

HAFTORAH INSIGHTS
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# Whose Example Do We Follow

The Haftorah opens with חֲזוֹן עֹבַדְיָה, "the vision of Ovadiah," and immediately tells us that the prophecy concerns Edom, the descendants of Esav. Why was Ovadiah chosen to deliver this particular prophecy?

In the Gemara (Sanhedrin 39b), Rabbi Yitzchak answers this question by drawing a comparison between Ovadiah and Esav. Ovadiah lived among two resha'im, Achav and Izevel, וְלֹא לָמַד מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם, and did not learn from their ways. Esav grew up among two tzaddikim, Yitzchak and Rivka, וְלֹא לָמַד מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם, and did not learn from their ways. The Gemara uses exactly the same words for both men. In one line, they're a compliment. In the other, they're an indictment.

A few lines earlier, the Gemara tells us whom Ovadiah *did* learn from. When Izevel was killing the nevi'im of Hashem, Ovadiah hid a hundred nevi'im and brought them bread and water. The Gemara pauses over a detail. Why did he hide them in two groups of fifty? Rabbi Elazar says that Ovadiah learned from Yaakov. When Yaakov heard that Esav was approaching, he divided his camp in two, reasoning that if one camp was attacked, the other might escape. Ovadiah took that same idea and used it to protect the nevi'im. (*Melachim I* 18:4, *Bereishis* 32:8–9, *Sanhedrin* 39b)

The two teachings sit just a few lines apart. First, Chazal tell us that Ovadiah learned from Yaakov. Then they tell us that he did not learn from Achav and Izevel. Achav and Izevel were the people Ovadiah saw in the palace. Yet when he had to decide how to protect the nevi'im, it was Yaakov's example that guided him.

There's a quiet irony in that. Yaakov divided his camp because Esav was coming. Generations later, the person chosen to speak to Esav's descendants was the man who had paid attention to what Yaakov did that day. ■

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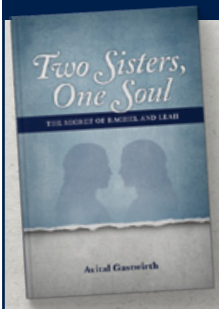


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