



Parashat Toldot
Rabbi David Silverberg

The *haftara* for Parashat Toledot is taken from the first chapter of Malakhi, in which the prophet castigates the people for their disrespectful treatment of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and sacrificial offerings. In response to the people's laxity and disregard, God looks with contempt upon their sacrifices, threatening, "I will strew dung upon your faces – the dung of your festival sacrifices" (2:3). The people offer sacrifices of such poor quality, and with such apathy, that God views them as valueless as "dung" and utterly rejects them.

Maimonides cites this verse in a famous passage in *Hilkhot Yom Tov* (6:18), where he emphasizes the importance of sharing one's holiday celebration with the underprivileged:

And when a person eats and drinks, he is obligated to feed and give drink to the foreigner, orphans, widows and other despondent, poor people. But one who locks the doors of his yard and eats and drinks with his children and wife, without feeding and giving drink to the poor and the downtrodden – this is not the joy of a *mitzva*, but rather the joy of his belly... And rejoicing of this kind is shameful, as it says, "I will strew dung upon your faces – the dung of your festivals."

Maimonides applies Malakhi's condemnation of the nation's disrespectful sacrifices to those who celebrate *Yom Tov* exclusively as "the joy of their belly," rather than as a means of serving their Creator.

This parallel implied by Maimonides becomes clearer when we consider the fact that Malakhi speaks here specifically to the *kohanim* (see 2:1). The *kohanim* received portions from the people's sacrificial offerings, which were brought in abundance on the three pilgrimage festivals, when every Jewish male was obligated to frequent the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Apparently, the *kohanim* during the Second Temple period (when Malakhi prophesied) lost sight of their role as the spiritual guides of the people. Instead of using the festivals as an opportunity to teach, lead, guide and inspire the pilgrims, they looked to these occasions as an opportunity to "cash in" and indulge in the food served to them by those frequenting the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The prophet's harsh censure of the *kohanim* is thus a most appropriate message for those who similarly misuse *Yom Tov* as a time for overindulgence, rather than as an opportunity to perform *mitzvot* and enhance their relationship with God.

Maimonides cites this verse earlier in *Mishneh Torah*, as well, in the *Hilkhot Dei'ot* section (5:1), as part of his discussion of how a Torah scholar should conduct himself:

A Torah scholar should not be a glutton, but should rather eat proper food to maintain his body. He should not eat of it [healthful food] excessively, and

should not run to fill his stomach like those who fill themselves with food and drink until their bellies swell. And regarding such people it is said explicitly in the Prophets, "I shall strew dung on your faces." The Sages said, "These are the people who eat and drink and spend all their days as though they are *kohanim*."

It thus emerges that although this verse was stated in specific reference to the *kohanim*, it bears relevance to all people. Just as the *kohanim* are to partake of sacrificial meat for the purpose of the *mitzva* and with the aim of teaching and inspiring the individual who brought the sacrifice, similarly, we must all treat our eating and physical activities as a "*mitzva*" of sorts. Our aim must be not simply to "fill ourselves with food and drink," but rather to sustain ourselves so that we may perform our "priestly" duties, by living a life of sincere commitment and devotion to the Almighty.