



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

I enjoy stories. Perhaps that is why history fascinates me. A story, especially a true, historical one, draws the interest of the listener or of the reader. Professional speakers know that, as do educators, rabbis and writers. It is for this reason that this week's haftarah is one that most people enjoy following. In contrast to those readings taken from *Nevi'im Acharonim*, the later prophetic writings, that usually share with us the prophet's condemnations of an unfaithful and corrupt Israel or his visions of a shining and glorious future, the selections taken from the earlier prophetic writings (*Nevi'im Rishonim*) generally tell a story that most find more interesting to follow and an easier source from which to extract moral lessons - whether from the account itself or from a character found in the story.

And that is certainly true of this week's haftarah. The episodes from *Sefer Melachim B* that make up our haftarah focus upon a poor widow and her sons, a wealthy, barren woman and her son and, of course, on the navi Elisha. We have, in the past, discussed the parallels between

the stories in the haftarah and that in the parasha, we have also drawn parallels between the navi Elisha and his "rebbe", Eliyahu, and even between the two stories in the haftarah itself. This year, however, I would like to focus on a seemingly minor character in the reading but one who, as his story continues in *Sefer Melachim*, is a difficult personality to understand: Elisha's aide, Geichazi.

In our haftarah he is portrayed as an assistant to the great navi. It is Geichazi who informs Elisha about the barrenness of the wealthy Shunamit woman, it is he who attempts to protect the saintly prophet when the woman falls upon Elisha's feet and he whom Elisha entrusts to revive the dead son of the Shunamit woman. Yet, by the end of his story, we find him cursed by his master with incurable leprosy and banished from Elisha's presence, never again to attend and assist the navi. So what happened to one who, ostensibly,



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was marked as the successor to Elisha, as Elisha was to Eliyahu?

The Tanach relates to us how Geichazi “lost” his position and his master’s trust when, contrary to Elisha’s wishes, he accepts valuable gifts from Na’aman (general of the army of Aram) and then attempts to hide his actions from Elisha. That single act of defiance broke the bond of trust and obedience between prophet and student, a bond that was essential for a successful handing down of the prophetic tradition from one generation to another. And it also reflected a moral deficiency in character that was sufficient reason for the rejection of Geichazi as a future “Ish HaElokim”, Man of G-d.

But what was it that caused one so special to fail so miserably?

HaRav Soloveitchik suggests that our haftarah gives us a glimpse into that moral deficiency that doomed Geichazi’s future. Elisha entrusts his assistance with the charge of reviving the dead son-and to do that without Elisha’s assistance. Furthermore, he was told to speak to no one on the way, that is, to fulfill his mission silently, telling no one of the miracle he would perform. This act was considered so important that the Chachmei Kabbalah, the masters of the mystical, state that, had he succeeded, the Beit HaMikdash would never have been destroyed!!! Instead, he told people all along his way to the boy, so that, when he attempted to revive him, there was a crowd of people watching him (as opposed to both Eliyahu and Elisha who revived the dead in the secrecy of

their room).

The Rav explained that Geichazi’s sin lay in the fact that, although he served the navi for so long and, even though he was in the presence of holiness for years, his fundamental personality remained unchanged. He was insensitive to the sanctity that surrounded him each day but was completely unaffected by it. And when you cannot sense holiness and are incapable of internalizing the values you see – you cannot hope to teach or inspire others.

How essential it is to recognize greatness and holiness and allow it to impact your very nature, your very character. Our challenge is to find that greatness, that holiness. And we hope to learn from that as Elisha did and as Geichazi did not. ■


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