

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



THE GREATEST

Shabbat HaGadol

The Shabbat before Pesach is called Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Shabbat. Isn't every Shabbat great? Or, at least, cool. Although oceans of ink have been consumed in the endeavor to analyze this name, the simplest explanation still rings true. The name is based on the penultimate verse in this week's Haftara and in the section of Tanach called NEVI'IM, Prophets: Behold, I shall send to you Eliyah(u) the Prophet before the advent of the great (GADOL) and awesome day (Malachi 3:23).

That verse has resonated through Jewish history. It is, apparently, the source of our tradition that Eliyahu HaNavi will be the harbinger or herald of the Messianic Era, and visit every Seder. But I don't think it's the most famous verse in this reading. The Haftara begins: Then the offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim shall be pleasing (V'ORVA, perhaps 'sweet') to the Lord, as in the days of yore and in the years of old (KADMONIYOT, ancient, past, former; verse 4). This powerful statement inspired our Sages, who made it the closing

statement of our central prayer, the AMIDA or Shmoneh Esrei. So, many of us say it at least 3 times a day.

This verse has generated much controversy, because Rav Kook quoted it to speculate about the future nature of KORBANOT (Olat Re'iyah, volume 1, p. 292, and other sources). Since the term MINCHA used in our verse to describe offerings is the word usually used to designate, specifically, meal offerings, Rav Kook theorized that only 'plant' offerings will be brought in the future Beit HaMikdash. I'm not taking sides in this issue, but, personally, I would find that sweet, ORVA.

However, this verse also raises the famous question: What were the 'good old days'? We refer to 'days of yore' and 'years of old'. When were they? There are many sources, but perhaps the most famous is a Midrash:

"Renew our days as of old!": Like Adam HaRishon, according to what was written: "He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden" (Breishit 3:24). Another interpretation: "Renew our days as of old!": According to what was written: "Then the offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim shall be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of yore and in the years of old" (Malachi 3:4). "Days

of yore": This is Moshe, as it is written: "Then they remembered the ancient days, Him, who pulled His people out (Moshe)" (Yeshayahu 63:11). "Years of old": like the years of Sh'lomo. Rabbi says: ""Days of yore": like the days of No'ach, as it is said: "For this to Me is like the waters of No'ach" (54:9). "Years of old": like the years of Hevel, when there was no worship of idols in the world" (Eicha Raba, 5:21).

There's a lot to unpack there. To find 'good times' must we go all the way back to before the Primordial Sin? Or was only the first offering ever accepted, that of Hevel, the best, and it's been downhill ever since? Then again maybe great periods required the Divine Revelation, and it must refer to Moshe Rabbeinu. I don't know, but it's fun to speculate. L'HAVDIL, like debates in sports: Was there ever anyone greater than Babe Ruth (yes, Willie Mays - ed.) or Jim Thorpe?

But neither of these is my favorite verse in our remarkable Haftara. I am enamored of: For I am the Lord, I never change; and you are the Children of Ya'akov, you never cease to be (verse 6). The Malbim comments that God is informing of the Divine permanence, and this really means that all of God's assurances are eternal. This is the

reason that the Jewish nation will never die. God's promises to the Patriarchs will never be abrogated.

Rebbe Nachman uses our verse as support for the famous Kabbalistic statement: The Holy One Blessed Be He, and the Torah, and Yisrael are one and indivisible. God doesn't change, Divine promises, which are Torah don't change, and the immortality of B'nei Yisrael doesn't change. This reality demonstrates that God, Torah and Yisrael are EMET, true. Only truth is immutable (Likutei Moharan 251:4).

Maybe it's because I like history, but my favorite approach to this verse is the Radak, Rav David Kimchi. This great S'faradi scholar suggests that Malachi is teaching us the unique nature of the Jewish people. All other nations come to an end. They don't remain vibrant and relevant forces in the world after they fall from their power and success. Whatever nation takes their place also wipes the record of their contributions and, even, existence. Archeologists and antiquarians can find some remains, and write of their culture. But for intents and purposes, their extinction is total.

Not so, the Jews. The Radak goes on to declare that the Jews not only survive, but continue to be a unique

presence among the nations. We are, and always will be: GOI ECHAD B'ARETZ, a unique phenomenon in the world.

I said this idea as a D'VAR TORAH after my minyan the other AM, and a professor of biology came over to me and said, 'Do you know why this is true? It's because all other nations are cultural or political or military phenomenon. The Jews are a biological phenomenon. We are like DNA, which evolves and lives eternally. That's why we're the Children of Yisrael.' Fascinating!

I think that our last prophet, Malachi, is informing of us great future tidings of MASHIACH and BAYIT SHLISHI, but his most pressing message is that the greatest miracle that ever was and ever will be is the eternal existence of B'NEI YISRAEL! 