

HAFTORAH COMMENTARY PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

Hoshea 12:13 - 14:10

This week's haftorah is devoted to the Jewish nation's severe plunge into idolatry. The Judean kingdom ultimately succumbed to the rampant practices of the Samaritan kingdom and engaged itself in foreign worship. This abhorrent conduct traced back to the days of Yeravam ben N'vat, the first Samaritan king. Shlomo Hamelech relied upon his unprecedented sound wisdom and permitted himself to marry women of alien descent and culture. He undoubtedly intended to eradicate from them every trace of their previous environment. However, he was unsuccessful in this and his idolatrous wives threatened to corrupt the entire Jewish nation. Hashem responded to this deteriorating situation and pledged to remove most of the Jewish kingdom from the royal Davidic dynasty. (see M'lochim 1 11:4-13) Hashem sent the prophet Achiya to inform Yeravam he would lead ten of the tribes and Shlomo's son, Rechavam would lead the remaining tribes of Yehuda and Binyomin.

Yeravam began his reign with the best of intentions but he soon abused his royal authority. Instead of preventing foreign influences he ultimately corrupted his entire kingdom beyond the any point of return. Eventually, brought matters under control and exiled most of the Jewish nation. In this week's haftorah the prophet Hoshea turns to the remaining Judean tribes and sternly warns them not to follow their brothers' corrupt ways.

It is worthwhile to understand the events described here that led to Yeravam's appointment and gain true insight to human nature. Hoshea said, "When (Yeravam from) Efraim spoke frightening words he was elevated over Israel; yet he sinned in idolatry and died." (Hoshea 13:1) This verse refers to a specific incident quoted in Sefer M'lochim wherein Yeravam took a hard stand and reprimanded Shlomo Hamelech. Dovid Hamelech previously designated the Milo area outside Yerushalayim as a communal plaza for the masses of Jewish people who visited Yerushalayim during the festivals. Shlomo Hamelech, however, opted to use this area as living quarters for his new bride, the daughter of Pharaoh. The Jewish people were infuriated by this outrageous act of authority but lacked the courage to respond to it. Yeravam took the initiative and displayed his religious zeal and publicly denounced the king for his behavior. Hashem rewarded Yeravam for his courageous act in defense of Hashem's honor and elevated Yeravam to the highest position of authority.

The Sages add an important insight regarding this rise to power. They reflect upon the verses that describe Yeravam's act in the following words, "And Yeravam ben N'vat ... was the servant of Shlomo

and he raised his hand against the king. And for this matter... Shlomo built the Milo and closed his father Dovid's opening." (M'lochim 1 11:26, 27) The Sages explain that Yeravam merited the throne because of his outstanding courageous opposition to Shlomo Hamelech's conduct. But, they painfully add that Yeravam was also severely punished because he publicly shamed the king. (see Mesicta Sanhedrin 101b) Maharsha explains here that the sages sought to understand Yeravam's devastating end. They question that since Yeravam performed such a meritorious act, as is evidenced by his appointment over Israel, how could such control result in the horrible Jewish exile? If Hashem truly appreciated Yeravam's devotion how could it develop so quickly into a rampant campaign of idolatry?

They answer that although Yeravam's intentions were proper they were accompanied by arrogance. True, Shlomo Hamelech deserved reprimand but this did not include public shame and embarrassment. The Sages reveal that had Yeravam been truly sensitive to the king's honor and authority he could have never acted in this manner. Although he acted out of religious zeal he was self absorbed in piety and ignored the king's honor and due respect. This imperfection ultimately led Yeravam to total corruption and caused him to forfeit his portion in the world to come. (ad loc)

This arrogance and disrespect played itself out on a broader scale and eventually led the Samaritan kingdom into idolatry. The Sages explain that Yeravam feared that the Jewish pilgrimage to Yerushalayim would cause him to lose his following to Rechavam. Yeravam based this fear on an halachic precedent that required him to stand in the Temple area while Rechavam sat. He reasoned that this scene would undermine his authority and publicly display him as Rechavam's servant. To combat this, he established alternate sites of worship throughout his kingdom and forbade his people from visiting the Temple. These drastic measures forced his kingdom to totally disassociate with the Judean kingdom and the Temple. In the absence of any tangible link with Hashem, the Samaritan kingdom developed its own form of worship and became gravely involved in idolatry.

The Sages reveal that the root of this was Yeravam's arrogance and insensitivity towards Rechavam. After all, couldn't a scion of Dovid Hamelech be afforded proper respect and honor without interfering with Yeravam's reign? Why couldn't Yeravam justify his behavior as a show of honor to Hashem's chosen one, Dovid Hamelech? The unfortunate reality was that Yeravam could not see himself forgoing his respect for Rechavam's sake. He conceivably reasoned that the king must display total authority and not be perceived as subservient to anyone. However, the Sages reveal that this reasoning was truly rooted in arrogance and unwillingness to show others proper honor and respect. This character flaw created his threatening illusion and propelled him to alienate his kingdom.

We now realize that what began as a subtle insensitivity towards Shlomo Hamelech eventually developed into a full grown split in our nation. Yeravam did perform a meritorious act but showed disrespect for authority. Hashem granted Yeravam the throne but tested his ability to manage such authority. Yeravam succumbed to the temptation of power and could not forego his own honor. This

persistent drive blinded him and misled him to undermine his own power and destroy his kingdom. (see Maharzu's comment to Vayikra Rabba 12:5) Regretfully, we learn the power of a character flaw and see how one person's sense of honor and respect destroyed our nation and exiled our Ten lost tribes.

This lesson is appropos to our sedra that presents our Matriarch Rochel as the paradigm of human sensitivities. Although Rochel undoubtedly knew the immeasurable spiritual value of her exclusive relationship with our Patriarch Yaakov she was not self absorbed. Her spiritual drive could not interfere with her sensitivity towards her sister, Leah. Rochel decided that her exclusive relationship with Yaakov had no merit if it caused Leah embarrassment. She, unlike Yeravam, overlooked her religious fervor and focused on her sister's pain. She therefore revealed to Leah all of Yaakov's secret signals and assisted her sister in establishing an eternal bond with her own pre-destined match. Rochel's self sacrifice and sensitivity became the hallmark of the Jewish people who constantly strive to perfect themselves in these areas.

The Sages reveal that Hashem specifically responds to Rochel's prayers on behalf of her exiled children. When Rochel weeps over her children Hashem remembers her incredible sensitivity towards Leah and responds favorably. In her merit Hashem forgives the Jewish people for their abhorrent insensitivities towards His glory and guarantees her children's return to their land. Although their sins and ultimate exile are rooted in Yeravam's insensitivity Rochel's merit surpasses all faults. Her superhuman display of self sacrifice and sensitivity became the character of the Jewish people and in her merit Hashem promises to return her long lost children to their homeland. (see intro. to Eicha Rabba)

The Chafetz Chaim reminds us that our seemingly endless exile is rooted in these insensitivities. Hashem will not send Mashiach until we rectify these faults. Let us internalize Rochel's lesson and exercise extreme sensitivity towards the feeling of others. (intro to Shmiras Halashon) Let us not allow our religious fervor or spiritual drives to desensitize us of the needs of others. Priority one must be every Jewish person's well-deserved honor and respect. Let us remember Rochel's ruling that no mitzva act- regardless of his magnitude- has merit unless it takes everyone's feelings into consideration. After rectifying our subtle character flaws we can sincerely approach Hashem and plead with Him to end our troubles. May we merit Hashem's return to His beloved nation in the nearest future.

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