
SHABBAT WORKS

23 Kislev 5782

Friday night, November 26 - Saturday, November 27, 2021

PARASHAT VAYESHEV

GENESIS 37:1 - 40:23

HAFTARAH

AMOS 2:6 - 3:8

Candle Lighting: 4:27 pm

Havdalah: 5:25 pm

Breaking Out (adapted from previous years) Rabbi Mordecai Finley, Ph.D.

Of all of the sublime indications that “the Bible is literature, not journalism,” the subtle threads exuding from this week’s Torah portion stand out.

Briefly, Judah marries the unnamed daughter of a Canaanite named Shu’a. Their elder son, Er, marries Tamar, of unknown origin. Er dies, and the second son Onan must take Tamar as wife, according to the laws of levirate (brother in law) marriage. Onan refuses to impregnate Tamar – he also dies. The obligation of brother in law marriage is still required, but Judah, worrying that his last son Shelah might die if he married Tamar, delays their union. Tamar takes the initiative, dresses up as a harlot, seduces Judah, and becomes impregnated by her unwitting father-in-law. She was determined to bear an heir to Judah, either through Judah’s son Shelah or through Judah, personally.

Tamar and Judah produce twins, just like Judah’s grandmother, Rebecca. At birth, one of the twins extends his hand from the womb. The midwife, recalling the sad story of Jacob (Judah’s father) and Esau (Judah’s uncle), immediately ties a crimson thread to that hand reaching out from the womb, saying, “this one came out first!” That baby retracts his hand, and his brother is born. The midwife exclaims, seemingly in admiration, “*Mah paratzta.*” That exclamation is hard to translate – maybe something like “Wow, you really broke out of there!” Judah, taking the midwife’s cue, names him “Peretz,” “Breakout.” We have the image of Peretz crawling over his brother to get fully out of the womb first.

So what became of Peretz, the breakout son of Judah and Tamar? We find out at the end of the book of Ruth. We are told: Peretz (Judah’s son) sired Hezron; Hezron was the father of Ram; Ram was the father of Amminadav, who was the father of Nachson, who was the father of Salmah, who was the father of Boaz (Ruth’s husband). Boaz and Ruth bore Oved, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, the future king, prototype of the Messiah.

In short, the authors/editors of the Bible made sure that we know that the story of Tamar and Judah continues straight into the story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth, the Moabitess, is the grandmother of King David; she is the ancestor of the Messiah, as well.

Breaking Out, Continued

Then what happens? David, of course, is the father of Solomon. Solomon marries Na'amah the Ammonitess (among other women). Solomon and Na'amah bear Rechav'am (Rehoboam), who succeeds Solomon as king. While Rechav'am's poor leadership is a factor in splitting the United Monarchy, he and Na'amah bring the lineage of David forward.

I hope you are still reading, because here's the gold: buried in these lineages is the Bible going to great lengths to tell us that the line of David, understood to be propelling into the future to bear the King Messiah, son of David, is the product of both a Moabitess and an Ammonitess. (Much of this is discussed in the Talmud, Baba Kamah 38b)

Moab and Ammon are the sons produced by the daughters of Lot, who consorted with their father under the belief that humanity had been wiped out with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They saw themselves as the new Eve, or the new wives of Noah, regenerating humanity.

At first glance, what a sordid mess. Sons die. Onanism gets its name. A daughter-in-law parading as a prostitute to have sex with her father-in-law. Capping all of this off are descendants of the products of incest marrying into the family.

Of course, the sordid nature of the story is reversed when we see that these women are the ancestors of the Messiah, that intrepid Ruth is King David's grandmother, and that fiercely devoted Tamar bears Peretz into the world, the young lad who broke out, to become the ancestor of David, of Solomon, and of King Messiah, down the road.

The Bible is literature, not journalism. We want to ask, "What does all this mean?" but that is a too facile question to ask of great literature. The Bible is not Aesop's fables.

What is clear is that something unclear is happening. Something strange, upsetting and beautiful. Jacob's tricking his father and betraying his brother sets into motion further stories of masking, impersonating, and hiding.

I can only offer a thought based on the spiritual- psychological- philosophic- literary journey through which the Bible leads us.

We are thrown into life, into situations that we cannot understand and we barely know what is at stake. No law, ethical code or cultural tradition can prepare us for, or guide us through, moments of being stranded, times when we find ourselves on the rocks and shoals upon which life can thrust us.

We have to find the answers within. Maybe someone else can advise us what to do, but we are the ones who have to decide. The story of Tamar in search of Judah's seed in this week's Torah portion is just one of the stories of courage and cunning we find in the book of Genesis. These stories tell us that to retreat into conformity betrays the truth of the moment. But we also know that to revel in nonconformity robs us of the existentialist experience of courage.

And these tales, exquisite literary products of deep and fine minds, evoke the tortured, miraculous and stunning contours of the journeys of our own souls.

Shabbat Zoom Sessions

Friday Evening, 7 pm

Candle Lighting and Brief Teaching

Meeting ID: 852 4540 4129

Password: 290167

Shabbat Morning, 10am

Shabbat Morning Teaching

Meeting ID: 245 967 453

Password: 595703

Parashat Vayeshev

Synopsis of the

Torah Portion

Genesis 37:1 - 40:23

1. Jacob favors his son Joseph, who has dreams, which presage his preeminence in the family. Joseph's favor in Jacob's eyes makes him unpopular with his brothers.
2. Joseph goes to see about his brothers' shepherding. His brothers plot to kill him, but individually back away from the plot.
3. Joseph is sold to the Ishmaelites, who then sell him to the Midianites, who then sell him to Potiphar, a "courtier" of Pharaoh.
4. Back in Canaan, Judah marries and has sons. Er marries Tamar, and then dies. Onan refuses to serve as Tamar's yabam (to marry Tamar and have a son for Er), and dies as well. Tamar masks herself, seduces Judah and becomes pregnant. Judah is contrite, and becomes a father and grandfather at the same time.
5. Back in Egypt, Joseph shines as Potiphar's steward. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him. He resists; she connives to have him unjustly thrown in jail.
6. In jail, Joseph soon becomes a senior trustee, eventually becoming the warden's Right-hand man.
7. Joseph interprets the dreams of senior government officials who are in prison. His interpretations are validated, happily in one case, not so happily in another.

Synopsis of Haftarah

Amos 2:6 - 3:8

The connection of today's Haftarah with the Sidrah is very subtle. In the first verse of the Haftarah, we find Amos castigating Israel for "selling a righteous man for silver, and a poor man for a pair of shoes." That seems to refer to Joseph's brother's selling him. Amos warns that for these sins God will exact retribution. Further on in the Haftarah, however, Amos chastises Israel in that fathers and sons consort with the same betrothed maiden; could this not be about Judah and Tamar?

Amos was the severest of the prophets who prophesied against northern Israel, around 750 BCE. His prophecy is filled with outstanding rhetoric. Perhaps his best known phrase in our times is "Let justice well up as water, righteousness as a mighty stream" (5:24)

Happy Birthday...

Steven Klein on November 27

Stephen Grynberg on November 29

Lisa Loeb on November 29

Cindy Fields on November 29

This Week We Remember...

Rose Adler,
mother of Gary Adler, on November 28.

Our Condolences To...

Susan and Gene Miller on the passing of Gene's
father, Ernest J. Miller, on October 30.

Laura & Ilbert Phillips on the passing of Laura's
uncle, Joe Diamond, on October 24.

OHR HATORAH SYNAGOGUE

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SUNDAY EVENING
NOV 28
TO
SUNDAY EVENING
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PLEASE NOTE:

If you have something for the weekly update, material, as well as flyers, must be in the office by 4PM the preceding Monday!