

Message from the Parsha

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Struggling to Become a Rosh Chodesh Jew

HAFTARA OF MACHAR CHODESH

At first glance, this week's haftara for Erev Rosh Chodesh has little of note to tell us. Its choice as the reading for the day before the start of the new month seems to derive from the phrase MACHAR CHODESH, 'Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh', which Yehonatan says to David in the opening verse (Shmuel Alef 20:18), in the context of a broader narrative of family and national dynamics.

Rosh Chodesh, marking the start of the Jewish month, is a time of renewal, reflection, and spiritual alignment. Yet perhaps the depiction of Rosh Chodesh appearing in this story can shed some light on how we are meant to think about the start of a new month. In the story, Shaul awaits the arrival of those close to him for the celebration of Rosh Chodesh, which was observed by way of a large, festive meal. David, who is attempting to keep away from Shaul, does not arrive at the palace, which concerns Yehonatan, who forewarns David that Shaul will notice his absence. Nonetheless, David does not arrive, leading Shaul to be enraged not only with David, but with

his own son, Yehonatan, whom he (rightly) fears is siding with David.

This dramatic episode, in which Shaul's position in his own home begins to teeter as Yehonatan commits himself to David, is cast against the backdrop of Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Chodesh is not a festival that is dressed in much external pomp and circumstance - yet it sets the stage for all the other festivals in our calendar and enables all of our annual spiritual and ritual experiences. It reflects the authority vested in us by God to oversee the calendar, to manage our experience of time and shape our communities. After all, the sanctification of the month happens through the conversation and engagement between strangers: two observers and a court of three who have seen the new crescent moon. This demonstrates how holiness in Judaism is never created in a vacuum, but through the capacity for conversation and connection.

Shaul's animosity towards David and his inability to communicate with him contributes directly to his downfall; while Yehonatan's friendship with and commitment to David, even in the face of political risk, is what allows the new king to eventually rise to power. The breakdown of the relationship between Shaul and David, and the solidifying of the bond

between Yehonatan and David, is framed in the context of Rosh Chodesh. For that is precisely what the day celebrates: the ability to use time to forge meaningful relationships which transform the world around us. One might say that Yehonatan, who is the critical enabler to this transition in Jewish history despite being a muted character in Tanach, is the paradigmatic 'Rosh Chodesh Jew'.

With this backdrop in mind, and as we are facing unprecedented, existential challenges as a people, I must share my struggle to emulate being a Rosh Chodesh Jew. For the first time, I find it challenging to reconcile with some of my Charedi co-religionists who seem to ignore the call to defend our nation during this time of existential threat. How can we reconcile the values of mutual responsibility and unity when segments of our community refrain from fulfilling the biblical mandate to defend our people during this MILCHEMET MITZVA and ignoring the principle of not standing idly by while your neighbor's blood is being spilled?

As we enter the month of Kislev, I wonder: how can one celebrate the heroism of the Maccabees without embracing the responsibilities they exemplified? How do we reconcile the burdens borne by some, while others disengage from the collective

responsibility? Why should my students, who are in the Beit Midrash, lose their learning and miss their families for hundreds of days of miluim, when tens of thousands of others not only don't serve, but also don't actually learn in a dedicated manner? This dissonance calls for introspection and dialogue - not to alienate, but to inspire a renewed commitment to shared values.

As we approach this and every new month, may we be reminded of Rosh Chodesh's lesson: to prioritize meaningful dialogue and relationships, even - especially - when challenges arise. Only through understanding and connection can we fulfill our shared purpose as a people.