

## PARASHAS MIKEITZ

## Who Is the Real Mother?

It only happens three times every hundred years, and this year is one of them. Chanukah almost invariably falls on Shabbos Mikeitz. This year, as on two other occasions in the past century, it falls on Shabbos Vayeishev alone. Consequently, this year, for only the third time in the last hundred years, we read the *haftorah* of Mikeitz, not the *haftorah* of Chanukah. Let us, therefore, take advantage of this rare opportunity to focus on the fascinating story which appears in this week's *haftorah*.

As the story unfolds (I Kings 3), two women ask King Solomon to settle a dispute between them.

*"Your majesty," the first woman begins tearfully, "this woman and I live alone in the same house, and we both gave birth to little boys at about the same time. One night, she rolled over onto her infant son and suffocated him. When she discovered that her son was dead, she took my son from my bed while I was sleeping and left me her dead son in his place. And when I awoke in the morning, I found a dead child in my bed - but he was not my son! This woman has stolen my son!"*

*"Not so!" the second woman protests. "The living child is mine, and the dead one is yours. I am the real mother. The exact opposite of what you said is true!"*

*King Solomon mulls over this problem, then he calls for a sword, which is quickly brought and placed before him.*

*"This is my ruling," the king declares. "We will make a compromise. I will have my guards take this sword and cut the child in half. One part will be awarded to the first woman and the other part to the second."*

*"Oh, please, your majesty," the first woman cries out. "Don't let them do this thing. Give her the child, but do not cut him in half."*

*"No, it is only fair," the second woman says, "that we share the child, part to me and part to you. Cut him in half!"*

*"There is no need to cut the child in half," says King Solomon. "Give him to the first woman. She has shown herself to be the real mother!"*

King Solomon's ruling in this case gained him a wide reputation for being imbued with "the wisdom of the Lord." The Jewish people looked up to him with increased awe and respect, and people began to come from the distant corners of the earth to hear his words of wisdom.

But let us think for a moment about this celebrated ruling. Did King Solomon really expect them to believe that he was actually going to

slice the child in half? Was it possible that this wise and just king would take the life of an innocent baby? Where did the people see in this “the wisdom of the Lord”?

Furthermore, why was the second woman willing to have the child cut in half? She had exchanged her dead child for a live one under cover of darkness. Why was she now willing to settle for half a dead child?

The answer to these questions reveals King Solomon’s insight into human nature. Of course, everyone knew that his decision to cut the child in half was only a psychological ploy, that he would never do such a thing. Therefore, the second woman challenged him. “Cut him in half!” she said, knowing full well that he wouldn’t do it. In essence, she was saying, Let us see where this psychological game you are playing is going to lead us. She was preparing to match wits with the king and prevent him from discovering her deception. But the first woman did not have the heart for such games. She couldn’t bring herself to utter the words, “Cut my child in half!” This was the real mother!

Such extraordinary insight could only be “the wisdom of the Lord”!

All too often, we disregard our children’s feelings in moments of anger and frustration. We fail to realize how damaging this may be to their emotional health. In truth, however, a child is a precious gift from Heaven entrusted to the parents for safekeeping; child-rearing is a sacred trust that takes precedence over just about everything else. In the Torah view, the quintessential parents love their child so deeply that they are incapable of uttering a word that could be harmful to the child. Children brought up in this spirit and by these values will surely have enough self-esteem to pursue the fulfillment of their full potential. Such children will surely enrich the lives of their parents beyond measure.