



## PROBING

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER

Faculty, OU Israel Center

## THE PROPHETS

As I sit to pen this message a short time after Yom Kippur, I feel the “mystique” of that holy day still guiding my thoughts and emotions. The emotional impact of these piyutim (religious poems) remains with me weeks and months after the chag, but so does my appreciation of the prayers themselves, the brilliant compositions of the paytanim (religious poets) of the Middle Ages. Their knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, Midrash and the gamut of rabbinic writings is nothing short of astounding. Along with that, is their expertise in the Hebrew language—even though they often use “poetic license” in ignoring proper Hebrew grammar in order to create a rhyming couplet or stanza (consider, for example, the use of “avoNIM” instead of the correct plural form for sins, “avoNOT”).

For me, the effect of these tefillot is even more impactful as these prayers bring up memories of the meaningful and passionate davening my father, a”h, who led the services in our shul - and taught the proper nusach to so many (including me) - for decades. My memory goes back some 50 years as I hear my father chanting the piyut of “Ma’aseh Elokeinu” in Musaf, a poem depicting the glorious works of Hashem. Curiously, right before the

end of that liturgical poem, the Aron Kodesh is closed and a contrasting stanza, “Ma’aseh Enosh”, the evil of Man’s deeds, is said silently. And then, as the Aron Kodesh is reopened, my father would cry out “AVAL MA’ASEH ELOKEINU!” – “BUT, the works of our G-d are....”

What a contrast!

What a powerful message!

What a precious memory!

And I bring up these Yom Kippur memories because that is precisely the message of this week’s haftarah from Sefer Yishayahu.

But first, words of introduction.

The haftarah is found in the 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> prakim of the sefer, however, leading up to these chapters, we read of the invasion of the powerful Assyrian army. The potent empire had successfully conquered and exiled the Northern tribes and had already begun to devastate the cities and towns in Yehuda. The king Chizkiyahu feared the worst as the Assyrian juggernaut had begun to lay siege to Yerushalayim, preparing to conquer it as it had already conquered the bulk of the Middle Eastern nations. Yishayahu promises the King that the

Assyrians would soon retreat from Yerushalayim and no longer be a threat to Yerushalayim. And so it was.

Not long after the Assyrian retreat, Chizkiyahu is visited by the King of Babylonia, the growing power in the area. King Chizkiyahu joyously welcomes the foreign king and boastfully shows him all of the wealth and treasures in his kingdom. Hashem is unhappy with Chizkiyahu's actions and the navi tells him that, eventually, the Babylonian armies would come and remove all of the treasures of Judea and his descendants would become mere servants to the King of Bavel.

It is at this point that Yishayahu, in perek 40, offers the words of comfort to the future generations who will suffer under the rule of Babylonia. In this chapter of "Nachamu, Nachamu Ami", the navi depicts visions of a return and of growth to the once defeated and broken nation, visions that the people find difficult to believe. And, to these people, Yishayahu offers the words of our haftarah. These words of comfort are directed at the generations who cannot believe that such a turnaround could occur. An exiled nation who had suffered in so many ways, in so many countries for so many years could not

easily accept the seemingly impossible promises that were handed down to them. And so Yishayahu leaves them with the words of this haftarah, words that, simply put, tell them that nothing is impossible for Hashem. In doing so, the prophet points to the wonders of nature that cannot be duplicated by mortal man and mocks the pagan worship of man-made "gods."

In contrast to these nations, Yishayahu adds, you, Israel, are the children of my chosen servants, Avraham and Ya'akov (hence, the connection to our parasha) and you will therefore merit all of these miraculous events that I promise. For Man is not like G-d and Man's capabilities and accomplishments pale in comparison to those of the Master of the Universe.

What a contrast!

What a powerful message!

What a precious memory to retain for the future generations!

This is who we are.

And this is what Hashem will do for us!! ■

***Shoshana Dekel, M.S.W. -  
Individual & Couple/Family therapy***

Clinical Social Worker  
& Certified Couple/Family Therapist  
20 years experience

Languages: English & Hebrew  
as mother tongue

Private clinic in Rechovot  
Online therapy optional upon request

**Tel: 0549263636**

**E-mail: shoshpashosh@gmail.com**

**Have Bituach Leumi, bills and bank forms  
you don't understand?**



**Translation &  
Advocacy Services for Olim**

**Hudi Liptz 058.792.2688**

[www.translationsandadvocacyforolimhadashim.com](http://www.translationsandadvocacyforolimhadashim.com)