

There are 2 different *Haftoros* associated with פרשת וישלח. The first is חזון עובדי-ה (Book of Ovadiah), the second is ועמי תלואים (Hoshea 12:7). The content of חזון עובדי-ה matches closely the content of פרשת וישלח as both discuss the battle between Jacob and Esau, past, present and future. In fact, פרשת וישלח is thought of as the Parsha of Esau, therefore it is readily understood why we would read חזון עובדי-ה, as Ovadiah was a convert, a descendant of Esau. Indeed, this is the Haftorah most congregations read for פרשת וישלח.

The choice of ועמי תלואים requires further explanation. The prophet refers to the in-utero battle between Jacob and Esau, the battle between Jacob and the angel, how the angel pleaded with Jacob to let him go to sing early morning praise to Hashem and Jacob's refusal unless he blessed him. The verses in Hoshea support the statement of Chazal that the angel did not want to bless Jacob and change his name at that point, however Jacob insisted. The angel, despite his initial refusal to do so, revealed to Jacob that Hashem would change his name later at Beth El.

Why select ועמי תלואים, with a more limited connection to פרשת וישלח, over חזון עובדי-ה, with its more obvious connection to the battle between Jacob and Esau?

The verses in פרשת וישלח that tell the story of the battle between Jacob and the mysterious stranger, the איש (ויאבק איש עמו), characterizes the essence of the continuing battle between the Jewish People and the nations of the world. (Midrash Rabbah relates that before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would travel to Rome to visit Antonius, he would study פרשת וישלח beforehand. Once it happened that he did not study פרשת וישלח prior to his trip and that mission was unsuccessful.) Even though the story of Jacob and Esau is initiated in פרשת תולדות, the climax of the description of their embattled relationship is related in פרשת וישלח, particularly in the story of the encounter between Jacob and the *Ish*, the battle that Hoshea describes in ועמי תלואים.

But the question remains: what is contained in these few *Psukim* that would give it precedence as הפטרת וישלח over the entire book of Ovadiah that deals at length with the battle between Jacob and Esau?

Jacob knew that his true implacable foe was Esau. He knew that Esau had 2 complaints against him: the first was that Jacob took or stole Esau's birthright. The second was that Jacob appropriated the blessings their father intended for him. In the Parsha's opening entreaty to Esau, Jacob attempted to convince Esau that there was no cause to hate him, as their father's blessings were not fulfilled. As Rashi comments, Jacob specified to Esau that the wealth he acquired while he was away was not of the sort that their father blessed him. For he had acquired cattle and not the blessings of the heaven and earth as Isaac promised him. The blessings he, Esau, longed for were unfulfilled, as Jacob did not benefit from the blessings, and consequentially Esau had lost nothing by not receiving them. As to your other complaint regarding the birthright, note that the *Kehuna*, priesthood and service of Gd, that is associated with the birthright, implies personal sacrifice inconsistent with the blessing of גביר לאחייך, to be master over all my brothers which was included in Isaac's blessings. Therefore you have nothing to fear from me having taken the blessings and hence no reason to resent me. Jacob knew his enemy, Esau, well, and recognized that perhaps, by appealing to his greed and vanity, he could be bribed. He knew that the way to potentially mollify Esau was to insist that he accept his gift, which he finally did.

However the night before he was to encounter his known enemy, Esau, he was attacked by a mysterious stranger, described simply as איש. Jacob attempted to learn the name of his opponent, but was not successful. His foe remained anonymous. Their encounter was symbolic of all the subsequent battles throughout the generations when the Jewish People were confronted by mysterious, nameless enemies who make outrageous demands on us that we cannot comprehend.

More and more, the troubles of the world are blamed on the Jew. We have been accused of being at the center of socialism, communism, capitalism etc. We are forced into life and death struggles, yet we often do not know why they attack us. Jacob and the *איש* struggled and kicked up dust in their battle, yet in the end Jacob did not know what his opponent wanted from him and why he attacked him. Jacob must have compared his 2 opponents to each other, thinking to himself that he understands what Esau wants and how to handle him, but what does this anonymous foe want from him?

The Torah says that when the *איש* realized that he could not defeat Jacob, he dislocated his thigh. The Midrash says that this is a reference to the generation of *שמד* (apostasy) and assimilation. We are forewarned that even though we don't understand why a battle is forced on us, the end result can be, Gd forbid, apostasy.

The struggle with the nameless *איש* continued through the night till dawn as the Torah says, *עד עלות השחר*. This is symbolic that our battle with the nations of the world and our nameless foes will continue until the coming of *Moshiach*. *חזון עובדי-ה' ועמי תלואים* was chosen over *חזון עובדי-ה'* because it specifically does not refer to the battle with Esau, the known enemy, but to the mysterious *איש*, the nameless foe of the Jewish People attacking us throughout the generations. This is the most important message of *פרשת וישלח*.

In a 1969 lecture on *Kedusha* and *Malchus*, the Rav noted that every individual and generation has a mission they have been empowered and enabled to fulfill. (Doctrine of Assignment.) Our generation has been given a two-fold mission. The first is to physically safeguard Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. Prior to World War II, governments (local and national) attempted to persecute and intimidate the Jew by restricting him economically and socially. The enemies of the Jews sought to restrict and deny them the freedom experience, and restricted them physically and experientially to a ghetto. This approach changed in the

post-Hitler era. The goal of ‘democratic’ enemies of the Jews remains the same: to annihilate them physically, wherever they may be (look no further than the Hamas Charter and the countries surrounding *Eretz Yisrael*). Had the Arabs won the 1967 war, not a single Jew would have remained alive in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Today we see the nations of the world openly supporting those seeking to complete Hitler’s work. They use code words like Boycott, Divestiture and Sanction to intimidate the Jew, to soften us up for their cohorts to complete their joint nefarious intention, the destruction of the world-wide Jewish community. The Rav said that he recalled how the democratic, intellectual elite of Berlin dismissed the Hitler youth marches and songs as humorous children’s play. They laughed so hard that we ultimately cried bitter tears. It was a short distance from those ‘childish’ marches to the marches to the crematoria in death camps like Auschwitz and Majdenak. The Rav cautioned us, even in the Western Diaspora, to be vigilant for any statements from public officials, no matter how seemingly innocuous, that smack of Anti-Semitism and to protest them vigorously. We must do our utmost to remove such politicians lest history repeat itself and their humor again turns into our tragedy. How poignant are the Rav’s words in light of the terrorist attack that claimed the life of his grandson, Rabbi Moshe Twersky HY”D, among the other *Kdoshim*.

Our second mission is to safeguard the spiritual identity of the Jew in the Diaspora and *Eretz Yisrael*. We must be on guard against assimilation, disintegration and apostasy, שמד.

פרשת וישלח and its Haftorah portend our destiny and mission to be vigilant for visible and clandestine enemies seeking our physical and spiritual destruction.