

HAFTARAH



Royal Mamma Knows Best

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb

Haftarah

Did Shlomo (Solomon) want to be king? I don't know and it really doesn't matter. His mother wanted him to be king.

This is not the start of a joke about a Yiddishe Mamma, this is what every woman who bore a king of Judah a son knew: A woman's path to royal power is paved by her son. The mother of the king, not his wife, holds the most powerful position a woman can attain in the kingdom. As the story continues (in chapter 2) we discover that Shlomo places a seat to the right of the throne for his mother, Bat Sheva. She is the one who whispers in his ear, she is the one who orchestrated his rise to power, and she helps him hold on to it.

Why the mother rather than the wife? Because a king has one mother (who is a seasoned politician) but many wives. A king's wives will compete about who will be the next queen-mother, the Gvirah, using great vigilance lest another mother beats her to it.

This might explain some things in the Haftarah. Bat Sheva springs into action when Adoniah, son of Hagit, tries to usurp the throne. Should he not have been described as "son of David", as that seems to be his claim for the kingship? But our story is about a battle between mothers, Hagit and Bat Sheva, over which of David's sons will gain the throne. Adoniah has the claim of seniority, but as it turns out, the mother is the significant factor in the story.

Bat Sheva does not act alone. She heads the "Shlomo to the throne" party, and counts among her loyal supporters Natan the prophet. He suggests that she goes to David and, playing naïve, ask why Adoniah is reigning while the kingship was promised to Shlomo her son. Then Natan will enter and complete the picture.

But Natan's plan comes up against Bat Sheva's personality and political savvy. She is primarily Shlomo's mother and an ambitious politician. She gives David a precise account of who sided with Adoniah and what is going on in that camp. How does a lady in the palace know exactly what is going on in the opposite camp? We conclude that she employs an excellent intelligence-collecting unit, and she knows how to use the information to manipulate the situation.

Bat Sheva succeeds, and establishes the position of Gvirah, the mother-queen. These mothers continued to be important players in the court through the history of the kingdom of Judah, and their names are always listed when their son becomes a monarch. Some of these monarchs gain the throne while they are mere children, and we understand who runs the country in their name. When reading the book of Kings,

pay attention to these ladies. They may be the key to understanding the politics of their times.