

THE SANDWICHED (CENTRALIZED) HAFTORA

Parshas Shoftim - Saitza

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

1) The recital of Haftora every Shabos following the weekly Sidra is based on a fundamental principle. Says the Galilean lecturer (Shabos 88a) "Blessed is the Merciful One Who gave us our Torah comprised of three parts: the Chumash, Neviim (Prophets) and Kesuvim (Scripture). "All three were alluded to at Sinai" (Ritva). At the conclusion of the weekly portion of the Chumash, thus, the Halacha requires the recital of a portion from Neviim. [The Scripture part is fulfilled by the abundant Scriptural recitals during Shachris, the chapters of Haleluya, etc.] The recitals from Neviim are escorted with seven Brochos (parallel to the seven aliyos in Chumash) three before (counting the two of the Maftir) and four at conclusion. [Mindful of the proximity of Rosh Hashanah, one finds a fitting example in Malchios, Zichronos and Shofros, each consisting of passages from all three branches: Chumash, Neviim and Scripture.]

Which chapters of the Neviim are selected for the Haftora recitals? Those, of course, which relate to the weekly Torah portion. So states the Shulchan Aruch (284:1). During the seven weeks between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashanah the seven Haftoras all speak of consolation, beginning with Nachamu. One of these chapters, chapter 54 of Isaiah is divided, half (the second half) for Parshas Re-ai and half (the first half) for two weeks later, Parshas Ki Saitzai. This is most puzzling. Since this chapter, Isaiah 54, is to be divided, it would have been more sensible to recite both halves in two Shabosim in sequence, one Shabos after another. Why are these two halves (of Prophets) separated by two weeks, leaving the Haftora for Shoftim "sandwiched" between the two halves of chapter 54?

Upon delving more profoundly into the Haftora for Parshas Shoftim we find a major prophetic teaching that is most appropriate for this Parsha. [This is in addition to words of comfort, as one of the seven Haftoras of Nechomo (consolation)]: “And I am Hashem your G-d, and I have placed My words in your mouth... to implant the heavens and to set a base for the earth” (Isaiah 51:16). Herein is the Divine authority for the words of Neviim (and Scripture). The instructions and guidance of the Neviim are taken seriously because they are divinely authorized, Hashem placing His words in their mouths. Before reading the Haftora, the reader declares emphatically: Boruch Ato... Who has chosen good prophets... their words uttered with truth”.

This cornerstone of the Jewish faith is mentioned in Parshas Shoftim, almost verbatim: “I will establish a prophet for them from among their brethren, like you (Moshe), and I will PLACE MY WORDS IN HIS MOUTH, and he shall speak to them everything that I will command him” (Parshas Shoftim 18:18).

2) In addition the Parsha declares clearly that this divine authority is transmitted from generation to generation, from teacher to disciple. “Moshe received the Torah on Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua... to the men of the Great Assembly” (Avoth 1:1). “You shall come... to the Shofet who will be in those days... according to the teaching that they will guide you... shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you” (Shoftim 17:11). Violating a rabbinical decree is equivalent (in many ways) to violating a Biblical law. In some cases “the Chachomim gave ‘chizuk’ (extra stringency) to a rabbinical requirement even more than a Biblical” (Eirovin 77a).

The Talmud (Shabos 23a) inquires, upon the blessing “Boruch Ato... Who commanded us” before fulfilling a rabbinical Mitzva

(such as Chanuka candles and all seven rabbinical Mitzvoths), “Where is that commandment in the Torah?” The Talmud responds: it is the above, “According to the teaching that they will guide you shall you do...” The words of the sages are indeed those upon which Hashem says “I will place My words in his mouth”.

3) The Torah world is still, and will remain for some time, under the impact of the Kiddush Hashem Siyum Hashas, where ninety thousand faithful gathered, and tens of thousands around the world joined, celebrating seven and a half years of daily study of the Talmud. Would anyone expect this immense historic celebration to touch somewhat the leader of the reform and conservative movements? At least with a distant nod?

Sadly, tragically, this massive Torah event was used by these movements to express triviality of the Talmud for them. Said the senior vice president of the Union for Reform “Judaism” (to the Jewish Telegraph Agency): “Talmud, oral law, is not our core text... Oral law we do not find binding.” The heights of Chutzpa, the apex of ignorance: Did these leaders ever come across the Torah’s decree in Parshas Shoftim “Do not deviate from what the sages will tell you”? Or did they ever notice the same concept “ I will put My words in your mouth” in the Sandwiched Haftora of Parshas Shoftim? Sandwiched in the sense of being the center and core of all Judaism.

It will take many more Shas Siyumim to warm and interest these reform and conservative deviates. Meanwhile Torah Jews will assiduously study the daily Talmud Daf, even with more zeal, more mind and soul.

