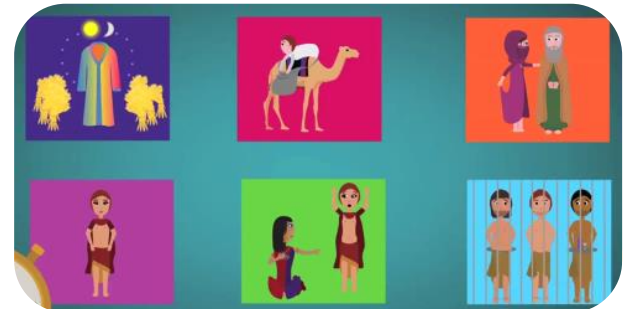


THE PARSHA EXPERIMENT

PARSHAT VAYEISHEV: HARLOTS & GOATS & COATS, OH MY!

SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE

- I. This week's parsha begins the epic saga of Joseph
 - a) The Sale of Joseph and its aftermath really takes us through end of the book of Genesis
 - b) There are 14 chapters left to the book, and almost all of them are about Joseph
 - c) There's one chapter that seems to totally interrupt the Joseph story, see if you spot digression in recap
 1. Jacob gives Joseph a coat, & Joseph shares dreams which imply that he'll rule over brothers
 2. The brothers get really jealous, and they eventually sell Joseph
 3. Tamar dresses like a prostitute and conceives a child with Judah
 4. Joseph ends up in Egypt and becomes master in Potiphar's home
 5. Potiphar's wife frames Joseph and he's sent to Jail
 6. In jail, Joseph interprets the dreams of a butler and baker
 - d) Right after the Sale of Joseph, before we hear about Joseph's life in Egypt, we hear the strange digression of Judah and Tamar



- II. Judah has a few kids, and he marries off his oldest son, Er, to a woman named Tamar



- a) Er dies, Tamar is faced with yibum - levirate marriage
 1. When a man dies without children, his widow marries the deceased's brother
 2. The children from that marriage would carry on the legacy of the dead brother
- b) After Er dies, Tamar marries the next son, Onan, but Onan dies too Judah has one more son, Shela, but he doesn't want Tamar marry him - After all, his first two sons just died, so he tells her to wait until Shela gets older
- c) Years go by, and he doesn't give Shela to Tamar
 1. Tamar has been in limbo
 2. She's still mourning the loss of her husband, hoping that someone will keep Er's name alive through



- d) She takes matters into her own hands
 - 1. She dresses up like a prostitute, and waits for Judah to solicit her
 - 2. We hear about the details of the bargain between Tamar and Judah over payment for her services
 - 3. He doesn't have payment with him, so she takes a collateral
 - 4. He tries to find her later to actually pay her
- e) Why do we need to know about these details of Judah's life? Why don't we hear personal stories about any of his other brothers?
 - 1. Why does the Torah think it's important for us to hear this? Secondly, even if it's a valuable story, why are we hearing about it now?
 - 2. What are we to do with the strange digression story of Judah and Tamar?
- f) Rabbi Fohrman's theory: Maybe the story is not a digression from the Joseph story at all - maybe it's a perfect continuation

III. Take a look, and play where have we heard these words or ideas before?

- a) When Tamar realizes that Judah had no intention of allowing her to marry his son Shela, she devises another way to keep the legacy of her first husband alive
- b) She dresses up like a prostitute, and tries to fool Judah - And it works (Genesis 38:15)
- c) Tamar asks, what he will pay for her services, and Judah answers that he will send her a goat and give her his signet ring, coat, and staff as collateral (Genesis 38:17-18)
- d) Then something ironic happens
 - 1. Judah, who seems to have been the judge at the time, is told that Tamar is pregnant
 - 2. That's a problem because Tamar has been awaiting yibum from Shela
 - 3. For her infidelity, Judah condemns her to death
 - 4. The irony is that Judah himself is the father of the child, but he doesn't realize that
 - 5. Tamar sends to her father-in-law as she is being led to her death, saying that the person whose belongings she has impregnated her (Genesis 38:25)
- e) Where have we heard this before?
 - 1. Don't need to go back too far - It's exactly what happened in previous chapter with the Sale of Joseph
 - 2. Joseph lost his coat when his brothers stripped him of it
 - 3. Then, they dipped the coat into goat's blood in order to cover up their actions -- - again, deception involving a goat
 - 4. And then, the bloody coat is presented to father for recognition Just as Tamar presented a coat to Judah - the father of her unborn children - for recognition



- Looking at the words the brothers say when they present the bloody coat, הִכָּר-נָא is the same (Genesis 37:32)
- הִכָּר-נָא only appears in these two stories in the entire Torah



- f) What does this connection mean?
1. Why is the Judah and Tamar story carrying echoes back to the sale of Joseph?
 - That was Judah, and the brothers followed his lead
 - He choreographed the events that led to deceiving Jacob with the bloody coat



- IV. The stories of Judah and Tamar and the Sale of Joseph are not the only Goats and Coats stories - there's another earlier one
- a) Goats and coats goes back to the story of the blessings
 - b) Jacob prepares a goat for his father before he gets the blessing
 1. Jacob wears Esau's coat and presents it to his father to deceive him
 2. Isaac was confused, not recognizing him (Genesis 27:23)
 - That's the same word
 - The Sale of Joseph is an echo of the very first Goats and Coats story - the story of the blessings
 - c) Jacob's children are replaying Jacob's deception
 1. They seem to be facing same challenges that Jacob faced
 2. We saw it with the deception with Shechem/Dina, and we see it with the Sale of Joseph



- V. The story we hear immediately after that is Judah and Tamar
- a) Judah just arranged a deception in which he covered up the truth and shirked responsibility, and now Judah would be faced with another similar opportunity
 - b) And he has a choice - will he continue to cover up truth, to shirk responsibility?
 - c) Or will he learn from his mistakes and grow from them?
 1. Tamar is being brought out to be killed and she makes a small plea
 2. She gives Judah a choice
 - d) What were Judah's options at that point?
 1. He could have said nothing

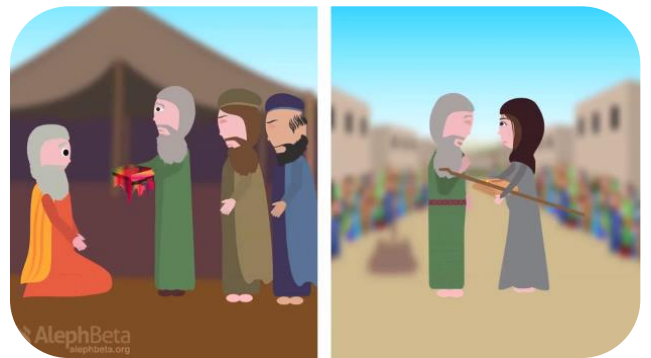


- He could have continued hiding the truth
 - That was probably an attractive option for Judah.
2. But Judah doesn't remain silent (Genesis 37:26)
- Judah saves her life, and publicly embarrasses himself
 - He's able to do something that beforehand, in the Sale of Joseph, he was unable to do
 - He recognized the truth - He took responsibility for his actions.

VI. By connecting these three stories, the Torah is highlighting that Judah was beginning to restore his personal integrity on a path that would eventually lead him to look Joseph, the brother he deceived and sold into slavery, in the eye - that's a story for another time

- a) In the story of Judah and Tamar, Judah was beginning to correct a chain of deception that has plagued his whole family - his father, his brothers, and himself
- b) This is the turning point in the story of Jacob's children

1. The brothers failed - they deceived, hid the truth
2. But Judah, when he's faced with אָנָּה-נָא, doesn't cover up the truth
3. He confronts it directly
4. Like his father, he begins to correct the mistakes that have haunted his family



- c) And you know what happens when he does?
 1. When Judah recognizes his ring, coat, and staff, he gets them back Who carries around these things? Who carries around a coat, a staff, and a signet ring?
 2. A king does - Davidic dynasty, the Messiah, would ultimately come from Judah
 3. It would come from Peretz, the child born from the union of Judah and Tamar - The child that would never have lived if Judah hadn't recognized the truth
 4. Judah gets back his ring, his cloak, and staff
 - Symbolic - at this moment, Judah's kingship is confirmed



VII. What a fascinating paradigm

- a) Kingship doesn't descend from a flawless, perfect human being
- b) Descends from one who made mistakes, but learned and grew from them
- c) That's who God chooses as our leaders - someone who has experienced a fall, and learned how to perfect themselves
 1. That's Judah - וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה - Judah recognized
- d) But that story doesn't end there
 1. Judah may have begun a transformation, and he may have begun to correct the flaws of his father and brothers, but his family's in shambles
 - He ruined relationships - Jacob's mourning, and Joseph's a slave in Egypt
 - How can Judah and his brothers begin to put the pieces back together?

