews could claim He was exaggerating, about them not being so awful. As well as them thinking they have their own merits. G-d wanted to debate this point with the Jews. In verse 43:26, G-d says to the Jews, Remind me of anything that I owe you; let us deliberate together to see who is right. You state first what you have to say, so that you may be vindicated. Usually the one who states his arguments first is believed to be right. G-d said, "I wished the Jews would always win

arguments against Me! If I lose, I win. If it happens the other way around as in, I win then I lose too. G-d says that he won the case against the generation of the Flood; at the same time he destroyed all of its members. So in the end, G-d really lost. Saying all of this G-d was not happy.

He was feeling lost when he won the judgment against the generation of the Dispersal and against the inhabitants of S'dom. He lost the argument against Moses after the sin of the golden calf, that was really His gain. The Jewish people managed to survive. He wished that He would always be defeated. Even your first father sinned and even your defenders (the tzaddikim among the Jews who had interceded on your behalf) have transgressed against Me. How can you claim that you are free of sin? Every human being, even the greatest one, has an evil inclination. This causes them to commit sin. Which first father sinned against G-d? The first man, Adam, sinned by partaking in eating the forbidden fruit. Adam was G-d's own handiwork. G-d was asking, how much more so are you, born of woman, liable to commit sins.

That was the first explanation how any human being, even the greatest one has an evil inclination. The second reason is, even your forefather Avraham, the tzaddik sinned. When G-d promised the land of Canaan to his descendants, they failed to trust fully in His word. This was why He asked, "Give me a sign whereby I will know that I will inherit the land. Avraham had feared that G-d's mercy was so great that He wouldn't drive away the Canaanim. At the same time, G-d made the "Covenant Between the Parts" with him. G-d said, "All of your intercessors committed a sin at one time or another. For example, Yitzchak loved the wicked Aisav through his motive was noble, for he was hoping to bring Aisav close to G-d. In verse 43:28 it says, Because of your sins, I will cause even Your holy princes to become desecrated by enemies. I will time and again give over Jacob for destruction and Israel for insults by the enemy.

This verse shows us G-d's way of managing history. He destroyed the "holy princes," including righteous and noble Jews. Together with the evil ones, because of the sins of the generation. Once G-d has decreed destruction, He will not isolate the righteous in order to rescue them on an individual basis. This was why the Jews in Egypt were told to stay indoors during the Plague of Killing the Firstborn, otherwise they would have been destroyed. The Midrash tells us that the "holy princess" mentioned here are referred to as the angels. At some point the prophet, Yirmiyahu had urged the Jewish people to do teshuva before the enemies would enter Jerusalem and destroy the Bais Hamikdash. The Jewish people didn't believe anyone would come into their city. They said, "No enemy will set foot in this city! The Jews thought they were in possession of the secret by which to adjure the heavenly angels to render Jerusalem impregnable.

One of the Jews said he knew the name of the angel who was in charge of water. The Jew was going to adjure him to surround the city with a wall of water. Then another Jew volunteered that he was going to command an angel to build an iron wall! Hearing all of this, G-d responded that He had been relying on His angels and that had become the Jews' substitute for doing teshuva! This was why G-d decided to change the angels' names and their tasks as well. G-d had switched the angels' tasks. The angel who was in charge of water was now in charge of fire. The angel who was in charge of fire was now in charge of the iron. When the enemies approached, a Jew started to call out to the angel that was originally in charge of the water. That angel replied, this is no longer my job, I can't do as you say. ALL of the angels responded in the same way, and as a result of this Jerusalem had fallen.

This was the meaning behind the words, "I caused the heavenly hosts to become desecrated." The Jews were encouraged to do teshuva. Despite the Jews sins and being punished for them, the haftara reminds us that the Jews should not lose heart. Their stressful situations would eventually stop. In verse 44:1, it says: And now listen, my servant Yaakov, and Israel whom I have chosen! To what message are the Jewish people supposed to listen? First of all, doing teshuva is very important. The term "and now" refers to how challenging it is to do teshuva. It denotes: Let bygones be bygones! Let us make a new beginning and improve our conduct as of this moment. G-d also wanted the Jews to listen to His message of encouragement!

G-d said, You, the Jewish people, are My servants whom I have chosen. Beatings and insults by the gentiles do not change the fact. Eventually, the situation is going to get better. I will once again be close to you and bless you. Verse 44:2, G-d is referring to Himself as the Maker of human beings. He was the one who formed us from the womb, and Who will also help us in the future. He says we are to not fear, My servant Yaakov, and Yeshurun. Yeshurun is another name for the Jewish people that G-d had chosen! Generally the prophets called the Jewish people by three names. "Yaakov" referred to the Jewish people in their lowest state. The name, "Yisrael" is used when they are on a higher level: and "Yeshurun" was referring to Jews who are on the highest spiritual level. The name Yeshurun came from the root yashar, meaning to go straight.

It may denote, "the straight (honest and consistent) one or the nation that is right and good in G-d's eyes. Here the prophet is maybe trying to encourage the nation. Even in times of hardship, he conveys when you are named 'Yaakov' you have nothing to fear as long as you remain a servant of G-d. Certainly the name 'Yeshurun' had nothing to fear. The prophet reminded the Jewish people that G-d helped them "from the womb." When Jacob and Aisav struggled in their mother's womb, G-d was protecting Jacob. This way Aisav wouldn't eliminate him, as he would have liked to do so. The next three verses promise the Jewish people's ultimate spiritual and physical survival and blessing. The Jewish public's conscience will be awakened, this leads to national teshuva.

This, in turn, will automatically result in the fulfillment of all these blessings. In the event that teshuva is G-d forbid, not forthcoming voluntarily, the blessings will in any case eventually come to pass, for G-d will compel the Jews to return back to Him. Verse 44:3 says, Just as G-d is pouring rain water on dry, thirsty earth and liquid on the dry ground, He will pour His spirit upon the Jews descendants, and His blessing upon our offspring. The haftara asks what "spirit" is G-d talking about that He will pour on the Jewish people's descendants? G-d is promising to restore prophecy to our people. Now, in exile, we lack this form of communication with G-d. This is because of our low moral and spiritual level. But in the era of Mashiach every Jew will be a prophet. Maybe the analogy to "thirsty" ground indicates that in order to be worthy of learning the word of G-d, a Jew must prepare himself with spiritual thirst - the desire and longing to hear it.

Our descendants will grow and multiply as though they were among grass that sprouts quickly and abundantly. It will be like willows that will flourish by streams of water. Grass sprouts rapidly but it is also quick to wither. Therefore the prophet also likens the Jews to willows that stay fresh because they grow near the water. Additionally, willow branches tend to hang downwards, symbolizing humility, a trait of the Jewish people. This verse is referring to the era of the people coming back from the dead. It's known as tachiais humanism. The revival of the dead, at that time G-d will bless the Jews and multiply

them until they fill the world. Some commentators interpret this verse as describing the exile period. It is amazing how the Jews are able to sprout and multiply even "among the grass," i.e., between the non-Jews, despite the adverse conditions of persecution and destruction.

Thinking back to the Purim story, when Haman wished to choose wood from which to fashion a gallows for Mordechai - which would ultimately serve for hanging Haman himself. All of the trees refused to make themselves available for this purpose. The fig, pomegranate, and nut trees argued with each other. They were saying, "The Jewish nation is compared to us. Then they came up with the question, "how can we allow this impure man to be hung on gallows made from our wood?" The myrtle branch, olive, esrog tree, and others at the same time refused to consent. These words were used for mitzvos, or the Jewish people are compared to them. Haman was considered the willow, but it (or its guardian angel in heaven), too, refused with the argument.

Yeshayahu said of the Jewish people that they would be like willows shooting up by the water. How, then, can I allow this evil man to be strung up on me? Finally the thorn volunteered. He said, unlike the other trees, I have no honor. By saying this he was reasoning.

The thorn continued that the evil man is like a prickly thorn; let the 'thorn' hang on a thorn! G-d was in agreement about this. G-d caused for Haman to find a thorn tree that was fifty amos long from which he made the gallows. The next verse is meant to teach us that eventually all of the Jewish people will be close to G-d. Even if it will have diverse back-grounds. Verse 44:5 says, One group will say how they always belonged to G-d. Members from this group will be the tzaddikim. One will call itself by the name of Jacob.

Members of this group are the children whose fathers don't keep the Torah (either on purpose or through no fault of their own.) Members of one group will obligate themselves by a sign with their hands that they will return to G-d. This group refers to the baalai teshuva. One group will be called by the name of Israel. Those who convert to Judaism will be the ones to join the Jewish nations. They will be members of this group. The end letters can be arranged to spell mila. This is hinting at the converts who will have a bris for themselves. In the time of Mashiach, all of the Jews will become righteous and even in the exile period there will be those who are awakened to return to G-d. The next part will compromise the central body of the haftara. It's where Yeshayahu ridicules every aspect of idol worship. First, however, he has to demonstrate that G-d is One. We learn that G-d is unique in verse 44:6.

G-d says He is the king of Israel and its redeemer. G-d calls himself as G-d of hosts. He was first - before anything was created - and He was the last. After all it will all be gone, there is no power besides His that directs events in the universe. This verse expresses the fundamental belief of G-d's omnipotence and oneness, as well as the fact that He is eternal. A human king may have a father, a brother, or a son. But G-d says, "I am different. I am first - I have no father; I am last - I have no son; there is no power besides Me - I have no brother. The next verse declares that no one besides G-d has the perfect knowledge of events past and future; at the same time, no one in the world has a right to claim divinity. In verse 44:7 it asks us Who can call out that he is like G-d? Let him say and set forth before me all that I have done since I placed people in the world in other words, since creation. Let them (meaning those who claim omniscience) also tell them the (others) signs and events that will come true in the distant future, just as I do.

Yeshayahu prophetically predicted the name of the Babylonian emperor Koresh (Cyres) 200 years before the birth of Koresh. He also prophesied regarding the impending destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. He also prophesied about the Jewish people being banished from the land. Furthermore, the Torah is filled with precise predictions that regard events which transpired hundreds and thousands of years later. One of these was G-d informing Avraham that his descendants would possess Israel more than 400 years before this actually happened. There was the time when Jacob blessed his sons, he gave them accurate details about their future portions in the Land. For example, Jacob predicted that "Zevulun will live at the seashore." Many laws in the Torah are effective only when the Jewish people possess Israel: trumos and ma'asros, sh'mitta, offerings in, and visits to, the Bais Hamikdash, and etc. Only a divinely inspired prophet like Moses could state with absolute certainty that the newly liberated nation of slaves now wandering about in the desert, would actually become the masters of the land of Canaan. The Torah forecasts the global dispersion of the Jews over a thousand years from before, while they still lived in a concentrated area in the desert. This is in parshas Ki Savo in Devarim 28:64-65. Since all the gods' claims to divinity are false: we learn in the verse 44:8, to not fear other gods. G-d is asking, haven't I let you hear and told you long ago, at the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, that I am the true G-d?! You are my witnesses to this fact, for at that time I opened all of the heavens and showed you that there is no god besides Myself and no rock (meaning power) unknown to Me.

Yeshayahu encouraged the Jewish people to not be afraid of the gods because the priests of idol worship threatened that non-compliance was doomed to revenge by the gods. There is an irony of worshipping images. The next part of the haftara will share Yeshayahu ridiculing idolatry. Verse 44:9 touches up on Yeshayahu ridiculing the idolatry that was going on. It says in 44:9 how those who form images are all empty people. Their coveted objects and the idols are useless. The idols are their own witnesses to their worthlessness for they neither see nor know, so how can they help others? They put their worshipers to shame. Verse 44:10 asks us who would be so foolish as to form a god and then cast an image that is useless? Verse 44:11 says, let all those who join in the idol worship be ashamed. The smiths themselves are human, so how can they make a god? Let them all - the artisans together with the worshipers - gather and stand still to reflect on the matter? Let them together be afraid of G-d and ashamed of their actions.

Yeshayahu continued to make fun of the idolaters for investing effort in producing worthless idols. Verse 44:12 talks about the iron smith forging an axe, working with coal. He shapes the god with hammers and works on him with the strength of his arm. He (the smith) is hungry, but in his eagerness to finish he doesn't eat, and that is why he has no strength. He doesn't drink any water, and that is why he becomes faint. The verse is underscoring two points, the smith works really ardently and allows himself no break to get a refreshment.

It's pretty ludicrous for a mortal to claim that he is fashioning a divine being, when he himself can't function even for a short while without satisfying his basic physical needs. On the other hand, many of our saints were able to exist without any food or drink for a long time. There is the example of Moses, staying on Mount Sinai for forty days without eating. His body was spiritual enough that it required no food. The smith who manufactures the idols can't claim Divine inspiration, since his earthly needs dominate his entire being. The verse here describes the iron smith who fashions an image from metal. The next verse will deal with the toll invested in manufacturing a wooden idol. The carpenter stretches out his tape measure. He marks it (the god's shape) with a colored marker. He smooths the wood with

planes and designs the god's round face with a compass. At the same time, he uses the compass to design round decorations with which to embellish the god.

He shapes it into the figure of a beautiful person. That is the idolater's notion of a god. The god's function is to sit in the house. It is, after all, incapable of doing anything else! The carpenter fashions the deity with the aid of ordinary tools using a tape measure, a marker, a plane, and a compass. How can he hope to produce with these artifacts a living being? At best, the result is a beautiful, but lifeless, image. He cannot even make it move, the way Moses and Aaron lehavdil, produced crawling snakes before Pharaoh. Let no one be deceived into believing that the god came into being by means of a higher power! Miriam bas Nachtom was once taken into captivity, together with her seven sons. The emperor, an infamous idolater, commanded the oldest son, "Bow down to my god!" Miriam's son said, 'G-d forbid I bow down to your god.'

He went on to express what Jews and he believed in the Creator's existence." The emperor was enraged by the lad's refusal in front of the whole court to comply with the royal command. So the emperor ordered for Miriam's son to be executed. The emperor barked at Miriam's son saying, "Worship my image!" This was the emperor's second attempt at trying to get Miriam's son to bow down to his image. The emperor stated that, "Even if your G-d does exist, as you claim, you must admit that my god is mightier, for see, I hold you in my power!" Miriam's other son got involved now. He said, "G-d forbid, I will not worship an image, just as my brother didn't. Miriam's second son ended the conversation with the emperor by saying, "G-d commanded us to not have any other gods! At this point the emperor felt pretty infuriated, he exclaimed to put Miriam's son to death. Miriam had one last son left who was not yet involved, but the emperor turned to him. The emperor said to Miriam's third son, "Even if your god is great, mine is also deserving, therefore you need to honor him!

The third brother wouldn't give in, he like his other brothers stated that he couldn't bow down to the emperor's image. This son of Miriam's reminded the emperor that it says in the Torah to not bow down to another god. The emperor didn't care for anyone's life, he said to have this lad killed as well. Miriam had a fourth son who is brought into the haftara now, the emperor started to argue, "Your G-d may be greater than mine, but surely my deity deserves some honor too, for he is also powerful! The fourth son of Miriam retorted back that he and other Jews can't worship any deity besides G-d. There is no power other than Him! The king decided to have this fourth son be killed too. One more son of Miriam's is mentioned, he was the fifth son.

The emperor started arguing that his god deserved to be recognized at least as G-d's servant and agent. The fifth son started to say, "Not at all". He said this in a very confident voice. He continued, "Our Torah states, 'Shma Yisrael, Hashem Elokainu, Hashem echad' - G-d is unique and none of His servants has power independent of Him." This brother, too, was sharing the unfortunate fate of the others. To the sixth brother, the emperor had something to say. "Even if your claim that no other than G-d is the ruler, you surely realize that He directs the fate of people on earth by means of my zodiacs. This is why we should honor them." The sixth son was not about to bow down to the emperor's image. Right away he said, "No way!" "G-d Himself directs the fate of the Jewish people; we do not honor mazalos (meaning zodiacs). The sixth brother was also sent to the fate of his five other brothers.

Now only the youngest brother was left. The emperor was pleading with the youngest brother. The emperor was desperately trying to attempt to save face. He said that even if G-d supervises your nation

directly, He directs the destiny of other nations by means of the zodiacs. This is why you and everyone else should bow down to my image. Here the youngest son turns to the emperor. The youngest brother says, "Far be it from me to lie! G-d is the only power in heaven and on earth and the zodiacs are all under His control. Even now, after the Bais Hamikdash is destroyed and we are governed by other nations, we have sworn not to exchange Him for any other god and He has sworn not to exchange us for any other nation. The emperor was feeling irritated at his failure to prevail over these young and stubborn Jews. The emperor tried to coax the young boy into submission. He told the youngest son of Miriam's, "You are so young! Why should you forfeit your life?"

If you only bow to the image, I will shower many favors upon you. The boy insisted that G-d rules forever; it is His favor I seek. The emperor reminded this youngest son of Miriam's, "Consider what happened to your brothers," the emperor responded, his voice reflecting his rising rage. "See, I will throw down my ring in front of the image. All you have to do is bend down and pick it up. In this way it will appear to everyone here at court that you obey me while in your heart you can remain perfectly loyal to your G-d!" The last son had something back to say to the emperor. He called him, "Mighty emperor! If you are so concerned with your prestige that you are afraid of what people will say about you, should I not be much more afraid of the true G-d, King of the universe? This argument went back and forth, the emperor didn't want to stop. The emperor asked, "But tell me, my boy, is it really true that G-d rules the universe?"

The emperor was inquiring about this from the boy. The emperor started to soften at the sight of this tender-aged, brilliant light boy. The boy turned to the emperor saying, "Shame on you, Emperor. Can you not tell that we do not live in a chaotic and disorderly universe?! The emperor questioned the boy, "Does G-d see and hear everything? The youngest of the brothers confirmed that G-d sure as certainly does hear and see everything. The youngest brother concluded this conversation with the emperor. His last comment to the emperor was about his idols being lifeless by contrast. They don't see, they don't hear, they don't speak, nor do they move. Again the emperor kept going. He said, "If it is as you say, why doesn't G-d save you from my hand, as he saved Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya from the emperor Nevuchadnetzar?"

The youngest son of Miriam was not afraid of this emperor. He wasn't afraid to show it either, he said that it was his brothers and he included himself. It was their own fault, Your Majesty. He said this in a very brave tone. We have sinned and even if we are personally innocent, we are punished for the generation's sins. Moreover, you are not a worthy emperor as Nevuchadnetzar was. You are therefore not privileged to experience G-d's providence. It was G-d who sentenced all of us to death. If you will not execute us, we will die in some other unnatural way. But one thing you should know: G-d will definitely avenge our blood. You will one day pay for this deed." It is no surprise to read here that the emperor reacted by ordering the young boy to be killed.

The young boy didn't expect anything less, but he still didn't want to bow down to the emperor's image just to be saved unlike his brothers. The emperor ignored the mother's pleas that she be executed before her youngest son. The mother fell upon her son, kissing and embracing him. She exclaimed, "My child, go to our father Avraham and tell him, My mother is greater than you are! You only bound one son upon the altar, but my mother has built seven altars and sacrificed seven sons in one day! Tell Avraham to beg G-d to have mercy upon our people! The brazen emperor didn't feel unmoved. He still

ordered for the child to be slaughtered in front of his mother without delay. The mother's grief was so intense that it caused the mother to become deranged. It was a few days later, she threw herself down from a rooftop. She toppled to her death. In this manner Yirmiyahu's foreboding words (in 15:9), "The woman who has borne seven sons is unhappy," came to pass. When Yirmiyahu had said these words, "The woman who has borne seven sons is unhappy," he was symbolically referring to the entire Jewish nation.

It was concerning whom G-d had issued a harsh decree that would cause the Jews a lot of unhappiness. At the same time, these deaths of Miraim's seven sons did atone for the entire Jewish nation. It was why the evil decree was abolished. There was a heavenly voice that was heard, it was speaking about Miriam. The heavenly voice said, "She is the joyous mother of sons!" The heavenly voice indicated immeasurable reward in the world to come for the mother and her sons. The next verse is going to deride those artisans who take the trouble of planting and cutting down trees to keep wood for the idols. Are they also convinced that their wood is "holy"?! Verse 44:14 goes like this: There is one who goes personally to the forest to cut cedars for himself, or he takes pine wood or oak. These are especially beautiful, since the pine and oak are not as strong as cedar. He reinforces this wood with other types of wood from the forest. Then there is one who goes to even more trouble: He plants an oren-tree, whose wood is very suitable for carving, and he waits. The rain will make it grow. In reality, G-d should hold off on the rain, because the wood was planted for a forbidden purpose.

However, G-d does allow the laws of nature to assist even a sinner. In this way, people have freedom of choice whether or not to obey G-d. Similarly our Sages teach that if someone stole seeds and planted them, they shouldn't grow. G-d does not want to interfere with the course of nature. Verse 44:15 talks about why man needs to use fuel. The man will take some of it to warm himself; he heats his oven with it in order to bake bread. With some of the wood he fashions a god and worships it. Still part of the verse 44:15, He makes a carved image and prostrates himself before it. After using some of the wood for his private needs, he uses what is left over for a god! If the idolater truly believes that the wood is holy or reserved for a higher purpose, how can he also use it for his personal enjoyment? The next verse in 44:16 talks some more about the wood that the man uses. Half of the wood, he burns in the fire to warm himself. This half he also uses it to eat meat. He roasts meat and is satisfied when he eats it.

Since he also warms himself, he gloats, "Aha! I am warm. I enjoy the fire!" (Alternately: Before warming himself, he claims, I have seen that my god is a consuming fire!). In verse 44:17, there is talk of whatever wood is left over. The man takes the remaining wood and makes a god. This becomes his idol, he bows to it. He falls down before it, and he prays to it. He says to the idol, "Save me, for you are my god!" This kind of behavior of our ancestors was ludicrous. It is apparent: nevertheless, we should not take the liberty of assuming that they were naive. Unlike ourselves, they were well acquainted with the zodiacs that direct events on earth, and by means of worship, they attempted to alter their effect. Moreover, they had a passion for idol worship which has been eliminated for a long time now, so that we are not in a position to pass judgment on our forebears. In verse 44:18 it talks about those who worshiped idols. Those idolater's neither know nor understand their folly, for their eyes are shut by the evil inclination. It's because of the evil inclination that they cannot see, and their hearts couldn't reflect. The ancient people had an innate urge that propelled them towards idolatry.

Just as with every type of evil inclination, G-d implanted it in their hearts so that they might resist and conquer it. The Jewish people would then achieve sanctity and gain great reward. There were many Jews who succumbed to their evil inclination. That was why the Men of the Great Assembly begged G-d to eliminate this type of evil inclination. G-d concurred, and that was why the Jews were no longer tempted to worship idols. In verse 44:19, no one thinks about it. No one understands it or has the insight to consider, I have burned half of it in the midst of a fire, and I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. How then can I make the rest of it into an idol, detested by G-d, and bow down to the product of a tree? The following verse is 44:20. The idolater's deceived heart has inclined him to accept as a leader god a substance that turns into ashes when it is burned. But he will not save his soul; he will not admit, the god I have made with my right hand is false!

On the other hand, idolatry is an obvious lie, one that is, as it were, clearly written on my right hand. This verse has a clue to the root of the worship of idols, or anything other than G-d. His deceived heart has led him astray. A person's desire for gratification of his instincts binds him to the truth. He will defend the most illogical philosophy and remain under life-long delusions in order to evade the rigorous self-control demanded by the Torah at all times. For this reason, our Sages have called this world "the world of deceit." In this next world, it's known as "the world of truth," there is no deceit or illusion. The truth will become apparent to us. In verse 44:21, we are reminded of these things, you who are called Yaakov and Israel, for you are a servant of Mine. We are not servants of the gods. G-d was the one Who formed us to become His servants. He tells us to not forget Him and to not turn to idols instead. G-d implored the Jewish people not to imitate the idol worshiping gentiles. The Jews had to resist the persuasive influence of the nations around them. We always had to be aware that they were G-d's people. Even though they had already gone astray, doing teshuva would eradicate any past sin.

This is where the verse of 44:22 comes in. It says that even if people had transgressed and did teshuva, G-d would blot out even their rebellious sins. He would blot the rebellious sins like a thick cloud that would totally vanish. They would be like a cloud, our unintentional sins. We would have a chance to return back to G-d and He would redeem us. The prophet Yeshayahu addressed these words to the Jewish people in the Babylonian exile. Yeshayahu clarified that their redemption was contingent upon their sincere teshuva. This verse can also be applied to all future generations. We recite it in our Mussaf prayer on Yom Kippur. This includes when we say, "For You are the King Who forgives our sins and passes over our guilt year after year. Redemption could be at hand, G-d is only waiting for us to do teshuva. The last verse in this week's haftara is 44:23. It's a bit long, It starts out saying, we should rejoice, heavens, for G-d has accomplished it! He has brought redemption to the Jewish people. We can shout, depths of the earth! We can now break into song, mountains, forests and every tree therein! For G-d has redeemed Yaakov and is glorified by all because he has redeemed Israel. The haftara asks us why will heaven and earth, mountains and trees be so happy at the redemption?

There are two answers for this, first is G-d has promised whoever mourns for Jerusalem will rejoice in the future. All of nature participated in the mourning over the destruction. This is why we will experience joy in the future. The second reason is when Adam sinned, G-d passed a decree. It was the earth that would become cursed! As a result, the earth became less fertile. All fruit became less succulent and the heavenly bodies were dimmed. At the redemption, the curse will be lifted. Nature, too, will be redeemed. After that we will all rejoice. The prophet specifically mentioned the happiness of the mountains and the forests. The mountains became hard and unsuitable for cultivation after Adam's

sin. In the future, they too would become fertile. The forests would be happy because even barren trees would bear fruit. At this point all of idol worship would vanish, their wood would no longer be used for production of idol. This is the end of this week's haftara. There are some footnotes from this week's haftara. It reads like commentary. It says that tragically in our times, as well, a large majority of Jewish people have alienated from its precious heritage.

In their confusion, these Jews seek meaning and fulfillment in any cult, religion, or absurd theory that they may have come across. They don't even consider the Torah as a viable option. Earlier in the haftara G-d mentions how Jews refused to include Him in their worship. They have not called on Him at all. G-d refers to the Jews as Yaakov. G-d said that there are some Jews who have omitted His Name. Moreover, just as the ancient Jews outdid their pagan contemporaries in idol worship, so too. In modern times, Jews are often the movers and shakers of destructive movements, such as Communism, and liberalism in America today. Jews are spiritual by nature and are often gifted with sharp minds. Unless Jews are guided solely by the Torah, these very advantages can cause their downfall. Earlier in the haftara one of the verses explains why G-d wanted to punish the Jews. In verse 43:28, G-d says because of the sins that the Jews committed He will cause even our holy princes to become desecrated by enemies. Over time G-d would give Yaakov for destruction and Israel for insults by the enemy. The footnote about this explains what this means. It's from a source named Rabbi Mendel Hirsch.

He was the son of R.S.R. Hirsch. He says in fact, Israel, the name is given to our nation when it is in an elevated state. It has not evoked praise from the nations. Instead, the virtues by which it has been achieved are depicted by them as weaknesses. The non-Jews have never been heard to extol Jews for their compassion, refined character traits, and idyllic family life. These very attributes are labeled as weakness, servility, submissiveness, cowardice, and so on. The last footnote for this week's haftara is focusing on how there were many Jews who turned to idol worship. It is hard for us to picture the world of our forebears realistically, since the evil inclination of idol worship has been eliminated. The historical period that we are dealing with was dominated by unchallenged belief in and fear of soothsayers, demons, magicians, and idolatrous priests. Anyone who didn't conform to this mentality was considered a social outcast.

Haftara Tzav

G-d will bring punishment upon the evil people. This will happen even if they offer sacrifices to Him. This is found in the book of Yirmiyahu 7:21-34, 8:1-3, and 9:22-23. To summarize this haftara will focus on G-d not desiring the sacrifices of Jews who disobey Him. G-d feels angry because the prophets' warnings get ignored and there is the sin of idol worship. There is punishment that is predicted for anyone worshiping idols. There is a description in the haftara of every Jew's goal for their life. Parsha Tzav is all about the laws of sacrifices, this haftara is different from last week, because it emphasizes that G-d will not accept sacrifices in place of obeying His will. The haftara from last week, Vayikra, was taken from the prophet Yeshayahu. This week's haftara is from the prophet, Yirmiyahu. Yeshayahu comes first, because he lived in an earlier period before Yirmiyahu was alive.

Sacrifices can't substitute for Heeding to G-d's Word. The first verse of Yirmiyahu reprimanding the Jewish people drips with sarcasm, he is mocking the Jewish people. He is doing this for their show of piety in offering numerous ola-sacrifices. They chose olos, since these were completely burned: the owner didn't eat even a minute portion of the sacrifice. The Jews were acting in a self-righteous

manner, they assumed that G-d was particularly pleased with them. By doing this in return they thought, He would pardon their misconduct. The haftara starts with the verse 7:22, G-d is saying He didn't speak to the Jewish fathers, nor did He command them on the day (meaning at the time) He brought them out of Egypt about olah and shlam offerings. Instead, He commanded them first and foremost to obey G-d. G-d spoke about the sacrifices that Jews wanted to give were of secondary importance.

At least compared to obeying Him, that came first. Yirmiyahu made a statement that was surprising for the Jews. We know that G-d did command the Jews to construct a Mishkan in the desert. It was there that the Jews offered sacrifices. The Torah also had many chapters that enumerated the laws of sacrifices. One of these was in this week's Torah parsha called Tzav. We wonder what Yirmiyahu was meaning when he declared that G-d didn't command the Jews about the sacrifices at the time He had released them from Egypt? The first part of the answer for this is, when the Jews left Egypt they arrived at Mara. It was there that G-d gave them several mitzvos and none of these were related to the sacrifices.

Next, the Jews received the Ten Commandments, in essence the fundamental precepts upon which the entire Torah rests. We don't find one word regarding sacrifices in the Ten Commandments. Afterwards, G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah's civil laws. These civil laws are mentioned in Parsha Mishpatim. Only after that happened did G-d order the Jews to set up a Mishkan for the purpose of offering sacrifices in it. The reason G-d postponed these commandments was so that the Jews shouldn't erroneously give them priority over the other commandments. An exception was the sacrifice of Pesach. It was not commanded "at the time of the Exodus from Egypt" instead while the Jewish people were still in Egypt. It served a distinct purpose, to remember yetzias Mitzrayim. The second reason was Yirmiyahu's words that could be interpreted as The object of the exodus was not that you should become a

sacrifice-offering nation.

Instead it was for Jews to obey G-d's will. Only the gods of the nations 'demand' sacrifices. I want you to obey Me for your sake, so that you may reap the attendant rewards. Sacrifices are merely a means toward the goal of achieving forgiveness and staying close to Me. The next verse is 7:23, it says that G-d commanded the Jews to listen to His Voice. The Voice will be the G-d for the Jews and we will be His people. We will walk in all the way that He commands us to do so. This way everything will go well with us. G-d does not gain anything from our compliance with the commands of G-d. They exist solely because of His concern for the benefit of the Jewish people. If we follow them, we will enjoy life in this world and in the next world too. In verse 7:24, we learn of G-d feeling disappointed towards the Jewish people. Even the people who left Egypt didn't listen nor incline their ear towards what G-d wanted.

These Jews followed the counsel and inclination of their evil hearts. They moved backwards in G-d's service. They did not move forward, they strayed further away from G-d and didn't come any closer to Him. This verse is referring to Yirmiyahu talking about the generation of the wilderness, where the members rebelled against G-d ten times when He tested them after the exodus from Egypt. Actually, it was that generation that ranked among the greatest and holiest that ever lived. This was precisely why the members were given very difficult tests by G-d. The prophet Yirmiyahu nevertheless makes use of extremely harsh language in his accusation because G-d measures the tzaddikim with the yardstick of

perfection, anything short of which is considered “sin.” From all of this reading, we can infer that when Yirmiyahu condemned his own generation, he also used harsh words in his rebuke.

This is when he had accused the Jews of hypocritically offering sacrifices while simultaneously serving idols and committing other sins. Yirmiyahu included all of them in the reproof, even though there were certainly many tzaddikim among them. Furthermore, all of our ancestors were given difficult tests by G-d. The reason for these hard tests was that the people were considered to be very great. Our generation would have fallen far shorter than that generation did, under the same circumstances. Our ancestors’ greatness is apparent from the fact that even the idolatrous kings were brilliant Torah scholars. The idolatrous King Menashe was able to interpret the Book of Vayikra in fifty-five different ways. King Achav knew eighty-five interpretations and King Yeravam a hundred and three.

There was a Sage who once asked King Menashe in a dream why he served idols even though he was so well-versed in the Torah. Menashe replied, “Had you lived then, you would have gathered the hem of your robe, the faster to run after me in your eagerness to serve your idols! Verse 7:25 tells us that the Jews transgressed from the day our fathers left Egypt and to this day we continue to do so. It is why G-d has sent the Jews all of His servants, the prophets on a daily basis. G-d sent them to the Jewish people early in the morning. Why did the prophets usually deliver their messages early in the mornings? It was done to encourage the Jews to start the new day sin-free. How many prophets did G-d send on a daily basis to the Jewish people to warn them to do teshuva? Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi taught, there was one prophet in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Rabbi Nassan taught there were two prophets in the morning and two prophets at night. Yirmiyahu usually accompanied these prophets. G-d declared, I did everything possible to induce the Jews to do teshuva. The people in Yirmiyahu’s generation have not listened to G-d and they did not incline their ears. They have stiffened their necks. They did worse than their fathers had done in the past. In verse 7:27, G-d told Yirmiyahu to speak to the Jewish people. Express all of these words, but G-d warned Yirmiyahu that the Jewish people would not listen to him. G-d told Yirmiyahu to call the Jewish people, but G-d knew that the Jews still would not respond. Since G-d was aware that the Jewish people would not respond to Yirmiyahu reprimanding them, the latter is bidden to continue with condemnation. Yirmiyahu was also given the ability to predict what punishment would happen to the Jews. It says in the next verse of 7:28 what kind of warning Yirmiyahu sent to the Jewish people. G-d told Yirmiyahu to tell the Jews, this is the nation that acted as though its ancestors had never heard the voice of G-d, its G-d, at Mount Sinai.

It is as though these Jews didn’t receive any kind of feedback on how they could better themselves in the future. The belief in G-d had been lost from these people’s hearts and even cut off from its mouths. Instead of talking about G-d, the people only spoke about their idols. There was an idolatrous king named Menashe and he erased G-d’s name wherever it was found in the Torah. Instead he replaced it with “Ba’al. After the destruction of the First Bais Hamikdash, the prophet Eliyahu wandered around the streets of Jerusalem. He was attempting to comfort the desolate Jews. Many of these Jews were expiring in the street, their bodies were swollen from hunger. Eliyahu found a little boy who was lying on a garbage heap, the only survivor of his entire family. Eliyahu asked this boy if he should teach him one thing which is certain to keep him alive? The boy said, yes please and Eliyahu told him to say the Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokainu Hashem Echad, every day.

The child exclaimed in fear the word, "Hush!" The boy said to Eliyahu, "You must never mention G-d's name." He had been trained by his parents not to pray to G-d, instead he pulled out his idolatrous image and kissed it fervently until his swollen belly burst and he fell over his image, dead. Verse 7:29 says, You Jewish nation, tear out your hair, cast it away in mourning, and raise your voice in lamentation on the hills! For G-d has despised and forsaken the generation upon which He poured His anger. The next verse is 7:30 and it talks about the sons of Yehuda doing evil in the eyes of G-d. They have put their abominations, the idols which I detest in the House on which My name is called, to defile it. Yirmiyahu censures the Jews for allowing the kings to place idolatrous statues in the Bais Hamikdash. In the next verse 7:31, the verse talks about the horrible rite of sacrificing children by fire to the god Molech.

In verse 7:31, the sons of Yehuda had built altars to Molech, who is named Tofes, in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. They did this to burn their sons and daughters in a fire. It was an act that G-d neither commanded for his service nor did it ever enter His mind. It seems that in Yirmiyahu's time the Molech-rite consisted not only of passing the children through fire, but also of actually burning them. The priests attempted to impress upon the parents saying, "The god will only have mercy on you, if you sacrifice to him what is dearest to you." Why was this worship named "Tofes"? While the victims were burned, the priests would beat loudly on a drum (tofes related to tof/drum). This was done in order to drown out the sound of their frightful shrieks. The valley where this rite was performed was next to Jerusalem. It was named "Gay (the valley) of Ben Hinnom." Hinnom meant wailing and it was called the "Valley of Wailing" because there one could hear the piercing wailing and screaming of the victims.

The verse uses a double expression. It means, G "didn't command" this type of service and "it didn't enter His mind." The repetition alludes to several historical episodes: One might claim, "G-d does indeed desire human sacrifice! Did he not command Avraham to sacrifice his only son on the altar at Mount HaMoriya? Furthermore, the Jewish judge Yiftach sacrificed his daughter to G-d and Maisha, the king of Moav, sacrificed his son. Let us closely examine each of the above cases. With Avraham, G-d said, He never intended that Avraham actually sacrifice his son. He was merely commanding Avraham to bring Yitzchak up to Mountain Ha Moriya. It was supposed to be a test, because the accusing angel had demanded it. With the prophet Yiftach, the judge, vowed before going out to war against Amon.

He said, "If you G-d, help me win the war, I will sacrifice to You the first thing that comes out of my house!" After his victory, the "first thing" that happened to come out of his house was none other than his only beloved daughter! Yiftach, not being fully proficient in Torah law, felt obligated to offer her up as a sacrifice. He was not comfortable with this idea because he had observed some of his Jewish neighbor from the tribe of Efrayim sacrificing their children. What he should have done was consulted Pinchas, who was the head of Sanhedrin. He could have either annulled his vow, or possibly determined that such a vow was not binding in the first place. Somehow, Yiftach considered it below his dignity to consult Pinchas. Yiftach's punishment was that he suffered from a bizarre sickness.

He was having problems with his limbs. They became loose and fell off one by one. G-d said, "Let no one conclude from the story of Yiftach that I approve of human sacrifice." Then there was the example of Maisha, king of Moav. He was the king that was attacked by the kings of Israel and Yehuda. They had united in war against their common enemy. In the honor of the king of Yehuda, the righteous Yehoshafa, G-d performed miracles for the Jewish soldiers. The valley in the desert through which they marched was miraculously filled with streams of water, so that the soldiers were able to quench their

victory. The Moavim, believed the area to be dry and sandy, perceived the streams aglow with color from the sun's reflection. They were convinced that they were looking at pools of blood. Surmising that the Jewish kings had killed each other, they ran forward pell-mell, in order to collect the spoils. At this point they encountered a fully mobilized Jewish army that easily overpowered them.

The Jewish kings entered Moav, destroyed its cities, felled its trees, and closed its wells. When King Maisha saw that all was lost, he gathered seven hundred armed men. He intended to penetrate the Jewish army in order to reach his neighbor, the king of Moav, who would save his life. This proved to be impossible, in despair, Maisha started to question his astrologers. He asked, "Why is it that we, who have overcome all the other nations, are being defeated by the Jews?" They have the merit of a great ancestor Your Majesty," the astrologers explained. King Maisha asked who could that be? The astrologers explained that it was Avraham, and when King Maisha wanted to know what Avraham's special merit was, he was surprised by the answer. Avraham was over a hundred years old. The astrologers claimed that their G-d told him to offer his only son as a sacrifice. Avraham did not refuse this request G-d had. The king asked if Avraham actually sacrificed his own son.

The astrologers said that in the end, Avraham didn't do it. The astrologers referred to King Maisha as Your Majesty. The Moabite did some quick thinking and arrived at a novel, albeit perverted, conclusion. He thought, if the Jews are granted miracles even though their ancestor didn't actually sacrifice his son, I am totally allowed to expect miracles if I do bring my son as an offering. King Maisha took his son and burned him as a sacrifice. Some of our Sages explain that Maisha offered him to G-d, while others hold that he did so in honor of his deity, the sun of god. What King Maisha did evoked anger in heaven. Satan started to argue that the Jews were not better than Maisha; they, too, offered human sacrifices, and had not really been worthy of experiencing miracles.

G-d said, "Let no one claim that it entered My mind to approve of Maisha's sacrifice!" In the next verse, 7:32 there is a punishment predicted for the Jewish people.

G-d said there would be one day that would come when the spot where the idolatrous altars stand will no longer be called the Tofes and the valley of Ben Hinnom. Instead it will be called "The Valley of Killing," for so many Jews will be buried in the Tofes that there will be no room for more. As a punishment for sacrificing children to the Molech, Jews would suffer death at the hands of their enemy. We learn from Rabbi Nassan, he taught that "It is a good sign when a person is treated with disrespect after his death.

One example is if he is buried without a eulogy, or he is not buried at all but animals devour his body." We may understand this concept better after studying the following conversation that took place between Assaf, who was a Laivi. Originally, he was a descendant from Korach and lived during the destruction of the First Bais Hamikdash, and G-d. Assaf argued, "How could G-d allow impure gentiles to enter the holiest sections of Your House, where only kohanim are normally allowed to walk? You used to punish even pious Jews who tried to enter there!" G-d had a response to this, "Those Jews who came in without permission, wherears the enemies were inspired by Me to infiltrate Jerusalem and destroy My holy House. But don't worry! I will build a new Bais Hamikdash from these ruins, and it will be even more resplendent than the previous one!"

Assaf replied, I believe that You will rebuild Jerusalem, but what about the flesh of your pious servants who were devoured by the birds and the beasts? " Will that be restored as well?" It is surprising that

Assaf referred to those Jews who were not brought to bury "the pious", ones for we know that they were immoral to such an extent that the prophet Yirmiyahu referred to them as "horses that indulge in their desires". This is coming from the book of Yirmiyahu 5:8. We learn that from Assaf's words there was a fundamental principle of Judaism. Once punishment has been meted out, the sinner is considered to be "pious". In this case, it was precisely the punishment of non-burial that achieved this. The Torah emphasizes that an evil person who deserves lashes by the Jewish court of law is to be regarded as "a brother" once he has been punished. Now we come to understand why G-d did not allow the corpses of the sinful Jews to be buried in the time of the kings and in later generations. It helped to atone for their sins.

If one person owes someone else a large sum of money and the debtor declares to be bankrupt and not be able to repay, the other lender has no choice, but to bear the loss. On the other hand, G-d is always collecting His debts. While the people are alive, He exacts payment from them, after death He collects from the flesh. And if there is no more flesh, He will collect from the bones. It says in the book of Yirmiyahu in 8:1, "At that time they will bring the bones of the Jews out of their graves." Our Sages' words are comforting with respect to the pain suffered by millions of our brethren who were burned to ashes in the crematoria built by the savage, cursed Nazis in World War II. Surely, the physical disgraces suffered by their bodies serves to atone for the individual and collective sins of the entire Jewish people.

The day will come when the Master of the Universe will rebuild their bodies, too. This will be at the time of the revival of the dead known as *tehiyas hamaisim*. In verse 7:34, G-d plans to stop the cities of Yehuda and from the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the voice of gladness; the sound of people cheering the bridegroom and the bride; for the land will become desolate. The Jews will be punished measure for measure. Instead of serving G-d with joy and gladness, they brought upon themselves the misery that goes hand-in-hand with the perversions of serving the Molech and the other gods. Now G-d will deny the Jews a sense of happiness.

In verse 8:1 G-d stated a time would come, "They will take out the bones of the kings of Yehuda, the bones of its princes, the bones of its kohanim, the bones of its prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from their graves. When did this prophecy come about? Amon and Moav were two vile neighbors of the Jewish people. When they heard the prophets foretell the destruction of Jerusalem they sent the Babylonian king, Nevuchadnetzar, a message. It said, the time has come for you to take over Jerusalem! Nevuchadnetzar replied how he was afraid the Jews will deal with me as harshly as they have dealt with their other enemies! Amonim and Moavim told Nevuchadnetzar to not worry, the Master is not home. Those words, the Master is not home, come from the book Mishlai 7:18. They were implying that the Presence of G-d was no longer residing in the Bais Hamikdash.

Nevuchadnetzar continued to argue, he said G-d is close to the Jews and sooner or later He will come back! The bloodthirsty neighbors of the Jews said that G-d has gone far away. Nevuchadnetzar was still not on board with them, he stated how he knew there would be righteous individuals among them. They would pray and He would surely return. The Amonim and Moavim replied, G-d took the lives of the tzaddikim to make sure they would not be present when the evil times arrived. The Babylonian emperor Nevuchadnetzar, insisted how the evil will mend their ways and G-d will heed their prayers. Amon and Moavim replied how the decree of punishment is irrevocable. Nevuchadnetzar was still not convinced, it is the winter season now. He didn't feel comfortable bringing his army from Babylonia to Israel in the

rain and snow! Amon and Moav stated that to bring them via the mountain route, the soldiers would be protected from the elements.

Nevuchadnetzar questioned where he should lodge his armies once they were to arrive in Jerusalem? They can't remain outdoors in this weather!" The Amonim and Moavim seemed to have an answer for everything. They said, "The Jewish graves, located in caves outside Jerusalem, can be converted into barracks, even more comfortable than your palace!"

Nevuchadnetzar was finally convinced by their words. He decided to advance his army to Jerusalem despite the cold season, a highly unusual tactic. He surrounded Jerusalem on the tenth of Teves, it has become one of our national fast days. Nevuchadnetzar's army dragged the Jewish dead out of their graves and used those grave sites as living quarters for themselves. This was why Yirmiyahu's prophecy came true.

They will take out the bones of the kings of Yehuda, the bones of its princes, the bones of its kohanim, the bones of its prophets, and the bones of its inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. The enemies of the Jews will spread them out before the sun, the moon, and all the heavenly host that they loved, served, followed, sought, and to which they bowed. The corpses will not be gathered in nor will they be buried. They will become dung on the surface of the ground. The verse uses five words to describe how the Jews worshiped the gods: they loved, served, followed, sought, and bowed to them. This is how we get a clearer picture of the intensity and ardor with which the Jews embraced the service of the gods. G-d implanted in each human being a desire to worship Him, as well as a need to be occupied. These instincts help people be drawn towards G-d's service and to become totally involved in it.

When we speak about Torah-study, we use the term "to become involved in the Torah." Misdirected, this instinct leads to the degeneration of worshiping false ideas and ideals, being involved in foreign cults, or obsessed with material pursuits. In the next verse, the prophet Yirmiyahu foretells that the Jews who would manage to escape from the enemies would be led into exile and suffer excruciating agony. In 8:3, we learn that death would be preferable to life for all who remain from this evil family that served the gods. Anyone who stayed in all the places where I have cast them out. This was all coming from the words of G-d. The haftara skips some verses to 9:22 where we learn about the goal of a Jew. G-d said, "Let the wise person not praise himself with his wisdom, nor the strong with his strength nor the rich with his riches.

In verse 9:23 it says, "Let him who does praise himself rather praise himself with this: Understanding and Knowing Me, that I am G-d, the Unique Power, Who performs kindness with those who guard His commandments, justice with the evil, and has mercy in deeds I desire that men perform kindness, justice, and mercy." The haftara asks us a question, why must a person not be proud of his wisdom, strength, or riches? And what does he gain by studying and contemplating G-d's management of the world? There are a few answers for this. The first is the degree of a person's intelligence and the amount of his physical strength and possessions have been determined by G-d at birth. None of them are due to one's own achievement. This is why taking pride in them is like showing off borrowed garments. There is the other idea, how much fear of G-d one has is not predestined; it depends upon a person's efforts. G-d therefore values all achievement in this area.

The second reason is the glory of wisdom, physical strength and riches are only temporary. They expire with death. We are told in this haftara to let the wise man not pride himself with his wisdom. Even

Moses, whose wisdom was so deep that he was able to enter the heavenly realm and receive the Torah from G-d. He was unable to prevent his death, when G-d told him to go up to Mountain Har Nevo and there he would die, he started to protest. He said, "Master of the universe, the Torah commands a master to pay his laborer on the same day. I was a faithful laborer for forty years. Give me my wages now!"

To this, G-d asked him, "Moses do you really wish to receive your reward in this world and forfeit it in the World to Come? Moses was at a loss for an answer. The time had come for him to depart from this world. We also learn to let the strong one not pride himself with his strength. The physical proportions and strength of Shimshon, the judge, were superhuman. His shoulders measured sixty amos from one end to the other; he walked with giant steps: and he once killed a thousand Pelishtim with the aid of a donkey's bone. His dying put an end to his strength. We learn from the haftara to let the rich one not pride himself with his riches. King Achav, was a ruler over the kingdom of Israel. He was extremely wealthy, he had seventy sons. For each one of them he constructed luxurious summer and winter palaces. Upon his death, King Achav left all of his riches behind. It is only up to G-d who possess wisdom, strength, and riches forever. In what, then should a person take pride?

In the crown of Torah, for it gives riches and life in the world and in the next world. It also gives external strength, as it says in the book of Yeshayahu in 40:31. Those who hope in G-d will find their strength constantly renewed. The Persian emperor named Artaban sent Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi an invaluable pearl as a gift. To please send back something equally as precious. He was challenging the Sage, Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi. The emperor was certain that he had outwitted Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi. He didn't believe the Sage would surely find a comparable gift, but the Rabbi was very smart. He sent the emperor a mezuzah and the emperor was amazed. He couldn't understand how this present matched his own. In his mind, pearls were the ultimate valuables. It was why the emperor sent Rabbi Yehuda a message, "I don't understand! I sent you a priceless pearl and you reciprocated with an object which I can purchase for a few coins!" Rabbi Yehuda responded to him, "The Torah is more valuable than all the pearls in the world!

It bestows perfection upon a person, and there is no end to its reward in the World to Come. "As a token thereof, I have sent you a mezuzah. Your gift must be carefully guarded from thieves, while the mezuzah has an inherent, secret power to protect one from harmful agents. A mezuzah merely contains some passages from the Torah; it is a sample. The Torah itself preserves a person in this life and after death; he will be guarded by angels of mercy and will arise at the revival of the dead. Your gift is of limited value; it cannot compare to the eternal value of the Torah! A person must come to the realization he was given wisdom, strength and riches only as a means to the end of knowing G-d. This knowledge is acquired by delving into the Torah. Having abstract knowledge is not enough; it must lead to the emulation of G-d's ways; acts of kindness, justice and mercy.

When Yirmiyahu proclaimed that one, "May praise him-self with knowing G-d," he did not mean vain, being selfish, or having pride. He was referring to the joy and elation that result from the knowledge that one is fulfilling G-d's will. The ending of the haftara for this week is stating the goal of every Jew is to study G-d's laws. We need to follow in His ways. If the performance of external rites, like offering sacrifices, replaces the pursuit of this goal. G-d is not impressed at all. Yirmiyahu's message applies to all generations. G-d does not accept "services" or "temple rites" while His mitzvos are being violated. Of

those who are loyal to the mitzvos, He demands that they not content themselves with impressive, external ceremonies that demonstrate their frumkeit. Instead He wants people to never lose sight of the true goal. It is, "understanding and knowing G-d."

The footnote for this haftara says that the name "Gay Ben Hinnom " is already mentioned in the book of Joshua in 15:8. It was mentioned there before the Jews worshiped idols. Maybe Joshua had prophetically foretold the valley's future name. The Gemara and Midrash apply the name "Gehinnom" to the heavenly abode where the evil are punished. The Gemara mentions that one of the "entrances" to Gehinnom is that valley next to Jerusalem. Tiferes Tzion explains that this to mean that a person standing in the valley of Ben-Hinnom would feel a natural fear of the punishment of the future world. How amazing is it, then, that Jewish people worshiped the Molech in that very spot! This shows how far they had spiritually deteriorated.

The Haftara of Shemini

It's the story of King David bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. It takes place in the book of Samuel. King David and all the Jews accompany the Ark. Uzza ends up getting too close to the Ark and dies. G-d felt he was acting in a disrespectful way as he tried to save it. King David deposits the Ark in the home of Oved Edom. The aron is brought to Jerusalem for the second time. Michal reproaches King David for acting in a manner that she considers to be undignified. King David's desire to build the Bais Hamikdash is not to be fulfilled. He is promised, though, that the Bais Hamikdash will be built by his son, whose royal lineage will endure forever. In the parsha of Shemini it deals with the dedication of the Mishkan. At the same time, the haftara describes the ceremony of bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. It was the precursor for the dedication of the Bais Hamikdash. Both of these joyous occasions were marred by tragedy.

During the dedication of the Mishkan, two of Aaron's sons were smitten by G-d for acting irreverently in the Mishkan. Aaron's sons had offered incense there, without having received a Divine command to do so. In the haftara, Uzzah is punished with death for behaving with disrespect to the Aark. His sin was that he was under the impression that the Ark was about to fall. He was mistaken about this and he stretched out his hand in order for this to not happen. It might seem to us readers that both these sins are not severe enough to warrant capital punishment. In both cases G-d acted with His attribute of strict justice. The reason for this was starting with Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, as well as Uzzah, they were considered to be tzaddikim. These kinds of people G-d dealt very strictly with. The other reason these tzaddikim ended up dying was, both incidents had the potential for developing into a fearful disgrace to G-d.

Seeing that Nadav and Avihu offered fires privately, every Jew could come to the conclusion that it would be okay for them to sacrifice when and what he desired to do so. Uzzah's act, too, might have been misconstrued as being the proper way to conduct oneself towards the aron. This was why there was severe punishment of the magnitude that G-d meted out on these two times. Having these tzaddikim die the way they did, helped restore the Jewish people's healthy respect for the Mishkan. The haftara shows us another parallel that can be drawn from the parsha and the haftara. The fires that Aaron's sons gave had been denigrated by the Jewish people. It was a cause of death and destruction. At the same time in the haftara, the aron was maligned after Uzza had died. This was why later in the Torah there is a description of how the fire was instrumental in reviving the Jews suffering from the plague.

We will read about this description in the parsha Korach. When we read the haftara this week, we read that the Ark had been a source of great blessing in the home of Oved Edom. King David makes a mistake regarding the law of transporting the Aark. In the holiest section of the Mishkan, the kodesh hakodashim, contained its holiest object. This was the Ark itself. Then, almost four hundred years later after the Jewish people entered the Holy Land, the Jews were defeated in a war against the Pelishtim. Its most precious vessel, the aron, had been captured by the enemy and taken in triumph to their land. G-d was not going to allow for the holy Aark to remain in the hands of non-Jews for a long time. The Book of Samuel shares the story, there was death and destruction that raged in every Pelishti city that the Aark had entered. In the city of Ashdod, the Ark was placed in the temple of the national god Dagon, next to the deity, to demonstrate Dagon's superiority over the Jewish G-d.

The next morning, the priests found the idol had been overturned on the floor right next to the Aark. They promptly returned it to its place. The following morning not only was it again prostrate, but this time its head and hands were grotesquely severed! The residents of Ashdod felt terrified; they knew obviously a Higher Power had decided to teach Dagon Who was in charge. The Ashdodim decided that they must get rid of the Aark immediately. They took it to the Pelishti city of Gass, but as soon as the Ark got there, tragedy struck. All the residents there of Gass were smitten with a fatal intestinal disease. Then they dispatched the Aark over to Ekron, whereupon the terrified Ekronim started to protest. He said, "Have you brought the Ark here in order to kill us?" After seven months of terror and death in their cities, the Pelishti princes unanimously decided to return the Ark to the Jewish people.

Their sages had counseled them and said, "It would be wise to appease the G-d of the Jewish people. We can do this by sending gifts together with the Ark. We can fashion golden objects in the form of something relating to your sickness. This way G-d could cure you of it. Load the Ark onto a new wagon in honor of G-d. Place your gifts into a box on the side of the wagon. The wagon should be drawn by two milch cows. Don't lead them, instead let them choose their own way. If they will resist their natural instinct to remain close to their suckling calves and instead proceed with the wagon to Israel, it will be clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that the G-d of the Jewish people punished us and He wishes us to return the Aark." The Pelishti princes listened to the instructions of their sages.

The haftara continues with the story, in full view of a lot of people, they harnessed two mother cows to the wagon bearing the Ark. The calves were removed from their mothers' proximity. Everyone was pretty amazed, how these cows managed to show no interest in following their young. They ignored their offspring's pathetic bleating, the cows pulled the Ark directly back to Israel. The miracle was clear and the Jews were overjoyed at seeing their Ark once again. Once the Jews got the Ark back, they deposited it in the home of Aminadav, who lived in Kiryas Yearim. It was the territory of the tribe of Yehuda. It remained there for the next twenty years. When King David finished subduing the Pelishtim around him, he decided to bring the Ark to Tzion. It was the "City of David," a part of Jerusalem.

He constructed a special tent there to house the Aark. After consulting with the nation's elders, King David declared, "We are planning a grand public ceremony to accompany the Ark to its new home." In honor of the occasion King David invited thirty thousand distinguished Jews, and ninety thousand of the greatest judges of the Jewish Court. There were also another sixty-thousand judges of lesser stature who would be present. The original wagon which the Pelishtim had used to return the Ark to Israel had been preserved as a reminder of the miracle that had occurred at that time. King David commanded that

it now be used for transporting the Ark. The box with the Pelishti gift of golden objects was still on the wagon. David's order is surprising, it was clearly stated in the Torah that the Ark is to be borne upon the shoulders of the members of the Levite family from Kehas.

Why did King David not order for the leviyim to carry the Aron upon their shoulders? Also how can we as the readers understand the fact that the scholars of his generation neglected to remind the king of the law? There are two explanations, starting with King David reasoning that the Divine command said, "The Ark is to be borne upon the shoulders,". This was applying only to the period of the Jews wandering around in the wilderness. Since the later generations didn't reach the greatness of the generation of the wilderness, they were no longer worthy of carrying the holy Ark on their shoulders. Instead it was to be placed on a wagon. We also learn that King David intended to cause a kiddush to G-d by using the original wagon of the Pelishtim. It would remind all of the Jews of the great miracles that had happened in connection with it.

King David's error was a Divine retribution for his declaration (in Tehillim 119:54.) It says there, "Your Torah-laws were songs for me in my temporary dwelling place." With these words, King David was implying something. He said, "While I was under stress when fleeing from Shaul, I was unable to concentrate on Jewish Law. I therefore studied Torah in a light manner, for pleasure and enjoyment, it was less taxing on my mind." Since King David was such an outstanding tzaddik, G-d reprimanded him. G-d said, "Don't regard the Torah as a 'song'! A tzaddik like you is obligated to cast aside all his worries and to apply himself fully to Torah, no matter how stressful the circumstances in which he finds himself. G-d continued saying, "I swear, you will one day make a mistake regarding a basic Torah-law that specifies that the Ark must be carried upon the shoulders of the leviyim. This will teach you how thoroughly and diligently the Torah is to be studied."

The Jewish public were pleased with King David's ceremonial plans. "Just as the Ark was returned by the Pelishtim in a wagon, so should it be carried to its new home in a wagon!" They reasoned. They too had forgotten the Jewish law regarding this. They thought to themselves, we must remember that this law had not been in practical use for four centuries, since the days of Moses. Maybe some of the chachamim didn't dare to correct the king out of respect for his opinion. The most brilliant Torah-scholar of all was Achitofel, whose wisdom was surpassed only by that of King David himself. He was fully aware of the Jewish law, but he initially withheld it from the king. He was personally offended, not having received an invitation to participate in the ceremony. There was a reason why David didn't invite Achitofel to the ceremony.

It was because the king knew through the ruach hakodesh that Achitofel's fear of Heaven was not on par with his vast Torah knowledge. Achitofel consequently bore a large measure of guilt in the events that were going to happen. The next part of the haftara is that tragedy struck the Jews. The king and the Jews marched to Kiryas Ye'arim, to the home of Avinadav, who had hosted the Ark until then. The Ark was loaded onto the wagon which was pulled by oxen. Avinadav's son Achyo walked in front of it, while another son, Uzzah, walked behind it. The wagon with the Ark was accompanied by a tremendous procession, including the king, the judges of the Jewish Court and all of the Jewish people. There was lively music that filled the air and some musicians played the harp; there were others who played the flute and drums. Those who didn't play, sang, or they swayed the lulavim. G-d did not approve of this scene, it was forbidden to transport the Ark on a wagon.

The leviyim should have carried it upon their shoulders and the general atmosphere of levity was totally inappropriate in the presence of the holy Ark upon which the Presence was resting. The occasion called for a more solemn and dignified attitude on the part of the people. The procession passed the threshing floor of Aravana, which was the future site of the Bais Hamikdash. The ark, as it were, showed the Jewish people that it was “displeased.” It pushed aside the oxen that pulled the wagon so that they lost their balance. Then, the Ark rose by itself into the air. Uzza, who walked behind the wagon, noticed right away that the Ark was no longer supported by the wagon. He stretched forth his hand to catch it, so that it should not fall. The sinners among the Jewish people started to exclaim, “See this! Uzzah is keeping the Ark from falling.” In reality, this was not the case. The Ark was capable of suspending itself miraculously in the air.

It even picked up those who carried it. All of the people had clearly witnessed this in the time of Joshua. On the memorable day of the Jewish people crossing the Jordan river into the land of Canaan, the kohanim were commanded to carry the Ark. In the past it was the Leviyim who were commanded to carry the Ark. The Kohanim with the Ark marched ahead of the people, upon reaching the river, they stepped right into its waters. As soon as their feet got wet, the Jordan miraculously split into two. The water that came from upstream formed a wall. The remaining water flowed downstream and away. The Jewish people crossed the Jordan on dry land, while the kohanim with the Ark stood on the dry river bed. They were close to the east bank and when all the Jews had crossed, the kohanim had been ordered to return to the east side of Jordan. As soon as they stepped out of the river bed, the wall of water collapsed and filled the river bed once again.

Suddenly G-d demonstrated to the Jewish people the supernatural power of the Ark. It actually raised the kohanim into the air and carried them across the Jordan to the west bank. That was where the Jewish people had been waiting. Uzzah stretched out his hand because he didn't have enough faith in the Ark's ability to support itself as well as it carries through its power of holiness. He thereby undermined the Jewish people's faith in G-d. He had caused a disgrace to G-d, the Attribute of Justice dealt harshly with Uzza, since he was a tzaddik in every other respect. He was punished by instant death. As his lifeless arm went limp, while the Ark continued to hover in the air, the faith of the doubters had been restored.

This was also how Uzzah's death redressed the terrible disgrace to G-d he had caused. Everyone had become aware of the awesome holiness of the Ark. Although Uzzah was punished severely in this world, his soul went to Gan Eden. There are some opinions that say it was instantly admitted, requiring no further purification. King David was shattered by the tragedy, and blamed himself for causing it. David named the spot where Uzzah died as “Peretz Uzzah”. It meant The Breach of Uzza. It was to commemorate the punishment. King David felt perplexed, he realized that G-d was not happy, but was not sure of the cause. He instructed the Kohanim, “Place the Ark on your shoulders and carry it!” In the past the kohanim had indeed been commanded to carry the Ark on exceptional occasions, such as when the Jewish people had crossed the Jordan River.

Ordinarily the mitzva of carrying the aron belonged to the leviyim. Something strange now took place, the Ark hurled the kohanim high up into the air. Then it flung them down to the ground, several times, and caused them a lot of pain. King David realized that G-d was showing him that something was missing. He sent a message to Achitofel, “What is the meaning of all this?” King David was far superior

to Achitofel in Torah-knowledge. David was so humble that he didn't hesitate to consult him in public. Achitofel retorted sarcastically, "Why don't you ask those elders whom you invited to this affair? King David was furious he started to curse. He said, "Let the one who can help out in this dire situation, yet withholds his assistance, be punished with strangulation. This punishment is measure for measure, for retaining helpful information in his throat, he deserves to be choked to death.

Achitofel felt intimidated by the king's curse. Achitofel advised, "Sacrifices should be offered in front of the Ark in order to appease it." David complied, and indeed the Ark stopped its perilous activity with the kohanim. While Achitofel's counsel was helpful, it didn't inform David where he had gone wrong. The king feared further calamities, he was no longer sure that G-d approved of his plan to transfer the Ark to Jerusalem. After all, it had been attempted on his own initiative, and not by Divine command. King David interrupted the procession and ordered for the Ark to be brought to the home of a live, who was known to be a tzaddik. Only after King David returned to Jerusalem did he discover what he did wrong. Achitofel used a mocking tone and said, "David you should have understood from the verse in the Torah in Bamidbar 7:9. It says, 'But to the family of Kehas Moses didn't give any wagon.

They had to carry the holy vessels on the shoulders,' that the Ark must always be transported upon the shoulders of the leviyim. David had failed to understand that verse which every school child knows! Achitofel explained I didn't want to tell you the Jewish law before because I did not want to embarrass you in public. The Ark was kept in the home of Oved Edom. The name of the Laivi whom King David chose to host the Ark was Oved Edom. Even though Oved Edom and his family knew that the slightest irreverence on their part towards the Ark might cost them their lives. It was why they willingly complied with the king's wish. For the next three months, Oved Edom and his family honored the Ark exceedingly. Everyday he would clean the room where the Ark was kept. He would light a candle in front of the Ark every morning and evening. G-d rewarded the family by blessing them with prosperity.

Oved had a wife along with eight daughters-in-law. These daughters in law gave birth to healthy male sextuplets. Oved Edom's household consisted of sixty-two males, since he also had eight sons. There was an additional reason why G-d brought these blessings upon Oved Edom's family. They helped clear up a common fallacy that regarded the Ark. The Jewish people used to complain how there are three holy objects which cause them to die. There were three reasons for this, the first was the incense (ketores) that caused the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu. This brought the demise of Korach and his followers, who offered it to G-d. The second reason was that since the Pelishtim held the Ark, they suffered a plague. It also killed many Jews in Bais Shemesh because they didn't accord it appropriate reverence when it was returned. It also caused the death of Uzzah.

The third reason was Moses's staff rained destruction upon the Egyptians, both in Egypt and at the Red Sea. G-d wanted to counter these claims, He bestowed blessings upon the Jewish people by means of these three selfsame objects: The first one being Aaron was able to stop a fatal plague by burning fires. This is in Bamidbar 17:13. The second was Oved Edom's family was blessed with new arrivals on account of the Ark. The third was the staff Moses used, causing life-giving water to flow from a rock. This is found in Shemot 17:5. In each of these instances the Jewish people became aware that the object involved was not intrinsically destructive. Instead, it had turned into an agent of punishment only because of people's sins. King David got a report about the good fortune that had befallen the home of

Oved Edom. David was embarrassed when he realized that the previous calamities had been caused by his carelessness, which could have been avoided.

Actually, this was why Oved Edom was named only after the Ark stayed in his home. This meant that he got the name Oved for serving G-d in the proper way. He got the name Edom, because King David's face had become so red with shame when he was told how the Ark had brought blessings as a result. Edom is similar to the term adom in Hebrew it translates to the color red. This was why King David was encouraged to attempt again the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem. The Ark takes a journey for the second time to Jerusalem. ONce again the king assembles the elders of the Jewish Court, the noblemen, the kohanim and leviyim to accompany the Ark. This procession differs vastly from the first one. King David makes sure to warn the leaders of the kohanim and the leviyim. He said, "Prepare yourselves for the exalted occasion of carrying the Ark! The first time, G-d punished us.

It was because we had sinned. This time, the leviyim bore the Ark upon their shoulders. This was required by Jewish law and the former spirit of levity had been replaced by one of solemn respect for the Ark. The leviyim played music, there were shofaros that sounded to lend awe to the occasion. After every six paces, King David sacrificed an ox and a fat sheep. He did this on a temporarily erected altar. After he had done this six times, the leviyim offered seven oxen and seven rams. There was a special reason for this procedure, on a simple level, we may explain that every six steps King David was thanking G-d. He was thanking Him for no calamity happening. In the past, Uzzah had died after taking six steps towards the Ark. According to another explanation, the Jews were thanking G-d by means of the sacrifices for His assistance for the leviyim miraculously didn't feel the weight of the Ark upon their shoulders.

Instead, the Ark was transporting itself. The seven oxen and seven rams were offered after every six times, this was a symbolic significance. There is an explanation, they alluded to G-d's great Name of forty-two letters which rested upon the Ark and imbued it with holiness. There were no disturbances to mar this joyful occasion. The Ark didn't bother its bearers as it had done the first time. In order to express David's deed humility in the presence of G-d's Presence, he didn't dress in his royal robes nor did he conduct himself like a king. Before G-d, David felt as lowly as any ordinary Jewish citizen of his kingdom. The haftara stresses the point by saying, the verse of the haftara describes how the Ark was brought to Jerusalem. It was not referred to him as "King David," but rather as just "David."

Instead of his royal robes, the king was wearing simple clothes, though beautiful, white linen garments, such as were customarily worn by the tzaddikim. As always, David's head was crowned with tefillin. With his arm he cradled the small Sefer Torah which was the constant companion of every Jewish king. With his arm he was cradling the Sefer Torah. It was the constant companion of every Jewish King. He clapped his hands and made an announcement. "The Master is exalted!" This exclamation reminded those who felt spiritually uplifted by the closeness of the Ark not to indulge in philosophical thoughts beyond their ken. David was feeling ecstatic at being able to perform the wonderful mitzva of restoring the Ark to its rightful home; Jerusalem. He didn't walk along the route of the Ark; he danced the entire way.

With total disregard to his personal dignity, he bounded up and down. He was contorting his body in the manner of a young dancer. He did not want to be restricted by his long robe and sleeves, he rolled them both up, this way he was baring his heels and arms. He was jumping and twisting so much, his golden

ornaments tinkled a happy tune. He was expressing his joy, David wished to divert the crowd's focus from the Ark. He preferred that the people should stare at him and not at the Ark, he didn't want their attitude and thoughts to be irreverent or inappropriate. He couldn't bear to have anyone to allow for punishment to happen on this joyous day. When the procession arrived in Jerusalem, the women were observing from the rooftops and their windows. One of those women was Michal. That was David's wife and she was shocked to see her husband was wildly capering about with bare arms and feet.

David was the king after all! She felt mortified, to her David looked ridiculous! She did not understand why was making a spectacle of himself?! She didn't understand why he didn't walk in a dignified manner in front of the Ark as befitted royalty?! Once the Ark had been deposited in its tent, David blessed all of the people. To enhance their joy, the king presented every man and woman who attended with a challah, a portion of meat, and a flask of wine. Then he told everyone goodbye and came home. He wanted to bless his family and celebrate with them. David came home and found his wife to be upset with him. Queen Michal was standing at the palace gates, literally barring the king from entering. Her welcome dripped with sarcasm. She instantly started a rant with him saying, "What a dignified impression you made on the people today! Now I can truly see the difference between the family of my father Shaul and yourself!

The members of my family were scrupulous in conducting themselves with dignity and modesty at all times. Not one of them would think of baring a heel or toe in public; not even in private. It was true that King Shaul was noted for his outstanding modesty, even when he was alone. "Now if you had done your dance behind closed doors, it would have been so terrible, but you went and made a fool of yourself in front of all these maids!" Michal was referring to the Jewish women as "maids." She did this out of contempt for them. Retaining his composure, King David reprimanded his wife sternly. He said, "I did it in honor of my great Master, G-d!" He continued saying, "I feel humbled in His presence. My own honor is of no consequence, if necessary, I would have gone to even greater extremes in demeaning myself before Him! David asked Michal, "Why was your father - whose conduct was superior to mine in your opinion - rejected by G-d, while I was chosen to replace him?!

From this you may infer that your father's family was mistaken in placing its honor above the Almighty's! It was so wrong of you to refer to the Jewish women as 'maids', they are all as righteous as our matriarchs Sara, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah. I only wish that my share in the world to come would equal theirs! The less regard I have for my honor and the more regard I have for G-d, the more they will respect me." Michal was punished by G-d, she never gave birth to any children after this incident. King David conducted himself humbly throughout his life, despite having a dazzling career. He stated in Tehillim 31:1), "G-d, my heart didn't feel proud when the prophet Samuel anointed me as king; nor did my eyes look haughtily - when I overpowered the giant, Golyas, and saved the Jewish people; nor did I conduct myself with pride - when the throne was restored to me after Avshalom's rebellion. I didn't take revenge on those traitors, neither was I too proud to inquire from Achitofel, in the presence of all of the Jewish people, about a Jewish law which was concealed from me.

This happened when I brought the Ark to Jerusalem the first time. When I didn't hesitate to act like a commoner in Your honor. I didn't accompany the Ark in my royal robes in the capacity of a king." G-d tells King David that he is not to build the Bais Hamikdash. As far as King David was concerned, the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem was just the first step of a grand plan: the building of a Bais Hamikdash

for G-d. King David assumed that he would be the one to accomplish this noble task. He waited until he had subdued the Pelishtim who once attacked the Jews. They had established peace, David was ready to fulfill the mitzva of building a Bais Hamikdash, as the Torah commands (Devarim 12:10, 11): "When G-d will let you rest from all of your enemies around you, so that you will dwell securely, then you shall bring all I command you today... in the place where G-d, your G-d, will let His Name rest. King David summoned the prophet Nassan, he told him, "It's not right that I should live in a palace made of cedar beams, while the holy objects of the Mishkan are stored in a temporary tent in Givon.

The Ark is in a tent in Jerusalem. Let me find out where to build G-d's house, so that I may fulfill this mitzva. Nassan had not received a prophecy from G-d regarding the matter. Assuming that G-d would agree or possibly that King David had spoken with ruach hakodesh. He replied, "Do as you see fit, for G-d is with you!" It was that very night, Nassan got a Heavenly message that was the opposite from what he originally told David. The message was to "be quick and dispatch messengers to David letting him know not to build the Bais Hamikdash! Do not delay!

David, my faithful servant, is known for the swiftness with which he carries out every task. Before the day is over, he will have hired workers, whom he will then have to dismiss and he is likely to vow to abstain from eating and drinking certain foods and drinks, up until the job is done.

Then David would be forced to endure the humiliation of having to ask the Jewish Court to annul his vow and the public will know that he was not allowed to build the Bais Hamikdash. G-d said, "Tell my servant David the following: Do you assume you have been chosen to build a Bais Hamikdash for My residence?! I asked none of the judges before you to do so. I was content to dwell in a tent, since the proper time for a permanent dwelling had not yet arrived. Do not overstep your limit.

Be happy with the numerous kindnesses I have already bestowed upon you: I elevated you from 'the sheep pen'. This meant that David was once a shepherd and now he had become a ruler over G-d's people. David certainly deserved his high position, for as a shepherd, he went out of his way to find suitable pasture for each and every sheep. G-d was protecting David wherever he went, saving him from Shaul's deadly designs and destroying all of David's enemies. Finally, G-d had caused David's name or rank among the most distinguished names on earth.. These words included a Divine promise that David's name would forever be included by the Jewish people in their prayers, just as they mention the names of the "distinguished ones on earth." These words included a Divine promise that David's name would forever be included by the Jewish people in their prayers, just as they mention the names of the "distinguished ones on earth" - Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Our forefathers are mentioned in the first blessing of our daily shemoneh esrey prayer, and King David's name appears at the conclusion of one of the blessings after the haftara. In it G-d is referred to as "the Shield of David." King David was accorded this honor since he achieved a level of closeness to G-d, which resembled that of the forefathers. The words, "I will cause your name to rank among the most distinguished names on earth," also contain a promise to every individual Jew, as explained by the following Midrash. Rav Yochanan taught, "Whoever studies Torah in the present world, will find no rest in the World to Come. Instead, he will be taken from one Bais Hamidrash to the next - from that of Shaim and Aiver to those of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Then that person will go to the Bais Hamidrash of Moses and Aaron. How long is it going to take for this to continue? Until that person will become a Torah giant, where they will learn all of the secrets of the Torah

. As most distinguished Torah-scholars on earth.” The greater a Jew’s commitment to Torah learning in this world, the higher will be his level of revelation in the World to Come. G-d

continued to instruct Nassan the prophet in His message to King David. That message consisted of these words. “I was furthermore kind to you by firmly planting in the land My people, Israel, during your time of being in power. They are no longer oppressed by enemies, as they were in the time of the judges. I also informed you that the Jewish royal line will come from you. “Let it suffice that I did you all these favors! Don’t demand to build the Bais Hamikdash, too! I am letting you know, though, that after you have lived out your full life span, I will establish your son’s kingdom, and He will be chosen to build a House for My Name.

I will establish his throne forever. This will be the Davidic dynasty may be interrupted during the exile, but only for a short while. I will be to your future son like a loving father, and he will be to Me like a cherished son, whom the father punishes mercifully when he sins. His punishment will not be, as it were, a severe beating with a cane, instead a light lash. This way to ensure that it will be tolerable. My kindness will never depart from him completely, as it did when Shaul sinned and lost his right to the throne. When G-d spoke about the son’s future sins, he was hinting at Shlomo’s mistakes in marrying wives, accumulating gold and silver, and owning horses. He did all of this in excess of what the Torah allowed. As a result of this, G-d would permit enemies to rise up against Shlomo, such as Hadad the Edomite and Rezon ben Elyada of Damesek.

Furthermore, the shahid and Ashmadai would banish Shlomo from his throne. Actually king David was not yet informed which of his sons would be allowed to build the Bais Hamikdash. David did realize, though, that it wouldn’t be Avshalom nor would it be Adoniyahu. He knew this because Nassan referred to a son who was yet to be born. Later on, when the prophet Nassan sent King David a message that G-d was adding the name “Yedidya”. The name means Friend of G-d. This name was added to Shlomo’s name and King David understood that Shlomo would be his successor. Shlomo would be the one to build the Bais Hamikdash. Nassan’s prophecy concluded with the confirmation, David’s family and thorne will be firmly established forever. The reason for this was because David desired to build G-d’s eternal house, measure for measure, David’s royal house will exist forever.

The next day, Nassan relayed the entire prophecy to David. Actually this was embarrassing for Nassan, for it contradicted his initial response. That was for King David would certainly be allowed to build the Bais Hamikdash. The verse refers to Nassan’s prophecy as a vision, for it had bearings upon the distant future, until the era of Mashiaich. In the haftara there is a discussion of why King David was denied permission to build the Bais Hamikdash. G-d declares to David, “Do you think you may build a House for My residence?!” No reason is cited for the rejection of David’s request, but there is a verse in Divrai Hayamim 1 in 22:8, that gives further clarification. G-d told King David, “You may not build a House for My name, for you have shed much blood on the earth before Me.” G-d was talking about the waging wars David had against his enemies.

The haftara gives a midrash about David. When King David heard this reply, he was pondering in a sad manner. He came up with the conclusion that he had been found unworthy of building the Bais Hamikdash because of his bloodshed. He shared this with G-d, who told him in a

consoling way, not exactly. I swear, all the blood that you shed is considered in My eyes like the blood of sacrifices. G-d was referring to the war waged in honor of Him and how David destroyed G-d's enemies. David was pleading with G-d, "Master of the universe, if that is the case, why may I not build the Bais Hamikdash?" G-d responded that it had been revealed to Him that the Jewish people would one day sin. It would be on that occasion G-d would vent His anger on the Jewish people, in this way He would be saving the Jews. If the Bais Hamikdash would be built by you David, however, it would be indestructible. David asked, Would You not rather have Your holy, beautiful House last forever?

To that G-d said, No I must allow My House to be destroyed in order that the Jewish people can survive. As interpreted by the above phrase, "You have shed much blood," is not meant to be derogatory. Instead, it is highly complimentary. How does it explain the indestructibility of David's work? According to the mystical teachings of the Torah, David "had the soul of the first man, Adam." He was potentially capable of atoning for Adam's sin and accomplishing Mashiach's task. The name "Adam" hints at this; it contains the initial letters of Adam-David Mashiach. By eliminating G-d's enemies, King David was akin to Mashiach. A Bais Hamikdash built by his hand would therefore have been "Mashiach's Bais Hamikdash" - with such a degree of holiness that no human being could have ever destroyed it.

When G-d told David that he had shed much blood, He was implying that David rendered a great service in uprooting G-d's enemies. As a matter of fact, the foundations of the Bais Hamikdash which were later laid by David sank into the earth, never to be touched by the enemy's hand. Tragically, many Jews mistakenly assumed that if King David was not allowed to build the Bais Hamikdash, he must be deficient in some respect. It didn't occur to them that it was precisely his greatness that rendered him unfit for this task. Consequently, some of them adopted the habit of taunting him. In what way did some Jews attempt to make life miserable for King David? They would pass under his palace windows and call up. They would ask, "When will the Bais Hamikdash finally be built? We can hardly wait to get up to the House of G-d! If only King David's reign would be over so that his son, who is to build the Bais Hamikdash, would rule over us.

King David, far from becoming offended, declared in Tehillim 122:1 how happy he was when they said to him let us go to the House of G-d. King David was so humble, that he totally ignored the people's opinion of him personally. His heart was so dedicated to G-d, that he was gladdened to see how the people desired closeness to G-d through the Bais Hamikdash. G-d compensated David for his suffering with comforting assurances. He said, I would rather have one day of your Torah-study than a thousand sacrifices which your son Shlomo will offer to Me in the future! Our Sages cite two further reasons why King David's wish to build the Bais Hamikdash wasn't granted. G-d said to King David, "You placed your own honor before Mine. You decided to build a Bais Hamikdash after being settled in a palace made of cedar beams. Your son Shlomo, on the other hand, will regard My honor before his own. He will first construct the Bais Hamikdash and then think about his own palace.

King David set aside gold and silver for the Bais Hamikdash. Later when there was a famine in the land of Israel, the king refused to distribute these treasures for sustenance of the starving masses. This was why G-d didn't want him to build the Bais Hamikdash with them. Shlomo also didn't make use of them. When G-d said to David, you have shed much blood, he alluded to the sin of David having shed blood of the poor people he failed to sustain. Besides the above Midrashic reasons, we can explain simply that one of the necessary conditions for building the Bais Hamikdash had not yet been fulfilled, namely that

of attaining total peace and security in the land. King David was under the impression that he had vanquished all of his enemies, but he had only achieved major victories over the Pelishtim. For the rest of David's life, he continued to wage wars against the surrounding nations.

It was not until King Shlomo had ascended the throne, that there was complete peace. King David spent a great deal of his time and energy on preparing the construction of the future Bais Hamikdash. This is why it is forever associated with his name: A song for the dedication of David's House. It's in Tehillim 30:11. When King Shlomo brought the Ark to the Bais Hamikdash, the gates of the kodesh hakodashim would not open to admit it, until Shlomo would mention his father's name. This was why, even though King David was not to be the actual builder of the Bais Hamikdash, his name intimately and eternally linked with it.

We learn of a moral from the haftara, it's all about how mitzvos are to be performed. Rambam cites King David as the example, par excellence of a Jew who served G-d out of love: "The joy a person feels while performing a mitzva and the love for G-d who commanded it, are in themselves a great service... One who considers himself lowly is indeed great and honored; such a man serves G-d out of love, as David said, 'I would demean myself even more and regarding myself as low in my eyes...' (Samuel 2, 6:22) There is no greatness and honor in existence other than rejoicing before G-d. One of the responsibilities of parents is to encourage children to experience joy and satisfaction in performing mitzvas instead of fleeting "pleasures" that are fashionable in today's society. Our world is obsessed with pleasure-seeking. How, though, are we to understand the inverse ratio of happiness to material surplus and recourse to excitement provided by all types of entertainment and mind-altering substances?

Where is the bliss promised by contemporary life-style? Why the need for the record number of self-help books currently on the market? Know that the human soul is eternal and therefore hungers for the lasting satisfaction of the spiritual. Ephemeral, temporary pleasures are mere distractions; they can never truly satisfy the soul. After the "high" is gone, the soul's hunger remains painfully apparent. It can only be satisfied by the true and lasting pleasure that is engendered by closeness to G-d.

Torah-study and mitzvos which are performed for the sake of Heaven and in a spirit of goodwill with the intent of giving G-d pleasure (so-to-speak) serve a dual purpose. Besides actually "making Him happy," they provide the soul with everlasting satisfaction and happiness. This happiness, though, is not achieved if mitzvos are performed mechanically, by rote. It is the parents' responsibility to make the performance of every mitzva in the household enjoyable. One way to do this is by studying the Jewish laws pertaining to the mitzva, so that it may be fulfilled correctly, down to every detail, in the best manner possible and in a spirit of joy, even ecstasy.

Haftara Tazria

This will cover the story of the prophet Elisha curing Na'aman's Tzaras. It's found in the book of Kings 2 4:42-44 and 5:1-19. During certain years the parshiyos Tzaria and Metzora are read together on one Shabbat. This particular haftara is when these parshas are read separately. If the two parshiyos are read together, the haftara is that of Metzora. In summary, Elisha has students who are miraculously satiated with tiny portions of food. It's in verse Kings 5:1-2. There is a Jewish maid servant who advises Na'aman to consult the prophet Elisha for a cure for his tzara'as. Na'aman prepares to travel to the Jewish king in Israel.

Elisha advises Na'aman to immerse herself in the Jordan River. After initially refusing, Na'aman follows Elisha's advice and is cured. He accepts G-d's authority upon himself and wishes to reward Elisha. Elisha refuses Na'aman's gift. Na'aman requests earth from Israel so that he may build an altar for G-d in Aram. This haftara consists of two parts. The second part tells how the prophet Elisha cured Na'aman. Na'aman was an Aramian general of tzara'as. That is a skin disease that resembles leprosy.

It obviously relates to parsha Tazria, wherein are enumerated the laws concerning a Jew who has tzara'as and how the kohen helps him. It should be clear, however, that whereas the kohen's duty was to inspect the symptoms of the affected person, declare the metzora meaning either "pure" or "impure", and later supervise the purification process (If the symptoms of impurity had disappeared). Healing was not part of his job. Elisha the prophet, on the other hand, did heal Na'aman in the Haftara. There is nevertheless a common denominator between the two, for the kohen would also admonish the person who is not pure to do teshuva. As we will read, in order to cure Na'aman, the prophet, Elisha likewise chose a method that would inspire him to mend his ways. More difficult to discern is the relevance of the first part of the haftara to the parsha. The haftara tells of a man who brought Elisha a gift of bread during the years of famine.

Elisha served this bread to his students. Miraculously, a small quantity sufficed to satiate them all. Maybe this episode was included in the haftara in order to contrast it with the other, more major, part. It illustrates that it was customary to bring gifts to a prophet. As a rule, Elisha accepted them. This was different with his firm refusal to accept a gift from Na'aman. Later in the haftara we will learn Elisha's reasons for not accepting Na'aman's gift. The first part of the haftara also underscores Elisha's generosity. Right away he ordered that his personal gift be distributed among his students. His character is the antithesis of Na'aman's. Na'aman was an egotistical general of Aram, as well as of Gaichazi, who was a greedy servant of Elisha's. The prophet Elisha brings blessing upon the food. In the time of the evil king Yehoram ben Achav who ruled over Israel there were seven years of famine. At the time Israel was the kingdom of the Ten Tribes to the north.

The prophet Elisha had two thousand and two hundred students. He assumed the responsibility of providing for them all. Generosity of this magnitude was quite common back then. The Gemara tells us that in Rav's yeshiva, at the conclusion of lectures, a meal would be served to two thousand and four hundred students. Rav Hunna lectured to eighteen thousand students. Thirteen of those were interpreters and they were required to explain his words to the student body, and Rav Hunna fed them all. Rava and Rabbi Yosef supported four hundred homeless students. During the years of the famine, Elisha miraculously managed to provide for his students. The haftara starts out with an example of this. Due to the famine, there was no new crop of wheat in Israel during the month of Nissan. It was at this time that wheat usually ripened.

Only in the fertile region of Ba'al Shalisha, which belonged to the tribe of Efrayim, did some grain ripen. It was merely barley and it was a very small amount. There was a righteous individual from that area. He decided to present to the prophet the first bread that was baked with flour. It was from the new harvest. He traveled to Shomron with twenty-one loaves of barley bread. He also had some unhulled, tender kernels of grain. This verse describes his gifts as the first fruits. It was to teach that supporting Torah-scholars and their students ranked equally with bringing first fruits to the Bais Hamikdash. The

donor had intended the gift to be for Elisha personally. Elisha immediately commanded his servant, Gaichazi, to serve this food to the students!

Gaichazi was an outstanding Torah-student, but he was deficient in fear of Heaven and positive character traits. He asked if he should serve one loaf of bread for each hundred students?! He asked this in a sarcastic tone. Elsiha had two thousand and two hundred students. The man had brought the equivalent of twenty-two loaves. There were twenty-one loaves plus enough grain to bake another loaf, so the ratio of bread to the students was one to a hundred. Elsiha told Gaichazi to not worry and just give the students the bread. They would eat and have leftovers! Gaichazi did as he was told. Each student got a tiny piece of bread, just a little bit more than a kezayis. As Elisha had foretold, there was a blessing in the food. After eating a kezayis, every student felt so satisfied that he even left some over. Shortly, thereafter, Elisha performed another miracle. This is related in the remainder of the haftara. There is a Jewish girl that advises Na'aman. The king of Aram which was contemporary Syria accorded great honor to his great General Na'aman.

Not only did the king respect Na'aman's military skills, but he was also appreciative of the general's instrumental role in a victory over the Jewish people in the battle at Ramos Gilad.

Na'aman had mortally shot his arrow at an unidentified Jewish nobleman, who turned out to be Achav. He was the king of Yisrael, father of Yehoram during whose rule this episode took place. It was later that Na'aman commanded bands of marauders that invaded Israel. One of their captives happened to be a young Jewish girl. Na'aman took her home to be his wife's maid. Suddenly Na'aman's brilliant military career as well as his life were in jeopardy. This was because he was stricken with a dreadful disease called tzara'as. It was known as a kind of leprosy. Na'aman deserved to get leprosy for two reasons. Tzara'as is a punishment for people who have a lot of pride. Na'aman was extremely humiliated to be stricken with leprosy.

The second reason was his punishment for having captured a Jewish girl. Na'aman was haughty, he deserved to suffer from leprosy. It was at this time, the kingdom of Israel was ruled by an idol worshiping king. His name was Yehoram ben Achav. Many Jews lived in ignorance and neglect of a Torah lifestyle. The family of that particular girl was Torah observant. Even the young girl was acquainted with the complicated laws of leprosy. When her master was stricken with this condition, she told her mistress, "No one knows more about leprosy than us Jews. This is not a natural physical disease: rather, it is caused by Divine providence. A Jewish leper is isolated outside the city and examined by the kohen. If the white lesions disappear, he must undergo a special purification process.

The leper must immerse his body and his clothes in a mikvah. Then he will start counting seven clean days and he immersed himself once again on the seventh day. On the eighth day, he also offers sacrifices according to his financial means and immerses again.. I assure you that not a single doctor in Aram will be able to cure Na'aman, because this is not a medical problem. Na'aman has only one hope: let him visit G-d's messenger in Shomron and humbly entreat him to cure him, and the prophet will certainly do so." The Jewish girl understood that Na'aman's arrogance was a possible cause of him having leprosy. She hinted that humility would be required for the cure. He would have to travel personally to the prophet and act humbly in his presence.

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Jewish girl's advice was given in honor of G-d. She wanted to prove to the heathens among whom she now lived that their beliefs were false. She wanted to prove that it was only G-d who was the One True G-d. Na'aman does take the Jewish girl's advice. Na'amana's wife promptly informed her husband of the Jewish girl's counsel and he repeated it to the king. The king of Aram said it wouldn't be a problem and they would arrange for the Jewish prophet to heal him. The king of Aram told Na'aman to not go directly; he may refuse to treat you. I will give you a letter of recommendation to the king of Israel, so that he can command the prophet to heal you. The king of Aram assumed that Yehoram, king of Israel was on good terms with the prophet Elisha. How was he to know that Yehoram refused to hear the prophet's continued reproof and had severed all contact with him? The king's antipathy to Elisha was so violent that he denied Elisha's Divine power to perform miracles, even though it was common knowledge. Na'aman rode out to Israel in style. His entourage consisted of numerous servants, horses, and chariots. The chariots were loaded with chests containing a vast fortune.

There were ten kikar of silver and six thousand gold pieces. He also packed ten changes of clothing. Maybe he intended all this to be a gift for the prophet. It is also possible that he misunderstood the Jewish girl's description of the purification process and thought that in his capacity as a rich man, he would be required to buy expensive sacrifices. Since a rich man offers a more expensive sacrifice than a pauper. Then there was the need to change his garments more than once, because a leper's garments become impure. Upon his arrival in Israel, Na'aman immediately proceeded to the royal palace, where he presented to Yehoram, king of Israel, the letter from the king of Aram. Yehoram read the request: "I have sent you my servant Na'aman, so that you may cure him of his leprosy." It was below the dignity of the king of Aram to appeal directly to King Yehoram to approach the prophet - who in the non-Jewish king's eyes was but an ordinary Jew - for help. This was why he kept the contents of the letter vague. He was confident that Yehoram would understand that he was supposed to consult the prophet. King Yehoram's thought process, however, was entirely different.

He regarded the letter as a ruse on the part of Aeram - a convenient pretext to begin a war against the kingdom of Israel. He was tearing his garments in grief and fright, Yehoram was lamenting about. He was saying, "What does the king of Aram want from me?! Am I G-d Who kills and revives that he sends me a message to heal a man from leprosy?! One who has leprosy is considered to be like "dead." This is why healing him from this dreadful disease is considered like resurrecting him from the dead. It is clear that he wants to begin a fight! Maybe King Yehoram's fear was aggravated by the repulsive sight of Na'aman, his father's murderer.

Elisha heard about the commotion in the royal palace. He sent a message to King Yehoram, "Why do you tear your garments?! Let the general come to me and discover that there is, indeed, a prophet among the Jewish people! Elisha did intend to heal Na'aman in order to cause a kiddush to G-d. He wanted to proclaim to all of Aram that the Shechina rested upon the Jewish people.

prophet Elisha gives counsel. Na'aman received Elisha's message. He left the palace, escorted by his servants. As they approached the prophet's neighborhood, he ordered for them to stay behind and wait for him. He rode unaccompanied to the entrance of the prophet's house. He remained the saddle; in his arrogance, he did not consider it befitting to walk to the prophet. Instead, he waited on horseback for the prophet to come out to him. Elisha knew that Na'aman would have to learn to be

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humble before he could be cured. That was why he did not go out personally to Na'aman. Instead he sent out a messenger to relay his word. Elisha's non-direct involvement would also prove to Na'aman that his cure was a Divine miracle and had no connection whatsoever with either natural or "magical processes." The prophet's messenger informed Na'aman, "Go and immerse yourself seven times in the Jordan River. This will heal your flesh and you will become purified from leprosy.

Na'aman was deeply offended with the style, as well as the content, of the message. He had expected for the prophet to come out and greet him. As to the cure - it sounded too ordinary, for he had anticipated something more complex, possibly even exotic. Na'aman turned away in disgust from Elisha's home. "I thought Elisha would have the courtesy to treat me with respect, as befits my status," he thundered. As for the cure, why doesn't he use the same method as all medicine men who call the name of their god and wave their hand back and forth over the lesions?! Then I would be confident of being healed." "The rivers of Damascus, Amana, and Parpar, are by far superior to those of Israel. How often have I bathed even in their waters without results! How can the Jordan River succeed where they have failed?" Na'aman hoped that his ranting and raving would force the prophet Elisha to step outside and talk to him. Since Elisha, however, stayed adamantly indoors, Na'aman spurred his horse into a furious gallop and rode off in a rage.

The Midrash shares reasons behind the prophet's advice. Elisha proposed this particular cure. The simple reason was Elisha was planning to entreat G-d to perform a miracle and cure Na'aman. Since tzaddikim don't challenge G-d to perform open miracles, Elisha gave the miracle a semblance of a natural cure. There are certain waters that do, in fact, heal various diseases. That is why Elisha thought it was best to advise Na'aman to immerse himself in the Jordan River, even though this would not in itself bring about his cure. On a deeper level, Elisha was trying to hint to Na'aman that his only hope lay in "washing himself spiritually, cleansing himself of his personal pride and his belief in idols. Water generally symbolizes humility, for it always flows downwards.

The trait of humility is particularly implicit in the name of the River Jordan, which in Hebrew is derived from the root to descend. Immersing seven times would remind Na'aman of the seven days during which a leper purifies himself, a reflection which would also be conducive to acquiring the trait of humility. The third reason had to do with the opinion, Elisha came up with this particular cure from a prophecy, which he understood more fully by expounding certain Torah verses. There was a divine message consisting of just two words: "Laich tahair." This translates to Go, Purify. It is from this that Elisha deduced the details of Na'aman's purification process. Elisha calculated the numerical value of the two words of Go, Purify.

numerical value was 264. This is also the numerical value of Jordan and this is why he concluded that the purification process was to take place in the waters of the Jordan River. His theory was corroborated by a brilliant inference from three different verses, all of which begin and end with the letter Nun. In Vayikra verse 13:9 it talks about the laws of having leprosy. In Bamidbar verse 32:32 it says "Nachnu na'avor chalutzim meaiver layardain." In the book of Devarim verse 18:15 it says: "Navi Mikirbecha... ailav tishme'un." This translates to G-d will bring forth from you a prophet... listen to him." Elisha integrated these disparate verses to reach a novel interpretation which is, a man whose name

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begins and ends with the letter Nun (Na'aman), will one day suffer from leprosy. He will consult the prophet for a cure. He will be accompanied by many horses and wagons. He will be equipped with an entourage and he will be healed through immersion in the Jordan River. The Jordan River will be mentioned and also the breadth of the River Jordan is fifty amos. It is matching the numerical value of the letter Nun.

Elisha deduced that Na'aman had to immerse himself in the Jordan River seven times from two facts. Firstly, the kohen purifies the person who is impure by sprinkling oil seven times towards the klodesh kodashim. This is in the book of Vayikra 14:16. Secondly, the word "water" is mentioned seven times in the parsha of tzara'as in Vayikra 14:5-52. This was why Elisha based the purification process of Na'aman on verses of Torah and utilized an original method of interpreting those verses. Na'aman does teshuva. His servants thought their master was wrong to squander this golden opportunity to be healed. "Even if the prophet had told you to do something really hard in order to get rid of your sickness, it would be worth your while to listen to him." This is what his servants told Na'aman. "Now that he has advised you of such an easy procedure of immersing yourself in the Jordan in order to become pure, what harm can there be in trying?" Na'aman now began to do his teshuva process in earnest.

Na'aman had never in his life listened to the opinion of any lower-ranking person. He decided to humble himself and accept his servants' advice. The heavenly decree of his suffering from leprosy was abolished, because G-d saw his change of heart. He immersed his body in the Jordan seven times, after which his leprosy miraculously disappeared. Na'aman was overjoyed when he saw that his skin was clear. He felt reborn and immediately he believed in the power of G-d and accepted upon himself the Seven Noachide Laws. He became a Gair Toshav, it means a gentile who neither serves idols nor violates any of the other mitzvos required of him. Na'aman returned to Elisha, his conduct contrasted sharply with that of his first visit. He no longer stayed seated on his horse.

Instead he stood respectfully before the prophet, who received him personally. Na'aman proclaimed, "Now I know that there is no god on earth other than the Jewish G-d. I was wrong in not honoring you before. Please allow me to make up for it now and accept a gift from your servant!" Elisha replied, "I swear by G-d, Whom I serve, that I will not accept it." Elisha was afraid that Na'aman's money had been obtained by dealing in objects related to idol worship, and was therefore forbidden to be used. If Elisha had accepted his gift it would lessen the kiddush G-d in the eyes of Na'aman's servants. They would consider Elisha to be a kind of "medicine man" who receives remuneration for his services.

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Elisha was anxious to demonstrate to everyone that Na'aman had been healed by a Divine miracle and not by some natural or magical power that he possessed. Na'aman continued to pressure the prophet, but Elisha remained steadfast. He even took an oath against accepting the money for the purpose of ensuring that his resolve did not weaken. Na'aman saw how adamant Elisha was in accepting his gift. Na'aman came up with a different request. He said, please allow your servant to take some of the holy earth of Israel back with me. I need the amount that the mules can carry. With it, I wish to build an altar for G-d in Aram, for I will no longer serve gods I used to worship. It is not clear why permission was needed to remove some earth from a public space. Maybe Na'aman specifically wanted earth from Elisha's private property, feeling it had been imbued with special sanctity, since it belonged to a tzaddik. Na'aman had just accepted the seven mitzvos of the People of Noach.

Na'aman didn't want to transgress the prohibition against theft by taking earth without permission. Na'aman added, "Please entreat G-d to forgive your servant for the following sin: When my master, the king of Aram, visits the temple of the god Rimmon, he leans on my arm. When he bows to the god, I am compelled to bow together with him. This will merely be an external motion; in my heart I believe only in G-d. Maybe G-d pardon your servant for this offense." To this Elisha responded, "Go in peace." He didn't forbid Na'aman to act outwardly like an idol worshiper, since Na'aman was a gentile and he was not obligated to fulfill the mitzva of kiddush Hashem. A Jew under such circumstances would have had to sacrifice his life rather than pretend to serve idols. The story of Na'aman is not finished here, it will be found in the next haftara called, Metzora. In conclusion of the haftara of Tazria, Elisha has great miracles. Before Eliyahu died, his disciple Elisha requested of him, "Please let double your spirit rest upon me!"

G-d fulfilled Elisha's request literally. He allowed him to perform twice as many miracles as Eliyahu once had. There are eight well-known miracles that Jews associate with Eliyahu. We know of sixteen that Elisha performed, two of each type. There is a list of these in the haftara of Tazria.

These are Elisha's miracles from the start of his career up to our haftara. The first miracle was Elisha splitting the waters of the Jordan by striking them with his master's coat. The second was he sweetened the undrinkable waters of Jericho by throwing salt into them. The third was Elisha caused bears to appear and according to some opinions, he even caused a forest to appear. This was to punish wicked evil Jews who ridiculed him. The fourth was Elisha who provided water for the Jewish army of the kings Yehoram and Yehoshafat that were stationed in the desert. The fifth miracle was when Elisha miraculously supplied Ovadya's wife with oil. This is in the haftara of Vayaira. The sixth miracle was when Elisha decreed that the Shunamite woman should have a son. The seventh miracle was when Elisha revived the Shunamite woman's son. The eighth miracle was when Elisha was able to neutralize poisonous food by mixing flour into it. The ninth miracle was when Elisha brought blessing upon food so that by eating a small quantity one became satiated. This was mentioned in the beginning of the Tazria haftara. The prophet Eliyahu had performed the miracle of reviving the dead when the son of his hostess, the widow from Tzorfes, fell ill and died. Eliyahu later miraculously restored him to life.

This is found in Kings 1 verse 17:17 through 22. At the same time, his student Elisha revived the son of the Shunamite woman. Where do we find that Elisha performed the miracle of reviving the dead a second time, in fulfillment of the promise that he would be granted "double of Eliyahu's spirit"? That answer is in the haftara of Tazria. One who is stricken with leprosy is considered as if they are dead. By curing Na'aman, Elisha once again had performed the miracle of "reviving the dead." This was the tenth

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of Elisha's miracles. The Midrash asks why did G-d give the prophets Eliyahu and Elisha the ability to perform so many striking miracles?

Both of them served as prophets in the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. Unlike Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu who prophesied for the inhabitants of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes who had to contend with numerous spiritual perils. Their kings were often fanatical idol worshipers. They would encourage their subjects to follow in their sinful ways.

In order to counteract their influence and spur the Jews to do teshuva, G-d allowed them to witness extraordinary miracles through the hands of Eliyahu and Elisha. Both prophets exerted a substantial influence on the Jews. As we read in the Haftara, Elisha had two thousand and two hundred students. They certainly admonished the people not to serve idols and guided them in the way of G-d. The footnotes for this haftara tell us that tzara'as is not identical with leprosy. Tzara'as was a unique skin disease whose purpose was to encourage the Jew's people to do teshuva. The Midrash mentions that occasionally G-d also caused non-Jews to get tzara'as. In the case of Na'aman, the source Rif explains that he had a potential for teshuva, as is evident from the fact that he later became a Gair Toshav. G-d knew that through this affliction he would find the right path in life. In the footnotes for this haftara, Our Sages teach "That there is no subject in the universe which is not found in the Torah."

Besides their literal context, the verses of the Torah can be interpreted to predict past and future events. There is a source called Kol Tzofayich that asks a question about Na'aman. If Na'aman personally experienced such a tremendous miracle, why did he not become a gair tzeddek? This means to ask why he didn't become a full-fledged Jew. One of several answers for this suggests that although it is a characteristic of non-Jews to be more easily influenced than Jews, nevertheless the effect is more superficial. Na'aman was certainly aroused to do teshuva, but he didn't have the stamina to carry it through till the end. Another possible explanation is that he was negatively influenced by observing Elisha's servant, Gaichazi's greed. There is more about this topic in the haftara called Metzora.

Haftara Metzora

There are four lepers that discover the camp of Aram. It is deserted and they report this sensational find to the king, who verifies it. The famine comes to an end and the king's officer does not benefit thereof, as Elisha had prophesied. This week's haftara starts with, there are four people who are considered to be lepers. They are standing at the entrance gate and those words are strongly reminiscent of the central topic of the weekly parsha, tzara'as. The parsha instructs us concerning the laws of the purification of the leper whom the kohen declared to be pure. While the four lepers in this haftara were tragically afflicted with chronic and incurable tzara'as.

We know that sometimes a house is stricken with tzara'as spots because its owner selfishly refuses to share home and hearth with those that are less fortunate than himself. The outbreak of the house: he himself will eventually be stricken unless he mends his ways. The four lepers in this haftara were characterized by self-ishness. Despite their suffering, they obstinately refused to mend their ways. A background to the haftara has to do with Gaichazi. He was Elisha's servant. The events described here are a sequel to last week's haftara. After Elisha had healed Na'aman, the general of Aram, of his tzara'as, the prophet swore, "will not accept any gift from you!" Na'aman and his servants took leave of Elisha and departed to Aram. Elisha's servant, Gaichazi, overheard his master's words, and disagreed. "My master was wrong in declining Na'aman's gift," he said to himself. "I think it would have actually

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been a mitzva for him to accept it, for do not our Sages teach, 'One may not heal a non-Jew without payment'?

I will quickly try to catch up with Na'aman and accept payment from him." Gaichazi, of course, was deceiving himself into thinking that he was performing a mitzva. In reality, Elisha had a precise calculation for refusing payment. It was because he wished to perform a kiddush Hashem by demonstrating clearly that Na'aman's cure came from a Divine miracle rather than by the prophet's healing powers. Gaichazi caught up with Na'aman as he (Na'aman) had not yet gone far from Shomron. When the general realized he was being followed by Elisha's servant, he dismounted from his horse. He asked, "Is all okay? My master has sent me after you. Two students suddenly arrived from Mount Efrayim, and are in urgent need of money and clothing. My master requests that you kindly give them a kikar of silver and two changes of clothing." Recalling Elisha's earlier adamant refusal to accept anything, which the prophet had endorsed with an oath, this quote struck Na'aman as suspicious.

Na'aman had doubts were more or less dispelled by Gaichazi's statement: "I swear that I am telling the truth." "Well, then please take two kikar of silver, instead of one," he urged Gaichazi. After an initial show of reluctance, Gaichazi graciously accepted the offer when Na'aman persisted. Despite the oath, Na'aman was not fully convinced of the validity of the story. He therefore dispatched two of his servants along with Gaichazi, ostensibly to carry the treasure for him. In reality, their mission was to observe whether or not Gaichazi would actually hand over the money to Elisha. However, Gaichazi circumvented detection by dismissing the two servants as soon as the group arrived in the vicinity of the city. He managed to conceal the treasure as well as the clothing. In this way the entire matter would not come to Elisha's attention. When Gaichazi returned to the prophet, Elisha right away asked him, "Where have you been?" Gaichazi replied in an evasive tone.

Elisha had ruach hakodesh and was well aware of all that had happened. He thundered at Gaichazi, "Even though I was (physically) here in Shomron, I know all about your misdeed. You have defrauded Na'aman of money with which you intend to get garments, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, cattle, and maidservants. You disregarded my oath not to accept anything from Na'aman. You have also coveted his belongings. Well, you shall have them, and not just the money! Take his tzara'as! Let it cling to you and your sons as long as you live!" The Midrash asks why did his sons deserve this kind of punishment?

It was because they knew of their father's crime, but didn't say anything. They kept quiet and that is why they are considered to be accomplices. When Gaichazi left Elisha, his body was covered with the white spots of the dreaded tzara'as. The Midrash asks what exactly was Gaichazi's offense that deserved such harsh punishment? He had committed several of the sins that called for the tzara's punishment. The first was a disgrace to G-d, he had desecrated G-d's honor. Elisha had sworn in G-d's Name that he would not accept money. Here Gaichazi had disregarded that oath. The second reason was, for taking a false oath is when Gaichazi swore falsely to Na'aman that Elisha had sent him. The third reason was speaking poorly, on a previous occasion Elisha had sent Gaichazi to revive the child of a woman from Shunam with the aid of his staff. On the way, he mocked his master by expressing skepticism regarding the promised miracle. Even though Gaichazi's punishment was fully deserved, our Sages indicate that Elisha had been overly harsh. He "pushed Gaichazi away with both hands" by sentencing him to lifelong isolation. What he should have done is leave the door open for him to do teshuva.

There was a famine in Shomron. There was no rain that fell in Israel. It was due to the sins of the Jewish people. Produce was scarce back then and the famine had set in. In addition, a new calamity befell the

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Jews. The king of Aram (Syria) was Hadad. He had raided Israel occasionally, now brought his entire army to besiege Shomron, the capital of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. Since the city was completely surrounded by the enemy, the residents were not able to leave in order to get food. Supplies in the city dwindled steadily until they were totally exhausted. The famine was unbearable. All kosher animals had already been consumed. As a last resort, the Jews slaughtered horses and other non-kosher animals, for they were desperate to relieve their hunger pains. The Torah only allows this in life-or-death situations. Even reptiles and crawling animals were killed and devoured. Soon edibles were scarce that a donkey's head which contained very little meat could be obtained only for the exorbitant sum of eighty silver pieces. There was also a measure of pigeons' dung that was valued at five silver pieces. It is not clear what the Jews used the dung for.

According to some commentators, edible kernels could be found in it. There were others who maintain that it was used for fuel, since all their wood had been used up. One day, as King Yehoram was strolling along the city wall of Shomron, a woman appeared before him. She screamed, "Help, my master, the king!" The king assumed that she was desperate for food. He replied in a bitter tone that if G-d does not help you, how can I? Do I have something to give you from the threshing floor or the wine press?" The woman indicated that this had not been her intention; she wished the king to administer justice. He told her to state her case. She said she was having a problem with her friend and she wanted to ask the judge about her case. The women were extremely hungry and wanted to eat their sons. Her friend suggested, 'Let us both eat your son today and tomorrow we will eat mine.' So we slaughtered my son and cooked his flesh and ate it. The following day we slaughtered her son and cooked his flesh. This woman deceived me! She hid her son's flesh so that she will be able to eat it all herself, instead of sharing it with me! I demand justice for that! King Yehoram was shocked. He tore his garments in grief.

It became apparent that the king was doing teshuva, because he was wearing a sackcloth under his royal robes. Yehoram's teshuva, though, was not real. It was superficial, it was a result of the pressure from the famine. If he had done some serious soul-searching, he would have understood that he must destroy the two calves that were officially worshiped in his kingdom as well as the other images found in the land. Instead of admitting that the tragic situation was due to the nation's collective sins, this wicked king blamed it on G-d's prophet. He said Elisha had the power to abolish the famine, he could beg G-d for mercy, but he refrained from doing so. Yehoram said that he swore Elisha's head would no longer be attached to his shoulders by the end of the day! King Yehoram promptly dispatched a henchman to Elisha's home, with orders to execute him. The prophet knew about it because of his ruach hakodesh.

At the time the communal elders were deeply involved in a discussion of Torah matters. Elisha addressed the elders asking, do you see what I see? Know that Yehoram, son of the murderer-king, Achav who killed Navos, is sending someone here to behead me! Please cooperate with me and detain the messenger when he arrives at the door. When the king, who is following, comes, I will talk to the king. King Yehoram's messenger came while Elisha was still speaking. The elders kept him outside, and indeed, the king arrived soon after. The elders then opened the door in his honor. The messenger was not interested in carrying out his bloody mission. He said to the king, "G-d has sent this famine to punish us for our sins. How can we even think of begging Him for relief? If I now stretch forth my hand in murder against His prophet?! The Almighty will certainly not have mercy on us after that!" In a remorseful way the king said, "You are right, my command was uttered out of sheer grief and despair.

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The prophet is not guilty at all. We must do teshuva. The famine is, but the fulfillment of the Torah curse. This is in Devarim 28:13: 'You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters which G-d has given you, in the siege and the oppression which the enemy will oppress you.' These words coming from G-d are meant to let the Jews know He immediately had mercy upon them. He informed Elisha prophetically that the famine was going to end. Elisha told the Jewish people: "Listen to the word of G-d, tomorrow at this time, about 13 pounds of fine flour will be sold at the cheap price of a shekel in the gate of Shomron. Barley will be sold for an even cheaper price, two pounds for one shekel. Elisha had predicted that this would come to pass "tomorrow, at this time." Prophets usually give an exact time for the fulfillment of their words so that when the event comes to pass, it is clear to all that it was brought about by G-d.

It seems that the king would have believed Elisha's words, but the officer who always came with him, skeptically mocked the prediction. He called out that this generation is as sinful as that of the Flood. The flood generation gets a nickname from the Midrash called Mabul. The officer said, its members certainly don't deserve a miracle! Do you think G-d will actually cause food to rain down from heaven for these people?!" Elisha's response to this was that the officer would see it with his own eyes, but the officer would not eat from it! The officer was punished measure for measure for disbelieving that he would not merit to personally enjoy the fulfillment of the prophecy which he questioned.

Anyone who scoffed in Egypt, who didn't believe that Moses had been sent to redeem them, died during the Plague of Darkness and were not privileged to experience the redemption. At the same time, those who deny the revival of the dead, would not merit to arise as promised. The events that we have related thus far, precede those of the haftara that starts at this point. Back to the part of the story where Gaichazi and his sons are in the camp of Aram. As mentioned in this haftara before, there were four men that were struck with tzara'as, a kind of leprosy. They were staying outside of the gate of Shomron and they had been expelled from this walled city in accordance with Torah law. The lepers were not identified by name, maybe because - we will soon see - they performed a meritorious deed which G-d did not want to be attributed openly to the evil people. There is also the reason that it would be a disgrace to G-d if it had ensued from publicizing the fact that Elisha's servant Gaichazi and his sons were lifelong lepers - for that is who the lepers were, according to the Gemara.

Gaichazi's sons said to each other, "Why should we just sit here and wait until we die of hunger?! Even if we were to enter the city, which is permitted in a life-and-death situation, we would perish from lack of food. If we stay here, we are certain to die. There was an alternative to this, they could enter the camp of Aram, the besiegers of their city. If the Aramite soldiers would grant them some food, they would survive; and if they would kill them, they would not have lost anything, for here the sons of Gaichazi would perish from hunger either way. Accordingly, the four men waited for the arrival of dusk, when it would be easier to travel undetected. Then they walked to the outskirts of the camp of Aram. They were surprised to note that it was totally unguarded; not a single sentry was posted around the entire camp. The Midrash asks us readers how could this be explained? It was actually part of G-d's plan. He had performed a miracle: He had caused the Aramite soldiers to hear the clanging and roaring of numerous chariots and horses - a din so tremendous that it stimulated the approach of a vast army.

The Aramite soldiers exclaimed to each other, "The king of Israel must have hired troops from the kings of Chitim and Egypt to attack us!" The soldiers were stricken with panic and were obsessed with only one thought - escaping alive. Abandoning their horses, donkeys and all of their possessions, they

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scurried as fast as they could in the opposite direction to that from which the noise had come from. It is nevertheless surprising that they did not mount their horses for faster escape. Maybe they were hoping to discourage enemy pursuit by diverting their attention to the animals and the spoils. Gaichazi and his sons were cautious as they entered the camp. It struck them as strange that they didn't encounter a single person. They approached the first tent, straining their ears for a voice inside. Not a sound was heard, and so they stealthily entered. The tent was unoccupied but it was well stocked with food, gold, silver, and clothing. The famished men threw themselves at the food and feasted to their hearts' content. When their bellies were full, they didn't stop to consider the desperate plight of their brothers back in Shomron who were still dying from lack of food.

It didn't occur to them to inform the Jews that there was food in the camp of Aram, even though every moment's delay was fatal. Jews were steadily perishing from hunger. No, Gaichazi, and his sons had no such thoughts. Notoriously greedy, they were jubilant upon discovering the treasure left behind in the tent. They grabbed as many valuables as they could. Since they didn't even trust each other, each one sought a hiding spot for his booty. Even after having raided the tent, they were oblivious to the emergency situation in Shomron. All they thought about was how to take possession of even more spoils. They entered the next tent, and rejoiced when they discovered that it too was filled with valuables. This time Gaichazi and his sons didn't bother with the clothing; they were only concentrating on hiding the gold and the silver. Finally, after raiding the second tent, they remembered that they were obligated to inform their fellow Jews of the wondrous happenings in the camp of Aram. They said to each other how they were not acting properly. They decided it would be best to share this good news with their brothers who were back in Shomron. Still, these men here had a lust for money and would have prevailed if not for their fear of punishment.

They thought to wait until the morning then the king would be furious with them and bring them to a trial. They decided to let him know and they believed it was clear a miracle had happened here. They thought the miracle was for the sake of the Jewish people. The Midrash tells us that Gaichazi and his sons were evil and had already wasted precious time. Now, luckily, the fear of being punished made them stop plundering and induced them to walk back to the gate of Shomron. They told the main gatekeeper, "We have just come from the camp of Aram. There is not a soul there! The enemy soldiers left their horses and donkeys tied to their tents. All of their belongings are unguarded here inside! The main gatekeeper relayed the message to the royal palace guards, who passed the message onto the king. King Yehoram verifies the report of Gaichazi and his sons. The report reached the king in the middle of the night. It left King Yehoram feeling confused and he was doubtful. He thought for sure this was a trick of the Aramim. He said this to his ministers. King Yehoram believed that it was a trick, because the Aramim people knew how desperate the Jews were.

The Aramim knew that the Jews were driven by hunger. King Yehoram believed that the Aramim people were hiding in the fields, planning to seize the Jews alive if they were to come into the camp of Aram. It may surprise us that King Yehoram, who knew of Elisha's prophecy the day before, didn't consider the possibility that this was its fulfillment. Maybe the reason for this was simply that the king was roused from his deep sleep. He did not have a fully clear mind. Moreover, Elisha had prophesied, "Tomorrow, at this time... and it was still in the middle of the night. It is more likely, being as evil as he was, Yehoram did not have faith in the prophet's words. Yehoram's ministers debated with each other how to act. Finally, one of them suggested taking five of their surviving horses and sending them with riders to the

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camp of Aram. Even if this scene was staged as a ploy by their enemy. Even if they would kill their riders and horses, the ministers would still be none the worse. Because from their perspective, they would perish from hunger in the city without having a way of getting food. King Yehoram decided to compromise by risking only two riders and horses to investigate this matter.

When the two riders reached the Jordan River, they were met by an incredible sight: strewn all over the wayside were garments and paraphernalia, discarded by the Aramite soldiers in their haste to flee unencumbered. The king's messengers returned, and the good news spread like wildfire. The famished populace didn't wait for royal permission anymore. It surged en masse to the camp of Aram to satisfy its hunger. Afterwards, the people plundered the booty. We have reached the part in the haftara of the fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy. The price of food fell fast. Precisely as Elisha had predicted, a se'a of wheat as well as two sa'a of barley were sold for a shekel in the gate of Shomron. Supervision was required in the market place to ensure that purchases were paid for and that valuables were brought to the king's treasury and not looted. King Yehoram appointed the officer who usually accompanied him to be in charge of the sales. The gate of Shomron was overcrowded. There were throngs of Jews eagerly pushing forward to buy wheat and other staples after all the years of deprivation.

The officer fell down in the jostling crowd; he was inadvertently trampled upon by the masses and he died. Each of Elisha's predictions had now been fulfilled exactly as he thought it would. The Midrash tells us that the officer deserved this tragic end for three reasons. One was on the simplest level, he was a Jew who did not believe in G-d. He denied the truth of Elisha's prophecy. Just as he "stepped on" meaning he despised G-d's word, so he was trampled on in public. This happened in front of the king and nobles, cutting into a conversation between the king and the prophet without having been consulted. In the same way, he was sentenced to an abrupt, sudden death. The second reason was according to the explanation quoted in the Midrash, the officer once argued. He said, "This generation is as sinful as that of the Flood, and that is why he does not deserve a miracle." It was for this accusation of the Jewish people that he was punished. The prophet had responded back to him that he would not benefit from a miracle because he was not worthy of it. As opposed to the people, who would have merits and would experience a marvelous gift coming from G-d Himself.

The third reason for the officer being punished so harshly was, the king had originally intended to kill Elisha. Later he relented to do this and when the officer scoffed at Elisha's prediction, he may have purposely- rekindled the king's anger, and this was what jeopardized Elisha's life. For this alone, he deserved to die. The last three verses of the haftara repeat the officer's comment on Elisha's prophecy and his punishment. These three verses impress upon us the justice of G-d's ways, for, as we just explained, he certainly deserved to die. The haftara comes to a

conclusion with the statement, "This happened to him." This means the officer received the measure for measure punishment that he deserved. A haftara does not usually end with a negative or discouraging verse. This haftara concludes with the officer's tragic death. It appears to violate this rule. The difficulty can be resolved by understanding that in reality, it was to his ultimate advantage. Meaning that it atoned for his sin in this world, and so it secured him a share in the world to come. Before we are officially done with this haftara, there is a further listing of miracles that were performed by Elisha. It is a continuation from last week's haftara found in Tazria. The wonderful happenings related in the haftara of Metzora will help complete the list of Elisha's miracles, as follows.

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There was the tenth miracle, Na'aman's recovery from his tzara'as. That was in last week's haftara Tazria. The eleventh miracle was when Gaichazi and his sons became afflicted with Na'aman's tzara'as. This was what Elisha had decreed. The twelfth miracle was when Elisha's students went to the edge of the Jordan River and chopped wood for building a larger Bais Hamidrash. One of the student's borrowed an ax-head that fell into the water. Elisha made the iron float up by casting a piece of wood into the river. This is found in the book of Kings in chapter 6. The thirteenth miracle was when the Jewish people were saved from the famine. This happened when the army of Aram ran away, this took place in the haftara of Metzora. The fourteenth miracle, the last miracle, was when Yehoram's officer died an unnatural death. He died because he didn't believe in the prophecy that Elisha had. In reality, no prophet is a "miracle worker."

G-d alone performs miracles, but He allows a tzaddik "to decree," and fulfills the command, provided he has reached a high level of holiness. Just like his master, Eliyahu, Elisha had achieved an exceptional degree of spiritual perfection. This was why he was chosen as the messenger to demonstrate G-d's greatness to the Jewish people of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. It was in order to deter them from worshipping idols. We find out in this haftara, why the good tidings were brought to the Jewish people by Gaichazi and his sons. There is a general rule, "Good news is conveyed by means of a meritorious messenger." Why, then, did G-d cause the happy event of the end of the famine to be brought about through Gaichazi and his sons? One explanation of this is that the lepers were chosen for this errand. It was an encouraging sign for the Jewish people in the future times.

Meaning if the Jews were ever to despair of redemption, they should consider their generation totally unworthy. They should also remember that G-d promised to send them Mashiach even if the generation is totally corrupt. At the same time, it was G-d who sent Moses to Egypt. He sent Moses there when the Jewish people had sunk to a very low level. King Yehoram's generation, too, was undeserving, but G-d saved it from the famine. Lepers were chosen to effect salvation, because they are governed by a law that symbolizes this concept. If a leper's entire body is stricken with tzara'as- which would indicate that he was as defiled as can be. Meaning he is declared pure. Similarly, if the Jewish people have sunk to their lowest level, G-d will nevertheless redeem it for the sake of His Great Name.

Haftara of Acharai Mos

Jerusalem, the city of Sin, would be destroyed. There is a custom, the Haftara that we designate for parshas Kedoshim (Amos 9) is read, while this haftara (Yechezkel 22) is read on Shabbat parsha Kedoshim. Sometimes these two parshiyos are read together, in which case the Haftara is that of parsha kedoshim. In this week's haftara we learn about the purpose of the Jewish people. We learn about how the Jews were reprimanded because of their attitudes towards sacrifices as well as a promise that their teshuva would be honored. We learn why the Jews deserved the punishment they got. G-d also promised future blessings and we learn of how G-d is unique. We learn about the absurdity of idol worship. We learn about the Jews being encouraged to do teshuva. We learn that Teshuva would bring about the redemption.

The Torah portion for this week warns the Jewish people to not transgress a number of laws. The haftara contrasts this with the stark reality, in the prophet Yechezkel's time, before the destruction of the First Bais Hamikdash, the Jews violated some of these prohibitions. In the parsha of Acharai Mos, it talks about the forbidden marital relations that are enumerated as well as the prohibition of being intimate with a nidda. PG 13.