



## PROBING

## THE PROPHETS

“Ha'azinu hashamayim va'adabeira, v'tishma ha'aretz imrei fi”. This week's parasha begins with Moshe Rabbainu calling on the heavens and earth to witness (and testify to) the truth of the words he will recite during this “Shirat Moshe”, ‘song’ of Moshe. These opening words echo that which Moshe said at the closing of the last parasha, perek 31, that this song will serve as a witness that the people had been warned of the inevitable punishments that would befall them if they abandon Hashem. Interestingly, at the end of parashat Nitzavim, in perek 30, Moshe again calls upon the heavens and earth to witness how Moshe had placed before the nation a choice of good and life or, c”v, evil and death, and urges the people to choose life.

I chose to begin this article about the haftarah by first discussing the parasha because the *pesiqta* (P'siqta Rabbati, is a collection of midrashim on the Torah and the Haftarot, composed around 845 CE) comments makes a

puzzling comment about the opening pasuk of the haftarah. The verse, taken from Sefer Hoshea, states: “Shuva Yisra'el ad Hashem E'lokecha,” and the P'siqta says the pasuk should be read as “Shuva Yisra'el EID Hashem E'lokecha,” that Hashem is your witness!!

HaRav Soloveitchik, in one of his essays (found in “On Repentance”), sees this somewhat curious statement of the P'siqta as a support to the view of the Rambam. Maimonides declares (Hilchot Teshuva 2;2) that true repentance is achieved when the sinner resolves in his heart never again to repeat the sin, and He who knows all that is hidden can indeed testify that this person will never again repeat that sin.

The Rav is quite troubled by this comment. Is it not a condition that the remorseful sinner will find almost impossible to fulfill? How can this be the demand of G-d on one who sincerely desires to do teshuva? And, if Hashem will testify that the sinner will never again sin-then what happens to the person's freedom to choose how to act?

Rav Soloveitchik, therefore, turns to the Lechem Mishneh's explanation of the Rambam's words. The term “ya'id” that is used does not mean that G-d will testify that the sinner will never again sin throughout his life. Rather, the word ya'id can also be

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understood to mean to designate one as a witness, something Moshe Rabbeinu himself does at the end of the last parasha when he calls upon heaven and earth to be witnesses, to testify for Israel in the future. The Rambam's meaning, therefore, is that the sinner himself designated Hashem to witness how sincere and whole-hearted is his intention to repent and not to sin.

We stand before Hashem during a most difficult time for us and all humankind. When we think back to last year when we stood before a wonderfully promising time, we never dreamed that travel would be curtailed, economies destroyed, leaders challenged and, yes, even sports events and concerts cancelled. This was not the year we thought it would be. And this year as we stand before G-d we barely know what tomorrow will bring what to pray for.

So, perhaps we should heed the opening words of our haftarah and "Shuva Yisra'el....EID", our tefillot should be based upon the knowledge that Hashem is listening and witnessing how sincere our prayers are. We should realize that what we pray for is less important than HOW we pray. A sincere tefilla becomes an impactful experience that can affect us throughout the year.

For this reason, we shouldn't worry if we forget to pray for a specific something or someone. We should just pray deeply to Hashem and allow Him to "fill in the blanks" for us.

After all, when He witnesses that kind of tefilla how can He fail to respond? ■

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