Parshas Vayeitzi

This week's haftora is read from Hoshea, and there is a difference in the reading based on Ashkenaz and Sephardic communities. Hoshea is the first of the "trei assar" which are the 12 prophets who lived from the middle of the first Beis Hamikdash into the beginning of the second Beis Hamikdash.

Hosea was one of the firmest prophets in the words he spoke, calling the Jewish people G-d's disloyal wife (perek 2) for which he had to incur personal tribulations, given the Jews in G-d's eyes are still the chosen nation.

Part of Hosea's warnings were based on the split of the Jewish Kingdom of his era, (10 tribes in the north, and Yehuda and Binyamin in the south). Although the haftora begins a bit later in the 11th perek, the chapter begins with "when Israel was a lad [in Egypt] …" and the fact that they committed idolatrous acts. Chapter 12 of Hosea explains how Ephraim sinned, but Yehuda remained faithful to G-d. Then the final portion from chapter 14 is read, "shuva yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha". This is the same reading as by Shabbos Shuva (for Ashkenazim, and Mincha Tisha b'Av for Sephardim, and is the introduction to later reading for both from Yoel and Micah respectively).

What then is the connection of the Haftora to this week's parsha?

In my opinion, we must look at the story that begins in Vayetzei and ends in Parshas Vayechi. Yakov is given his first recorded prophecy, or prophetic vision in the form of his dream of the angels ascending and descending. When Yakov ran from his home, after receiving the Bracha of continuity from Yitzchak, the narrative for creation of the Jewish nation began. After Yakov, the true expansion of the nation took place, with the birth of the 12 tribes, the descending to Egypt, and the beginning of the exile in Egypt that ultimately led to the exodus, giving of the Torah and the birth of the nation, culminating with entering the "Promised Land" etc. etc. Yakov is the linked forefather to the birth of the nation. Yitzchak and Avraham are the leaders, who were approximately 20 generations from the creation of the world. During this period the chaos that ensued, culminated with Avraham re-recognizing monotheism and Hashem as the Melech Malchei Hamelachim.

Yakov was very deliberate and intentional in his actions, to ensure that we ended up in Egypt as we were meant to, to birth the nation that is Israel. We see this in Rashi's explanations for when he had prophetic visions, and when he lost his prophecy. It is often understood, for example, that when Yosef was sold into slavery, due to Yakov's sadness, he lost his vision. Then when he was reunited with Yosef, prophecy was reinstated, although briefly in Vayechi Yakov lost it when blessing Yosef's son's (Efraim and Menashe- he said "Mi Eileh" – who are these- even though Rashi explains he knew exactly who they were, and Yosef answered "Bonay Heim"-they are my sons- as Rashi explains to state that even though Yakov saw from Efraim and Menashe ensued idolatrous and sinful behavior, nevertheless, they in that moment when getting blessed from Yakov, needed the Bracha, which Yosef protested for. That is in this moment they are righteous, and we

cannot prevent what may or may not happen in the future even though Yakov saw the vision).

According to the Gemara in Rosh Hashana, it is possible for the outcome of some planned event to be changed through prayer and charity, meaning the lesson we learn from Yakov and Yosef is this.

Now let us circle back to the Haftora this week. We specifically read about the sinful behavior of Efraim, which is exactly why Yakov didn't want to bless Yosef's son's (again according to Rashi's explanation). Yet, the outcome was that the Jews repented, and we remained steadfast in our ways, regardless of the overall sinful behavior, and the destruction of the temples.

The fact that this all came true begins with the underlying thread that we see in Parshas Vayetzei, that is the intentionality of all the events, and the divine intervention and providence that resulted in the outcomes of our trajectory as the Jewish people. Without this intentionality, one could posit that Esav could have equally been the father of "our" nation, but since he himself was an unrelenting sinner, and Yakov was the neshama imbued with being the father of our people (we are called Israel, after Yakov's second given name). Even with trials and tribulations, and the fact that the visions of Efraim came true, the Haftora jumps to the end when Efraim repented. This is the ultimate vision of our neshama, and who we are. Even if we think we are destined to a given end, we can change that. Furthermore, Yakov not wanting to bless Efraim and Menashe in Vayechi would have messed up the lineage, despite, this they were blessed, for the ultimate outcome of repenting.

The Rebbe explains on this parsha that the journey of Yakov is parallel to the journey of a neshama into this world. Just as Yakov ended up in Charan, with Lavan (and kept the 613 mitzvos[1]). The world will be a place where it is easy to end up like Efraim, (as Yakov saw and wanted to prevent), but despite this Hosea shows us, we come back and reunite with our Father in Heaven, and against all odds, and only by divine providence do we remain alive, stronger, and continually steadfast in our service to Hashem. Which is the concluding message perhaps, that despite Yakov's bleak vision of his future offspring, something he could not prevent, we came back, we repented, and continue to this day to serve Hashem.

Good Shabbos

[1] In the Hagaddah we say in the paragraph "Tzei Ulimad" reference to the fact that Lavan went after all the generations, men women in children in trying to assimilate Yakov and his offspring, whereas Pharoah only went after the males.