

stone or piece of broken glass. However, base metals are generally not used to correct or even touch a Torah scroll, as these metals are used to make weapons, which render them unfit to touch a *seifer Torah*, which is an instrument of peace.

Any mistakes in the spelling of any of the names of God cannot be corrected, as the name of God cannot be erased. If a *seifer Torah* has extensive corrections, it is considered unsightly and, therefore, invalid. When invalid or beyond repair, a *seifer Torah* is buried in a *g'nizah* (place where holy objects are buried. In talmudic times, it was customary to bury such scrolls alongside the grave of a prominent rabbi (BT Meg. 26b).

Once the writing of *seifer Torah* is carefully checked and approved, the individual sheets of parchment are sewn together with *gidḏin*, a special thread made of tendon tissue taken from the foot muscles of a kosher animal. These sections of parchment are sewn on the outer side of the parchment, with one inch left unsewn both at the very top and bottom. To reinforce the *gidḏin*, thin strips of parchment are often pasted on the top and bottom of the page. After connecting the sheets, the ends are

tied to *atzei ḥayyim* (trees of life), which is the name for the wooden rollers that hold the scroll. Each *etz ḥayyim* consists of a center pole, with handles of wood and flat circular rollers to support the rolled-up scroll. In addition to providing a means to roll the scroll, the *atzei ḥayyim* prevent people from touching the holy parchment with their hands. (In some Sephardic communities, flat rollers are not employed, because the Torah scrolls are kept in a *tik*, an upright ornamental wooden or metal case.) When reading from a *seifer Torah*, one does not touch the Torah with one's hands, but uses a *yad* (pointer; literally: "hand") to follow the letters.

The Talmud teaches that one who corrects even one letter in a *seifer Torah* is considered to have the merit of one who has written the entire scroll (BT Men. 30a). Many *sof'rim* outline the letters at the end of the Torah, leaving them to be filled in by individuals in a ceremony called *siyyum ha-Torah* (completion of a Torah scroll). In many congregations, this ceremony also includes a processional of other Torah scrolls, and the new *seifer Torah* is accompanied to the Ark with great joy and pageantry.

HAFTARAH

Michael Fishbane

The *haftarah* (plural: *haftarot*) is the selection from *N'vi-im* (Prophets) recited publicly after the designated portion from the Torah (Five Books of Moses) has been read on *Shabbat*, on festivals, and on other specified days. These communal readings are an integral part of classical Judaism, in both form and function.

The primary feature of the ancient institution of the synagogue is the recitation of the Torah. The Torah is chanted on *Shabbat* in a continuous sequence throughout the year, from beginning to end in a fixed cycle, interrupted only when a holiday (or an intermediate day of a festival) coincides with *Shabbat*. Next in importance for the synagogue is the recitation from a book of the prophets, selected

to complement the Torah reading or to highlight the theme of a specific ritual occasion. These prophetic readings are selective, topical, and not read in sequence. These two recitations from Scripture (Torah and prophets) are enhanced by a homily (*d'rashah*) that interprets the readings in the light of tradition, theology, or historical circumstance.

This triad of Torah, prophets, and homily represents three levels of authority in Judaism, as well as three modes of religious instruction. The Torah is the most important of these, for it is the revelation to Moses and the teaching received from him—the foremost prophet, with whom God spoke directly (Num. 12:6–8). According to later (Rabbinic) tradition, the

difference between the divine revelations to Moses and those granted to other prophets is the difference between two modes of envisioning or experiencing the divine. Moses was allowed to see God clearly, through a shining mirror, whereas all other prophets had to perceive God through a glass darkly, as in an unclear and unpolished mirror (BT Yev. 49b).

Even though God's revelation to the prophets is less direct, the truth of their message is not diminished, because it too flowed from divine inspiration. Nevertheless, by making such a formal distinction, the ancient Sages differentiated between the primary teachings of Moses and the secondary teachings of the prophets. Their goal was to exhort the people to return to faithfulness to the Covenant and to announce the consequences of their behavior and the future fate of the people. The synagogue preacher could see his task as explicating the teachings of Moses, of the other prophets, or of both, on those occasions when he renewed God's message in the hearing of an assembled congregation.

The preacher thus added his words of interpretation to the divine words, to make their eternal relevance and significance clear and immediate to his contemporaries. However, even though he spoke on behalf of Moses and the prophets, the preacher's authority came from the Sages in their role as transmitters of the divine word. Their self-appointed task, in the synagogue as in the study hall, was to make Scripture come alive for the people. For these reasons, the Sages saw themselves as heirs to the prophets. "Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the Sages" (BT BB 12a). The Sages, as teachers, thus gave institutional stability to the ancient words of Moses and consoled their community with the prophets' hopes and promises for the future.

When was the Torah first recited at communal gatherings? Evidence is scanty and often obscure. Two biblical passages are of note in this regard. In Deuteronomy (31:10-13), Moses instructs the priests into whose keeping he has

given a written copy of "this teaching" (*ha-torah ha-zot*), namely, Deuteronomy. He tells them to "read" it "aloud in the presence of all Israel," "every seventh year" when they come before the Lord during the pilgrimage feast of *Sukkot*. The purpose of this septennial recitation was to instill both reverence for and observance of the precepts of the Torah in the entire community (Deut. 31:12-13). We may assume that the event was something of a covenant renewal ceremony, reproducing the event outlined in Deut. 29:9-14. On the basis of Moses' injunction to "gather [*hak-hel*] the people" together to hear the law (Deut. 31:12), this occasion traditionally has been known as the *mitzvah* of *hak-hel*. The other occasion of public Torah reading in the Bible is found in Neh. 8. There, it is reported that Ezra the Scribe, having returned recently to the land of Israel from Babylonian exile, gathered the people on the first day of the seventh month (*Rosh ha-Shanah*) to present to them the "book of the *torah* of Moses." This event is of interest for several reasons. First, it records a public reading that lasted from dawn to midday, with Ezra standing on a wooden platform surrounded by Levites. Second, when the scroll was opened, Ezra first blessed "the LORD, the great God," and the people responded "Amen, Amen" with upraised hands, after which they bowed down. Third, the Levites added meaning from the scroll with various clarifications and interpretations of the text (Neh. 8:8).

The practice of reading from the Torah each week on *Shabbat* is ascribed to Moses by ancient traditions (including the Mishnah). The recitation of a Torah portion on Monday and Thursday mornings and on *Shabbat* afternoon is considered one of the 10 legal innovations (*sakkanot*) instituted by Ezra.

Our earliest evidence for reading the Torah in a continuous cycle is found in the Mishnah. There it states explicitly that on the four special Sabbaths between the first of *Adar* (the month of *Purim*) and the first of *Nisan* (the month of *Pesah*), the regular *Shabbat* reading is interrupted. "On the fifth [*Shabbat*] one returns to the [regular] sequence" (M Meg. 3:4).

Interruptions also occurred when a festival or other special day coincided with *Shabbat*. On all of these occasions, other readings (out of sequence) were prescribed (M Meg. 4:2).

A continuous cycle of Torah readings was followed in the land of Israel near the beginning of our era, possibly as early as the 1st century C.E., although customs varied. Some authorities held that continuity implies reading portions from the Torah progressively each *Shabbat* morning, with the intervening readings on *Shabbat* afternoons; and brief readings on the market days of Monday and Thursday should be merely anticipations of the next *Shabbat* morning portion. Others held the opinion that a continuous reading implies an incremental reading of the Torah portion at the four public readings each week, with each reading continuing where the last stopped.

Far more complicated was the matter of how the continuous recitation should be subdivided, thereby determining when the cycle of readings from the entire Torah would be completed. There is a Babylonian tradition that "Westerners [Jews in the land of Israel] finish the Torah in three years" (BT Meg. 29b). This is confirmed in the later Gaonic statement about one of the differences in religious practice between the communities of Babylon and of the land of Israel: The "Easterners [Jews in Babylon] celebrate *Simhat Torah* at the end of their reading cycle every year, whereas the residents of the land of Israel do so every three and a-half years." Evidently, practices varied widely within the land of Israel itself depending on the way the special readings (e.g., for *Shabbat T'shuvah* or New Moon) affected the continuous recitations; and it is also possible that the number of readings were adjusted so that two triennial cycles could be completed every seven years. Most scholars regard the one-year cycle of 53 or 54 portions (*parashiyot*) as a derivative Babylonian practice; it became dominant after the authority of the Babylonian academy was transferred to Spain in the 11th and 12th centuries C.E., especially because of the backing of Maimonides.

Determining specific portions of each *Shabbat* also was a prerequisite for the selection of readings from the prophets as *haftarot*, as they were correlated with the Torah portion by words, by theme, or by place in the liturgical cycle.

The origin of the *haftarah* is obscured both by the paucity of ancient evidence and by medieval legend. According to the latter, the custom of reciting several verses from the prophets in the synagogue service is said to go back to the 2nd century B.C.E. in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. When the king issued an edict prohibiting the reading of the Torah, the Jews were said to have evaded it by reading a passage from the prophets instead. This custom continued after the persecutions ceased. This theory still enjoys popular currency, although there is no corroborating evidence for it.

In antiquity, the selection of the *haftarah* varied greatly from community to community. This is clear from the diverse lists of prophetic readings for the so-called triennial cycle found in the Cairo Geniza and in many other collections of customs, including the references or allusions to *haftarot* found in the Midrash.

The correlation between the Torah and the *haftarah* readings could be established on the verbal or on the thematic level, on the basis of verbal similarities and thematic relationships. The triennial and annual cycles exhibit both features, although the element of verbal similarities occurs primarily on regular Sabbaths, when the main concern is the lesson of the Torah portion. The element of thematic relationships appears primarily on special Sabbaths, when the main concern is the religious topic of the day.

Thematic links between the Torah and the prophets in the early rabbinical sources in the land of Israel appear, as noted earlier, when *Shabbat* or another day commemorates a special ritual or religious occasion. The Mishnah mentions several days when a special selection from the Torah is recited. These include the four Sabbaths between the 1st of *Adar* and the

1st of *Nisan* (M Meg. 3:4); the three pilgrimage festivals of *Pesah*, *Shavu-ot* (Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Booths); and the holidays of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur* (M Meg. 3:5). They also include *Hanukkah*, *Purim*, and the New Moon (M Meg. 3:6).

The annual cycle has roots in the older multiyear cycles. Its choice of prophetic readings may be in part a selection from all the available *haftarot* in those cycles. This is particularly evident when the link between the Torah portion and the *haftarah* in the annual cycle occurs somewhere in the middle of the weekly *parashah* and not at the beginning. This striking phenomenon is explainable only by the fact that the length of any given section (*parashah*) for the annual cycle could embrace about three sections from the Palestinian triennial cycle. Thus each *haftarah* could have been chosen from a number of possibilities.

The annual cycle also conforms to old Palestinian traditions in its overall liturgical structure. As noted earlier, the weekly core of regular *Shabbat* readings, constituting a perpetual recitation of "God's word" in sequence, is sometimes interrupted by the substitution of other passages from the Torah. All of these sacred days had special Torah readings assigned to them. And pertinent *haftarot* were recited on the special Sabbaths, on holidays, and festivals (and the *Shabbat* of the festival week of *Pesah* and of *Sukkot*), the *Shabbat* of *Hanukkah*, and when the New Moon coincided with *Shabbat* or occurred on the day after *Shabbat*. In addition, special *haftarot* were recited on 10 successive Sabbaths during the summer, beginning with the *Shabbat* after the 17th of *Tammuz*, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem during the Romans' final siege of the First Temple. The first three weeks of this period, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people, are known as Sabbaths of Admonition. Warnings and exhortations are read from the first two chapters of Jeremiah and from the first chapter of Isaiah. The subsequent seven weeks, begin-

ning with the *Shabbat* after *Tish-ah b'Av*, are known as Sabbaths of Consolation. During this period, words of comfort and hope are recited from Isa. 40ff.

Any year can have almost half as many special *haftarot* (21 or more) as *haftarot* for regular Sabbaths (54 or less). This ratio changes in favor of the special *haftarot* when holidays and festivals coincide with *Shabbat* or when there are two Sabbaths during the feast of *Hanukkah*. All such occasions interrupt the regular cycle of Torah readings and require an adjustment that results in the combination of two Torah portions on one *Shabbat*. This, in turn, leads to a reduction of regular *haftarot*, for when two Torah portions are joined, only the *haftarah* assigned to the second one is recited. The combined total ensures that the teachings and topics preserved in the prophetic literature have a dominant place in the public instruction of the community. This intrusion was aided and furthered by the homiletic use of these passages in the synagogue as well as by the Aramaic translation and paraphrasing (*targum*) that accompanied them.

The broad base of instruction through the prophetic literature is also clear from the distribution of the books from which the *haftarot* are derived in the annual cycle. Of the 54 selections, the largest cluster is from the book of Isaiah (14), with fewer from Jeremiah (8), Ezekiel (6), and the minor prophets (9). This cluster makes up two thirds of the Torah readings and constitutes a contrast with the *haftarot* in the triennial cycle. In that cycle, two thirds of the *haftarot* were from Isa. 40-66 (dealing with redemption and ingathering) and fully four fifths of them had a messianic or eschatologic dimension. In the *haftarot* of the annual cycle, by contrast, the smaller percentage of material from the later chapters of Isaiah is notable, as is the lesser emphasis on messianic features. The *haftarot* of the annual cycle emphasize the national future and the restoration of the people to the Land and reflect a strong interest in historical parallels or symmetries between the Torah portion and its *haftarah*.

Parallels between events, persons, or institutions also highlight many types of continuities and correlations within Scripture.

One cannot speak of any consistent literary feature or style among the *haftarot*. Each individual reading sculpts its discourse out of a larger context and establishes its own rhetorical emphasis and features. In several cases, the *haftarot* overlap separate units of scripture, thus underscoring the fact that the prophetic readings are a rabbinical creation and institution. The diverse forms are discussed in the commentary to the *haftarot* in this volume. Also because of the great variety of texts and topics, there is no consistent theme or emphasis among the *haftarot*. Nevertheless, religious instruction and national hope are frequent

features. The individual types are also considered in the commentary.

For the synagogue, the *haftarah* marks the "leaving off" (*afarta*) or "completion" (*ashlamata*) of the official Torah service and is formally set off from it in several ways. The *haftarah* service, so to speak, begins after the reading from the Torah portion has been completed and a half *Kaddish* has been recited to mark a break between it and what follows. Then a brief passage (of at least three verses) at the end of the Torah portion is repeated. After the Torah scroll is rolled up and set aside, the *haftarah* is chanted. Blessings before and after the recitation of the *haftarah* enhance the authority of the lesson from the Prophets and present it within a sacred liturgical framework.

MIDRASH

David Wolpe

The Bible is at once powerful and cryptic. Characters are often sketched rather than elaborately described, and key concepts are not always spelled out. The Bible instructs us not to perform "*m'lakhah*" on *Shabbat*, but the word *m'lakhah* is never defined! The rabbinical tradition comes along to fill gaps, analyze implications, color in characters, spin tales, and derive laws—to take the biblical text as a starting point for building the structure of Jewish life.

The medium through which the Sages work is *midrash*. The word *midrash* comes from the root שרר—to search out. Use of this word can be confusing, because it refers both to a method and a body of work. There are books of collected *midrash* (plural: *midrashim*), the most well-known being *Midrash Rabbah* (literally: Great Midrash, Large Midrash). The body of *midrash* in the Talmud is referred to as *aggadah*. Yet one can also speak of "doing" *midrash*, of seeking out and explicating texts. *Midrash* is a type of investigation of a text, or a genre, not just a body of literature; and it is found in different measures in all the classical rabbinical literature.

Most classical *midrash* originated in ancient Palestine, among rabbis who lived from the end of the Roman Era (ca. 3rd century C.E.) to the beginning of the Islamic Era (the 8th or 9th century C.E.). Some *midrashim* were written and polished later than the 7th century, and the origins of *midrash* go back much further, not only to earlier sages (of the Tannaitic period, the first few centuries of the Common Era) but also back, in fact, to the Bible itself.

In Exod. 12:8, we are told that the paschal sacrifice must be eaten "roasted over the fire." Deut. 16:7 states: "You shall cook and eat it." The words for "cook" and "roast" denote different processes. In 2 Chron. 35:13, there is a reconciliation: "They roasted the passover sacrifice in fire, as prescribed, while the sacred offerings they cooked in pots." This simple illustration of the midrashic process at work in the Bible shows how problems of interpretation arise and are resolved from the very beginning of a system of law and lore.

In Jer. 25:11–12, 29:10, a prophecy reads: "And those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. When the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and