

Vayeshev and Its Haftarah by the Rav zt"l

- The Rav deals with three connections between Amos' life and times, and the Sidrah Vayishlach. In the process, he wove in some Hanukah themes.

VAYESHEV AND THE HAFTORAH (Amos)

LECTURE DELIVERED BY RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK ON SATURDAY EVENING
DECEMBER 23, 1978, EREV HANUKAH

(This is a “reconstruction” of part of a shiur by Rabbi Soloveitchik, probably given in Boston. I do not know who transcribed this shiur. The notes that came to my hand are unsigned, and there are no “mare mekomot”. I attempted to research the sources and may have erred in some. I have attempted to transmit the ideas of the Rav as faithfully as I could, under the circumstances. [Ed.]).

In tonight's Shiur we will touch upon the subject of Chanukah.

Listening to today's Sidra, Vayeshev, and the haftarah from the prophet Amos, a question arises. What is the connection between the haftarah and the parsha? The pertinent sentences read: Al shlosa pishei yisrael veal arbaa lo ashivenu; al machram bekeseif tzadik veevyon baavur naalayim. It is said that with the money the brothers received for the sale of Yoseph, they bought shoes. In consequence, the Almighty declared: “With your shoes you shall walk into the Diaspora of Egypt”.

This answer is simple, but I believe it is not satisfactory. Reading the rest of the haftarah, it appears doubtful that Amos refers to Yoseph. He preaches against injustice, corruption and the oppression of the poor, even to the point of selling them into slavery. The prophet continues, that “Hashem brought you up from Egypt and led you for 40 years in the wilderness and destroyed the Amorites, the most powerful nation you faced. Yet, you forced nazarites to drink wine and commanded the prophets to stop their prophecy. Shall a lion roar without prey? Shall a shofar sound and the people not tremble? So, too, G-d has spoken, who will not prophesy?”

It makes no sense to say that this passage refers only to mechirat Yoseph. The prophet is denouncing the prevailing injustice and cruelty! Still, this haftarah was selected for this parsha by the baalei hamesorah. We must understand why.

I believe the reason for the choice lies not only in the first pasuk, even though that is the theme used in the piyut of mussaf of Yom Kippur about the Asara Harugey Malchut, where the executioner is described as “filling up his mansion with shoes”, which means that he killed them as expiation for the selling of Yoseph and the shoes they bought with the money they received. Even so, I believe there is more to the connection between the sidra and the haftarah.

I

There are three themes in today's sidra: (A) Selling Yoseph; (B) Yehuda's affair with Tamar; (C)

Yoseph's life in the master's house and his encounter with the prisoners in the dungeon. Which is the central theme? All of them coalesce into one central theme: Yaakov's troubles within his family.

Until now, Yaakov had met only with opposition from the outside: from enemies who were not members of his own household. His problems were with Esav, Laban and Shechem. The actual house of Yaakov enjoyed complete unity. All opposition came from without. Suddenly, a new confrontation developed – brother against brother. They hated Yoseph – they couldn't talk peaceably with him!

What was the chief cause of the brothers' anger? What bothered them most of all? Their anger was motivated by the partiality showed to Yoseph by his father.

Parents often have preferences among their children. Sometimes the preference is the father's oldest child for he acts, as it were, as his assistant, his chief disciple. Mothers often favor the youngest because they remain "their babies". But outwardly, parents try to hide their preferences and to make it appear as if they have no favorites. They try to cover up their preferences. Yaakov, however, for good reasons of his own, not only didn't deny his favoritism, but he demonstrated it by giving the coat of many colors to Yoseph. For the coat symbolized leadership. He wanted them to know that he was giving the mantle of leadership to Joseph!

Therefore, the first thing the brothers did when they attacked Yoseph, was to remove his coat – divesting him of the symbol of leadership. What they hated most was the coat of many colors, which proclaimed this leadership.

Next, the Torah tells us of his dreams. The dreams complicated everything, and their hatred for him increased. Yoseph, himself, told them of his vision and even interpreted it. The second dream was even worse. It evoked open hatred. Had he not told them of the dreams they might have tolerated the favoritism. After all, the coat was Yaakov's doing, not Yoseph's. However, when he began to dream, he demonstrated that he accepted and embraced Yaakov's decision and they became frightened. How do we know that the dreams complicated the situation? When he approached them, they did not call him Baal Hapassim, master of the coat, but Baal Hachalomot, master of the dreams. Later in Egypt, Yoseph remembered the dreams. The whole tragedy was caused by the dreams. A Baal Hachalomot is not an ordinary, dim-witted person. He is usually a gifted, bright person: a leader, an innovator.

Now, what did the brothers try to do? What was their desire? It was that Yoseph be silenced. It wasn't only that they didn't want to hear his dreams themselves. They wanted him to stop talking of his dreams to others. That is what we find in the prophet Amos! They (the people of his time) wanted to silence the prophet and his prophecies. We are told elsewhere, Vehayu malivim bemalachey E-lohim ubozim devarav, umetaatim beneviav, ad alot chatat Hashem beamo ad leeyn marpey: "They mocked the messengers of G-d and scorned his words, and derided his prophets until the anger of Hashem rose against His people until there was no cure for it" (Divrey Hayamim II 31:16). The people mocked the prophets and despised their prophecies. They were afraid of prophecies. Even though they knew disaster would strike, they did not want to be told about it. Amos tells them: "You will never get rid of Neviim. "You will have to listen

whether you want to or not. G-d speaks! Who can resist it?" Jeremiah declared: "The word of G-d became a fire in my bones; I was compelled to prophesy" (Yirmiyahu 23:29). The people attempted to suppress the truth by stopping prophecy.

That is what happened to Yoseph. Rambam said, that a prophet who is moved to prophecy must speak (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, 9:3). Thus Amos declared, The Lord has spoken, who will not prophesy? (Amos 3:8). From the Midrash we learn that Yoseph must have had a spark of prophecy. The chalomot had the charisma of prophecy and that is why the brothers tried to suppress them. Prophecy breaks through the human personality. The prophet is transformed to another person entirely, nehepach leish acher (Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah, 7:1). The people of Shomron wanted Amos to go back to Judea where he was a shepherd but he declared, "Suddenly, I am possessed and cannot go back to Judea". This is exactly the chet of the brothers. They wanted to suppress Yoseph's dreams. And that is why the haftarah belongs to this sidra. They wanted him to lose his visionary power.

II

I believe that this is also the link between Chanukah and sidra Vayeshev. Of course, the nes of Chanukah occurred 200 years after scripture was completed. Therefore, it is not part of Torah SheBiktav. It is connected only with Torah SheBeal Peh. Throughout the ages, most of our enemies have tried to suppress Torah SheBeal Peh. The small Jewish community in Jerusalem was told by its internal enemies, the Jews who wanted to Hellenize, to stop studying and practicing Judaism. Just so was it with Yoseph and his brothers, and with Amos and his people. The Hellenists demanded, not that they stop being Jews, but that they stop studying, preaching, teaching and practicing Judaism. This is what Amos declares: "G-d speaks! Who can resist?"

There is another link between Chanukah and sidra Vayeshev. Of course, there are areas of conflict between the values of the sages and of Judaism on one hand, and the values of their enemies on the other hand. And one of the most critical areas of conflict was sexual immorality and immodesty. The nudity flaunted by the Greeks and the Hellenists, the licentious conduct, their seeking to suppress the modesty of the Jews, appalled Matityahu and aroused him and his followers to their revolt. An entire section of the Shulchan Aruch revolves around modesty. This is all represented by the story of Yoseph. Undermining modesty was the basis of Greek culture, which idolized the human body and its public display. When the Roman Emperor Caligula declared his intention to display the King's image in the Temple, the Jews declared, "It means war". Philo, the progressive Jew, came to Caligula and said, "No, I will join my brothers in this matter. A human figure cannot be displayed in the Temple". Caligula had to yield.

We have two distinct Shvotim, Yehuda and Yoseph. Yehuda was not, at first, strong enough to resist sexual temptation. That is how he is portrayed in the story of Tamar. Yoseph, on the other hand, resisted temptation. Later on, however, we find that Yehuda gained the strength to rise, once he had fallen. He does Teshuva publicly, and acknowledges his sin.

So, besides the midrash about the sale of Yoseph, we now have two additional reasons for the connection with the sidra. The Gentile world wanted the Jew to stop preaching and prophesying. And they wanted to remove the characteristic modesty of the Jewish people.

III

There is another link, which is subjective, and some may disagree. Yet I believe there is an additional link between Chanukah and Yoseph's life.

In the times of Bayit Rishon, the people and the land were one entity. There were no Jews outside the land, no Diaspora. In the era of Chanukah, it was different. For more Jews lived outside the land than lived within it. Before the churban, there were approximately five million Jews in Israel. Afterwards, most of them lived outside the land's borders.

The first Jews to experience galut were Yaakov, and even more so, Yoseph. Yoseph experienced galut as both a slave and a viceroy. Yoseph's experience was the Diaspora of poverty as well as that of riches. During the last 1900 years we have demonstrate that our greatest loyalty was when we were poor. Our record is not so good when we were affluent. Chanukah was not a fight only for the Bait Hamikdash. It was also a struggle for the survival of the people. If the Maccabees had lost, not only would the Temple have been lost, but also the people and the entire Diaspora. Jews did not lost their loyalty in the Diaspora, and the example was Yoseph!

Submitted by Nisson Shulman