

The Haftorah for פרשת ויצא (Hosea 12:13) covers several different topics. It begins with Jacob fleeing and working as payment for his wife, continues with the prophet (Moshe) who led the Jewish Nation out of Egypt and then the prophet who led them into exile. The prophet rebukes them for their idol worship that ultimately leads to the destruction of the בית המקדש. The prophet concludes with the topic of repentance – שובה ישראל. What is the prophet's message? What connection do the various topics covered in the Haftorah have with פרשת ויצא?

The key to understanding the Haftorah is in the transitions between the use of the names Jacob and Israel. Why does the prophet switch between them? Esau was given his name because it connotes that he came out complete, the Hebrew word עשוי. This advanced state of development is symbolized by Esau's pushing to leave the womb first, showing strength, similar to the birth of Peretz who pushed ahead of his twin brother Zerach. The kings that descended from Judah came from Peretz who displayed inner strength that a king must have.

On the other hand, Jacob was born holding on to the heel of Esau, symbolizing military and political dependence on Esau. The Jew, from the perspective of Jacob, is dependent on the non-Jewish world. This can be seen today in the relationship between Israel and the United States. Esau spent his time in the field hunting and engaged in the constant battles of life which made him tough, strong and secure. Jacob, on the other hand was a יושב אהלים, he was not schooled in the lessons of life's battles. He had a radically different external personae and mission from his brother.

Isaac wanted to give Esau the blessing of גביר לאחר because he had the best chance of physically carrying it out and become the master of his brother. Jacob agreed, when he noted that Esau is a hairy individual while he is smooth skinned. Jacob was saying that he is not the kind to derive benefit from the physical blessings of הוי ויתן לך and גבורה. They should go to someone who displays the attribute of גביר לאחר. After he takes the blessings, Rebekah discovered that Esau wanted to kill Jacob. She urged Jacob to flee to the house of Laban. Rebekah realized that Jacob was no match for the physical strength of Esau. Even though Isaac himself was never ordered to go to ארם on his own to seek a wife, Jacob had no choice in the matter. As the weaker of the brothers he was forced to flee.

Ramban comments that the name Jacob implies weakness while the name Israel implies strength. The Jew has tremendous inner strength with which he can stand up to an entire world. The prophet says ויברח יעקב שדה ארם ויעבד ישראל באשה ובאשה שמר, he is pointing out this contradiction. On the one hand, Jacob fled out of weakness while on the other hand the same person, as Israel, portrayed great inner strength. Even though he was working as a slave for his uncle Laban, he was still Israel, who was ever vigilant and ready to fight to protect the tradition of Abraham and the fledgling Jewish Nation

that would perpetuate that legacy. Laban pursued Jacob and told him that Jacob's children are his. They are the grand children of Terach and Nachor. Jacob stood up to Laban to protect his family and preserve their identity as the children of Abraham and Isaac. The same weak Jacob who was easy prey for Laban to deceive when it came to material and monetary considerations, stood up to Laban and demonstrated the strength of Israel, which was soon to be his new name.

In Egypt, the Jewish People were physically and economically weak, yet spiritually strong. As the Midrash says: Reuben and Simon entered Egypt and the same Reuben and Simon left Egypt, they did not assimilate. (The Rav noted that they did not assimilate in Egypt yet American Jews assimilate because they enjoy favorable economic conditions. They did not change their names, yet today American Rabbis use their secular names instead of their Jewish names.) As the prophet says: **וּבְנֵי אֶלֶּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם**. **וּבְנֵי אֶלֶּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם**. Even though we were physically weak and oppressed in Egypt, we still had the spiritual strength to produce prophets and leaders. We showed the same spiritual fortitude in Egypt Jacob showed years before when he stood up to Laban.

Seventy two nations said that Israel should not exist. Yet through the will of Gd and our great spiritual strength, we persevered and overcame great obstacles. The prophet also tells us **וּבְנֵי אֶלֶּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם**, that in the future the Jewish People will continue to produce great leaders who will exhibit the great inner strength of Israel.

The non-Jewish world might look at Zionism as racism if they look at laws like the **חוק השבות**, Law of Return. However if we show that **ארץ ישראל** is a land of sanctity, people can readily see that this is not the case. **ארץ ישראל** is a viable concept and entity only if it is imbued with sanctity, **קדושה**. Secular Zionism poses a great danger to **עם ישראל** and **ארץ ישראל** [because it seeks to deny this sanctity]. The prophet says we will maintain the inner strength of Israel and realize that idol worship is folly, hence the continuation of the prophecy is **שובה ישראל עד השם אלקיך**, the return of the people to Hashem which is the ultimate exhibition of our inner strength. We can see the strength of Israel among the non-religious Jews in America who risk their own security to protect Israel. The "Israel" potential dwells in each and every Jew. The Jew may be weak politically, economically or militarily. Yet, the prophet has promised us that eventually this strength of Israel will burst forth, as the Jewish nation is destined to return to Gd, **שובה ישראל**.

[Note: this Shiur was given during the period the UN passed the resolution equating Zionism and racism. It is most interesting to read the above in light of the recent controversy that has erupted between Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews regarding the religious future of **ארץ ישראל**. Perhaps these remarks should be revisited in light of the recent attitude of many American Jews to challenge the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Hopefully the words of the prophet **שובה ישראל** will be felt by those

Jews who unfortunately find fault with the Jewish People and ארץ ישראל.]

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