

# PARSHAS MIKETZ

*by Rabbi Dovid Siegel*

## *M'lochim I, 3:15*

This week's haftorah reveals to us the extent one can be driven when plagued with jealousy. The haftorah relates the first court decision the wise Shlomo Hamelech rendered after assuming the mantle of leadership. It tells of two women who shared an apartment and had both given birth at the same time. Unfortunately, misfortune struck one of them and her child died in his sleep. One of the women claimed that her child was actually kidnapped by the other woman and replaced by the woman's dead child and the other totally denied the accusation. Shlomo Hamelech immediately ordered for a sword to be brought and that the live child be divided equally amongst the two women. The true mother cried out and pleaded with the king that the child be spared and given to the other mother. But the latter calmly accepted the judgement and agreed to the slicing of the child. Shlomo immediately ruled that the woman who frantically expressed her compassion was the child's true mother.

This incident exposes the true ugly character of jealousy and demonstrates how corrupt it can be. It is most amazing to think that Shlomo Hamelech would actually rely upon this scheme and be confident that the truth would result from it. One could question, "After all, even if it were not her child, where is human compassion?" In addition, wouldn't one expect the imposter to act out her role to perfection? Obviously, no true mother would ever permit her own child to be sliced in front of her very own eyes. Didn't the kidnapper realize that she was revealing her true identity through this absolutely inexcusable behavior?

We must conclude from this that we totally underestimate the savage feeling of jealousy. Firstly, our understanding of this horrible drive is that one merely wants something belonging to another. In truth it is much greater than that and is rooted in an inner need for absolute equality with another. A jealous person can not tolerate the fact that someone else has more than him and is compelled, at all costs, to be on par with that other person. In his mind it doesn't really matter whether they both possess the article or neither, what really counts is that they are equal! The Malbim highlights this thought through the analysis of the exact wording in each woman's claim. The Scriptures state, "One woman said, 'No, my son is the live one and yours is dead' and the other said, 'No, your son is dead and mine is alive.'" (M'lochim I, 3:22) The Malbim notes the different priorities in the two women's statements. The first woman prioritized the live being of her son and the other prioritized the death of her friend's son. This subtlety revealed the true intention of the imposter. What disturbed her was that the

live child belonged to someone else while her own child had died. What she couldn't tolerate was the fact that her friend would enjoy her own child and she could not. Therefore it didn't really matter whether she would receive the live child or not; as long as she wouldn't be given to her friend she would be content. Shlomo Hamelech listened carefully to her words and discovered her true focus and concern. He therefore put her through this test and anticipated with confidence that her true motivation and interest would surface. And so it was. In effect she was caught off guard and without even contemplating the consequences of her statement she told it how it was. Once she heard the soothing words of equality, "Both or neither" she was perfectly content and, without thinking, agreed to Shlomo Hamelech's horrifying verdict.

The upshot of this is that jealousy means one's inability to accept that fact that one can possess that which he doesn't. Although it translates into a "sincere" interest in obtaining that very same article this interest is actually rooted in a base desire for absolute equality. This hidden reality exposes itself when one finds himself mysteriously calmed after his friend has unfortunately lost the coveted article. Suddenly the drive is gone and one no longer seems to need the article his friend once possessed. The imposter in today's haftorah lived with this real feeling of jealousy and saw things in their true perspective. When presented with a "fair" solution to her problem, she forgot to translate her jealousy into a positive interest, the well being of the baby, and left it as a savage need for equality. Shlomo Hamelech made contact with her true inner drive and when she was caught off guard she fell right into the trap.

This fundamental understanding of jealousy opens our eyes to the painful national experience of Yosef and the Ten Tribes. In Parshas Vayeishev the Torah reveals the underlying cause for the sale of Yosef. "And the brothers were jealous of Him." (Breishis 37:11) Yosef was the privileged character in the household of Yaakov rapidly establishing superiority and the brothers resented this. They actually felt physically threatened by Yosef's rise to power and sought ample protection from him. Although they felt justified in what they had done (see comments of Sforno to verse 37:18) they did not realize that, in truth, they were being driven to their conclusion by base jealousy. However, jealousy should motivate one to attempt to obtain the same item, or in this case to rise to a similar position of power. Yet, we discover that their response to this jealousy was quite the contrary. Instead of attempting to perfect themselves and be deemed worthy of a similar status to that of Yosef, the brothers were compelled to remove Yosef from the scene. Was this jealousy or basic beast-like hatred?

In light of this week's haftorah we gain a glimpse into the brother's behavior. As proven above, jealousy means a non-compromising stand for absolute equality without tolerating anyone to possess that which I don't have. It really doesn't matter if I achieve an equal status or if he is demoted from his superior position, all that counts is that we're equal and he's not ahead. The brothers, although not realizing it, could not tolerate their younger brother as a superior over them. There was therefore no drive for the position of superiority because their true desire wasn't status but rather

equality, that no one should be ahead of them. This unfortunately slanted their perception about Yosef and ultimately justified them in their position of removing him from his superiority over them. The results of this ugly trait were devastating to the morale of the Jewish people and could not be rectified until the martyrdom of the righteous ten holy martyrs during and after the era of the Second Temple. May we merit the speedy arrival of Mashiach and the day when this and all other character flaws will be removed from the world, forever.