

A DVAR TORAH AND TRIBUTE TO RABBI MEYER FENDEL ZT"L
FROM HIS DAUGHTER ON HIS FIRST YAHRZEIT

Yaakov Avinu's Dreams of Return – And Ours

The haftara of Parashat Vayeitzei, excerpted from Hoshea, begins with Yaakov's departure to Aram and continues with the section "Shuva Yisrael," famous as the haftara for Shabbat Shuva read on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

How is Yaakov's story in this week's Parsha connected to Hoshea's call to Am Yisrael to return to Hashem?

At the beginning of the Parsha, after departing from his father's home in Beer Sheva, Yaakov articulates his deep desire to "return in peace to my father's house and Hashem will be for me a God." Rashi says that Yaakov's wish is to come back from Lavan's house, complete, without sin, with his sterling character untainted, and Hashem's name made known in the world through him and his descendants.

Yaakov comes to the well where he meets Rachel and the Midrash Breishit Rabba tells us that Yaakov is overwhelmed with a glimpse of his majestic future which is to come from him: twelve tribes, Kohanim, Leviyim, dynasties with Ruach Hakodesh, Matan Torah, the Sanhedrin and the Beit Hamikdash.

Yaakov had left Eretz Yisrael physically, but his heart and soul are focused and consumed by his resolve to return and actualize his aspirations and Divine promise for Am Yisrael, and the parsha ends with Yaakov returning to Machanayim, as the proud and regal Patriarch of our nation.

Can we, his spiritual heirs follow Yaakov's lead and after a detour from our destiny, find our way back?

Hoshea informs us that Bnei Yisrael have been gifted with a "navi mishamer," we are protected by the Navi Eliyahu who arouses Divine Mercy by mentioning the merits of our forefathers, specifically those of the twelve Shevatim. The Midrash Pesikta Rabati says that the miracles that will be done for Yisrael are in the merit of the twelve tribes. In Sefer Melachim, when Eliyahu wanted to bring Am Yisrael back to Hashem, he takes twelve stones and builds an altar

"ויקח אליהו שתים עשרה אבנים למספר בני יעקב", after which Am Yisrael call out "Hashem

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hu Haelokim" and their sincere resolve of commitment to Hashem is accepted.

Hoshea's Nevua takes place before the exile of ten of the twelve tribes, Malchut Yisrael. Hoshea tells Bnei Yisrael how far they have strayed from Yaakov's aspirations and the subsequent consequence of being driven from the Land, solidifying the rift and division within Am Yisrael.

Towards the end of his nevua, however, Hoshea is uniquely encouraging: Shuva Yisrael! Yes, you have stumbled and sinned, but you are still Hashem's beloved Yisrael. Your Teshuva can reach up to the Kisei Hakavod! Hoshea not only urges us to do Teshuva, but tells us how to do so:

Don't be disillusioned by the distance your sins have created between you and Hashem, your confession and desire to change will restore the relationship.

“קחו עמכם דברים”

Realize the power of the "voice of Yaakov." Use your speech for words of prayer and Torah study and reaching out to create bonds with others.

“וקח טוב”

Hoshea instructs us to ask Hashem to take our good deeds and let them replace our destructive ones, urging us to focus on grabbing opportunities to do mitzvot, acts of loving kindness and concern for others, and get back on track.

Just like Yaakov Avinu lays down on one stone, comprised of 12 stones which united under his head, so, too, must we join, with our different roles, strengths and weaknesses and vow to maintain the integrity and indivisible unity of the twelve sons of Yaakov and show our unshakeable devotion to Hashem. In this merit, may we see the Beit Hamikdash restored,

our whole nation back in our Father's Home.

This haftara was read last year on Shabbat morning when my father, Rabbi Meyer Fendel, zatzal, left this world. His legacy of bringing back so many to Hashem, His Torah and Land with complete Ahavat Yisrael is legendary and continues to guide and impact us profoundly, especially in our times.

Together with my mother, Rebbetzin Goldie Fendel, a"h, who passed away a day before Shabbat Shuva, their joint haftara echoes with the messages of their life's journey and mission. ■



Rabbi Meyer Fendel, ztl, started day schools across the United States for Torah Umesorah in the 1940s and then founded the Orthodox community of West Hempstead, NY and the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, which he led for over three decades. He and his Rebbetzin made Aliya in 1985 and continued to educate and inspire at Camp Nvei Ashdod, Midreshet Moriah, and in their open home. The Fendels impacted thousands of lives and are survived by their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, all living in Israel.

Mrs. Mindy Marcus, youngest of the four Fendel children, has enjoyed teaching Tanach for over thirty years in Ahavat Yisrael Banot and other venues.

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