



This week's haftara, as read by Ashkenazim, opens with a clear reference to our parsha, Vayeitzei. The prophet Hoshe'a reminds Israel of her humble beginnings, referring to Yaakov's experiences, namely, that "Yaakov fled to the field of Aram; Yisrael labored for a wife; and for a wife he tended sheep."

Clearly, the message is that in order to achieve, we must strive. In the days of old, what contributed to Yaakov's achievements - and consequent wealth - was his steadfast faith in Hashem in the face of adversity. And we know that Yaakov was eternally grateful to Hashem for having brought him back to his homeland, Eretz Yisrael.

So one would expect Yaakov's descendants, Yehuda and Efrayim, to have learned that lesson of fidelity and gratitude to G-d who "knew you in the wilderness, in a thirsty land". But Efrayim grew proud and "provoked with bitter sins". Efrayim, so previously accorded honor, now sinned with Ba'al, to become "as the early dew that passes on".

The people argued that as Yaakov deceived Eisav, so their lax behavior was justified, forgetting, of course, that Yaakov received his due when Lavan deceived him over Rachel. Today, it seems, that we, no less, are faced with the challenges of overwhelming materialism and foreign cultural norms; and the echoes of Hoshe'a's dire warnings still stir our imagination. Nevertheless, we can take comfort in Hoshe'a's recognition that, in essence, Efrayim (Israel) remains good and pure... that Efrayim but stumbled into sin; that Hashem will not abandon us, and that He is always ready to accept T'shuva and to forgive. **MP**