HAFTORAH COMMENTARY - DAY BEFORE ROSH CHODESH

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

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This week we read a special Haftora portion in light of the fact that this Shabbos is Erev Rosh Chodesh. This particular segment deals with the heartbreaking separation of Yonason from his dearest and most beloved friend Dovid and Dovid's secret escape from the threatening wrath of Shaul Hamelech. Shaul, then acting as king over Israel, had the mistaken impression that Dovid was a threat to his reign and viewed him as a rebel who deserved, according to Torah law, to be executed . Yonasan the king's son, maintained an entirely different outlook on the matter and idolized Dovid's accomplishments to the point of yearning for Dovid to assume the mantle of leadership over Israel. These diametrically opposing views finally came to a head when the king publicly denounced his son for his disgraceful attitude. Yonasan read his father's message efficiently and secretly informed Dovid to flee for his life. After an emotional scene of departure Yonasan sent Dovid away in peace and reinstated their vow that nothing would ever separate the two families from each other.

The timely reading of this particular segment and the occurrence of its events around Rosh Chodesh suggest a corrolary between the reign of Dovid Hamelech and Rosh Chodesh. Indeed we find many customs related to the new moon that reinforce this association. Our Chazal in Sanhedrin 42a instituted that we recite a blessing over the new moon each month. The nature of this Mitzvah is to recognize the orbit of the moon and its exact and affixed progression and digression beginning from a small crescent, extending to a full moon and then decreasing and disappearing. Yet, in the midst of the recital we say with excitement, "Dovid, King over Israel is alive and enduring". This peculiar practice suggests that the moon and King Dovid's reign have much in common. Chazal (Pesikta Rabasi 15) tell us that in actuality King Dovid's reign was patterned exactly according to the moon. The moon comes to its fullest appearance on the fifteenth day, and then begins its gradual decline until it totally disappears . Once the moon is completely out of sight it then begins its gradual reappearance. Chazal explain that the reign of the House of Dovid resembled the appearance and disappearance of the moon. Likened to the moon, the glory of Israel's reign slowly began to appear in the time of Avrohom Avinu and developed to its fullest maturity fifteen generations later in the era of Shlomo Hamelech, Dovid's son. From that point onwards the monarchy, like the moon, began its gradual descent until its total disappearance fifteen kings later during the era of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. The Maharsha (Sanhedrin 38a) develops this thought and cites that even within the actual dynasty of King Dovid there were thirty figureheads. In fact, the household of Dovid enjoyed fifteen

kings until its downfall during the reign of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. But even after that point there existed a structure of rulership from the House of Dovid for many generations later. The Midrash concludes that when the reign of Dovid will totally disappear the time will be ripe for the gradual appearance of Moshiach.

We conclude the prayers over the new moon with a special request that Hashem restore the moon to its perfect brilliance and then we recite the following passage "And the Jewish People will seek Hashem and their King Dovid". Once again we discover King Dovid as an integral part of our Rosh Chodesh service. Our Chazal (see Rashi Breishis 1:15) teach us that the moon was originally created with the same brilliance as that of the sun. However, the light of the moon was decreased and will remain that way until the era of Moshiach. In this prayer the brilliance of the moon is likened to the glorious reign of Dovid Hamelech. We entreat Hashem to restore the moon to its original brilliance and likewise to restore the reign of Dovid Hamelech to its original splendor. The insightful words of the Maharsha are quoted in completion of this thought that the numerical value of the above cited phrase "Dovid, King over Israel..." equals the exact value of the words "Rosh Chodesh".

We can now appreciate the lesson of this week's haftorah and its encouraging theme. From the view of an outsider the events of the haftorah are terribly disheartening. Dovid had continuously demonstrated remarkable strengths and leadership qualities throughout his faithful years serving as Shaul Hamelech's general. Although Yonasan had been destined to be Shaul's successor, Dovid's superb qualities convinced even Yonasan to step aside and allow Dovid to rise to power. Now, because of King Shaul's grave misunderstanding all must be forfeited and Dovid's glorious career must come to an abrupt end. Yet, Yonasan remains steadfast and is totally convinced that justice will prevail and Dovid will eventually rise to his well deserved position of authority. The moon seems to be disappearing, but Yonasan knows that it will reappear in its proper time. He, therefore reinstates his pact with Dovid (see Malbim 20:13,14) that when he rises to his position of leadership never to forget the household of Yonasan and his father. We draw our faith from these words and, as we look towards the moon, we express our total faith in Hashem. We recognize that the disappearance of the Kingdom of Israel, like the moon, is a guaranteed indication of its reappearance and we entreat Hashem to restore the Kingdom of Dovid to its original glory and splendor, speedily in our days.