

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA CHA-YAY SOROH : חיי שרה

*This week's Haftorah is taken from the
First Book of Kings, Chapter 1, verses 1 — 31.*

1. The connexion to the Sidra is seen straightaway in the first Possuk of the Haftorah. In the Sidra, the Torah tells us that Avrohom was advanced in years and this prompted him to send his servant on a mission to find a wife for his son and successor, Yitzchok. And the first Possuk of the Haftorah, telling us that King Dovid was advanced in age, likewise introduces the subject of the succession to his throne.
2. This week's Haftorah tells about the time at the beginning of the Kings of Israel. After the first king, Shaul, the prophet Shmuel was commanded to anoint Dovid ben Yishai, from the Tribe of Yehudah, as King over the People of Israel and he reigned altogether for forty years. King Dovid had to fight many fierce battles to secure the borders of the fledgling kingdom and in addition he suffered great personal tragedies and much sorrow. As a result, King Dovid has become prematurely old. His mind is alert but no matter how many wraps they covered him with, he feels cold. Clothing will not warm him and it becomes clear that the only way to warm him is by human warmth. To this end, there is sought out a refined young damsel and she is able to restore to the king the bodily warmth that he needs. (We get here a glimpse of the great self-control of Dovid from the fact that despite her beauty and youth, he allowed her only to restore his bodily warmth.) Our Chachommim tell us that this, that Dovid could not derive warmth from clothes, was as a rebuke to him for his having cut off the corner of the cloak of King Shaul. Although at the time Dovid meant only to demonstrate how he could have killed Shaul — for see! he had cut off the corner from his robe — nevertheless his act showed a certain degree of disrespect for clothing. Being as great a Tzaddik as he was, the measure of censure for King Dovid is correspondingly exacting and if he showed a lack of respect for King Shaul's clothing, then he shall not be able to derive warmth from clothing.
3. But to Adoniyahu, one of King Dovid's sons, the King's frail old age presented an opportunity to assert himself as the next king. He gathered around him his cronies and companions together with a few prominent personalities and various disaffected people who either had some grudge against Dovid or else feared him and he conducted himself as if he was already crowned as king, even to the extent that he had fifty runners going ahead of his chariot. To mark the event, he proclaimed a celebration, taking care not to invite those national figures who were the inner cabinet of Dovid and loyal to him. In other words, making the most of the apparent weakness of his father and what he perceived as the uncertainty of the moment, Adoniyahu rebelled against his father and made a pre-emptive bid for the throne.
4. The Possuk tells us that Dovid was never strict with his son and our Chachommim point out for us that Adoniyahu's arrogant behaviour was therefore really Dovid's fault. In his love of his son, he had never rebuked Adoniyahu, who was a vain and handsome younger brother of Avshalom (whom Dovid had similarly never chastised and who came to a tragic end) and Adoniyahu therefore thought that he could do whatever he wished. Our Chachommim teach that love must be tempered with discipline and duty.

HAFTORAH OF THE WEEK : ח"י שרה

5. When the prophet Nossan heard about this rebellion, he quickly went to the Queen, Bas Sheva. She must go to Dovid and tell him what has happened. Otherwise, said Nossan, if Adoniyahu should be allowed to install himself as the next king, then Shlomo, and indeed Bas Sheva herself, would be in mortal danger from Adoniyahu after Dovid dies. She should go before the king, says Nossan, and ask him if Adoniyahu's actions are with his agreement. If so, this is in direct contradiction to his promise — and indeed HaShem's promise — that Shlomo was to succeed Dovid. Nossan arranges with Queen Bas Sheva that while she will be talking to the king, he will come and corroborate her words. In the interests of the peace of the realm and the stability of the monarchy, they must do something and see that King Dovid shall act decisively and so avoid conflict and discord in the Jewish Nation.
6. Bas Sheva comes before the king. He seemed to be very frail and it looked as if there was only a little time to save the situation. She told him of the happenings with Adoniyahu and asked the king to please name their son Shlomo as the next king, as he had promised. As she was speaking, Nossan arrived and Bas Sheva withdrew. Nossan then asked the king whether he had appointed Adoniyahu as his successor — as they were proclaiming.
7. King Dovid then ordered that Bas Sheva should come in as he wished to settle the matter clearly there and then. When she came, the king declared before HaShem and in the presence of the notables that what he had promised would come about, namely, that Shlomo would be the one to sit on the throne of Israel after him. Indeed, he would put things in hand this very day and will ensure that his promise will be kept. At these words, Bas Sheva bowed down and prostrated herself before the king and prayed that his dynasty shall live on forever. [The Haftorah ends at this point.]
8. King Dovid indeed orders that Nossan the prophet, together with Tzaddok the Kohen Ga'dol and Benoyohu ben Yehoyodoh, the Head of the Sanhedrin, shall take the young Shlomo and make him to ride upon the King's donkey and go down to the Gichon stream, just outside Yerushalaim. (King Dovid commanded that they take his donkey as if to intimate that Shlomo's reign will be peaceful and placid rather than his horse, which would have called to mind battle and war.) Tzaddok the Kohen Ga'dol, together with Nossan the prophet, is to anoint Shlomo with the holy anointing oil and they are to blow the Shofar and proclaim, "Long live King Shlomo!" They are then to bring him back and sit him upon King Dovid's throne and he shall thus be seen to be the next King of Israel. All this was done, exactly as King Dovid commanded, amid much happiness and rejoicing of the people.
9. When Adoniyahu was told of what had happened he was filled with dread. His cronies and companions quickly deserted him. Adoniyahu himself fled and tried to claim asylum by holding on to the Mizbayach in the Mishkan which was then in Giv'on (a mistaken understanding of the law in the Torah).
10. Shlomo heard of his brother's fears and he sent him a message of peace and conciliation — but tempered with firmness. If Adoniyahu will keep the peace, he said, then not even a hair on his head will fall. If, however, he shall be found to be conspiring to do harm, then he will pay with his life. Shlomo then sent his men to bring Adoniyahu down from the top of the Mizbayach. Adoniyahu came before him and bowed down and prostrated himself before the young King Shlomo, who said to him, "Go in peace to your house!"