



Parashat Sh'mini
Shabbat Machar Hodesh
I Samuel 20:18-42
April 18, 2015 / 29 Nisan 5775

This week's Haftarah connects not to Parashat Sh'mini, the selection from the Torah for this week, but to the arrival of the Hebrew month of Iyyar on Sunday (and Monday). The Haftarah from I Samuel 20 is referred to as Machar Chodesh, "tomorrow is the new month," as this fact forms the basis for the action in the Haftarah. Israel's first king, Saul, is extremely concerned - one might say obsessed - with controlling his own reign and passing it along to his son Jonathan. Jonathan's dearest friend and brother-in-law, David, is clearly a threat to the royal line, and both young men fear Saul's temper. They devise a plan in which David will be absent from his normal place at the royal Rosh Chodesh meal, Jonathan will gauge his father's reaction, and then Jonathan will communicate to David via a rather elaborate scheme whether or not he must flee for his life.

At the center of this fascinating narrative are 2 interconnected yet contrasting relationships that give us insight into the meaning of Rosh Chodesh, the imminent new month. One relationship is that between father and son, Saul and Jonathan, and the other is between dear friends, Jonathan and David. The father-son relationship is obviously strained in our narrative, with Jonathan barely communicating with his father. It is Saul who is motivated by his desire to preserve his son's right to rule, and yet we see that he has no qualms about raising his spear against this same son when it becomes clear that Jonathan favors his alliance and friendship with David. Unlike the ideal parent-child relationship based on unconditional love, this relationship unravels quickly and is truly broken.

In contrast, the relationship between Jonathan and David is completely unconditional, held up as an example of this kind of love by our rabbis in Pirkei Avot 5:16. The very heart of the Haftarah's narrative is their plan to communicate from a distance, something Saul cannot manage, even in the same room as his son. When David receives Jonathan's clear message that he must run away, the friends cry and embrace one another - a display of emotion that almost counteracts the violence and anger we see in Saul.

As the Haftarah concludes, we are left hoping for the day when the two friends are reunited. While we know from reading further in I Samuel that they are not (Jonathan dies in battle along with his father), the Haftarah wisely concludes with the potential for reunification and renewal of friendship, a theme that ties into the occasion of Rosh Chodesh.

The wholeness and the brokenness of these two relationships have much to teach us all year long, but they are particularly pertinent to Erev Rosh Chodesh. As we anticipate a new month beginning with the end of Shabbat, the renewal of the moon is on our minds, and with it, the renewal of the entire natural world - ourselves included. Will the new month bring brokenness in our relationships? A breakdown of communication with those we love? Or will it bring open communication and unconditional love with our family and friends? Surely we pray for the latter, finding inspiration in the beauty of the love between David and Jonathan.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for April 20, 2012 by Rabbi Ita Paskind of Congregation Olam Tikvah in Fairfax, VA. Machar Hodesh was Rabbi Paskind's Bat Mitzvah haftarah! A native of Lakewood, NJ, she has been Assistant Rabbi at Olam Tikvah since July 2010 and looks forward to becoming the Rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Norwalk, CT this summer. She was ordained by the JTS in May, 2010, having received a BA and MA there, as well as a BA in Psychology from Columbia U. Prior to coming to Olam Tikvah she was active with preteen and teen programs through USY, Nativ, Ramah camps and as a Solomon Schechter school teacher, and has continued this work as an active teacher and spiritual leader at Olam Tikvah. She is also an aspiring guitarist.