



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

Few haftarot connect to their weekly parasha as clearly as this week's selection from Sefer Yechezkel (37; 15 – 28) connects to Parashat Vayigash. The Torah reading begins with the monologue of Yehuda, the spokesman for his brethren, passionately pleading with Yosef to free Binyamin, and even offering to serve as a slave in his place. The parasha continues by relating the emotional reunion of Yosef with his elderly father, as well as the rapprochement between Yosef and his long-separated brothers. Additionally, the parasha includes the efforts made by Yosef to help his family adapt to-and succeed in-the new land they moved to. It is this theme of reunification and reconciliation that is the focus of the Torah reading.

Our haftarah shares that same theme – that of reuniting Yehuda with Yosef – not as individuals but as the two kingdoms that had been exiled from Eretz Yisrael, and the promise of their eventual reconciliation. We have repeatedly heard how the destruction of the second Bet HaMikdash was the result of “sinat

chinam”, baseless hatred between one and another and how the cause of the demolition of the first Bet HaMikdash was the rampant idolatry that filled the land. But I would like to suggest that the division between Yosef and Yehuda, the split of the nation into two separate kingdoms, is what began the downhill spiral that led to the exile of both realms.

Sefer M'lachim relates to us the details of that division and, in doing so, seems to blame both sides: Yehudah-the ruling tribe of King Shlomo, and Yosef – the tribe of Yerov'am, leader of the opposition. It is true that Judea's loss of control over the majority of the tribes was prophesied as a punishment to Shlomo for having permitted idolatrous worship into Eretz Yisrael. And yet, the fact that Shlomo would not live to see that painful event may indicate that it was not simply a punishment for the King alone, but for the nation as a whole. That being the case, it is not unreasonable to believe that the people could have done something to rescind G-d's decree, as happened a number of times throughout the Tanach.

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So what did the people do? We are told that Shlomo HaMelech had taxed the people heavily in order to support the multiple construction projects he undertook. Upon the King's death, Yerov'am, spokes-

man for Yosef (Yerov'am, from the tribe of Efrayim, was originally appointed by Shlomo himself to oversee the labor of the tribes of Yosef), approached Shlomo successor, Rechov'am, together with a contingent from the northern tribes, and requested the new regent to lower the heavy taxes. Rechov'am, showing a lack of understanding or sensitivity to the plight of these tribes, refused to lower the taxes and even pledged to increase that tax burden on the tribes.

Rather than plead their case further, Yerov'am turned his back on the King and broke away from the kingdom, leaving Rechov'am with the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin alone (as well as parts of Shimon and Levi). Soon after, the ten tribes, in their anger, attacked the Judean tax collector and the division was complete. The radical decision to split the kingdom was taken hastily and in anger. But what might have happened had the two sides considered what it meant to divide a kingdom that was united only 75 years earlier. What could have been had they been able to overcome their differences?

Would the breakaway tribes have fashioned golden calves to worship?

Would there have been different "holy cities" created in the North?

Would there not have been a different ending had Yerushalayim remained a city where all would have gathered to worship the one G-d?

Couldn't that have avoided the idolatry that eventually spread from the tribes of Yosef to those of Yehudah?

It was after the exile of the kingdom of Yehudah that the navi Yechezkel delivered Hashem's message to the survivors of both kingdoms in the Diaspora of Bavel. He told them that a bright future awaited them but that future could be secured only when Yosef and Yehuda become one again. Only when each side can talk to each other- as Yehuda spoke to Yosef in the outset of our parasha - and only when Yosef can show sensitivity to the cries of Yehuda - as Yosef did in the parasha - only then will Hashem keep the promise of gathering them to their land "v'asiti otam l'goy echad ba'aretz" (v. 22) and making them into one nation once more.

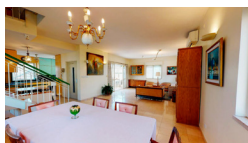
Couldn't the tribes have done that after the death of Shlomo HaMelech?

Couldn't the nation have done that after they were exiled?

And, as we read this haftarah only one day after observing the fast of Asara B'tevet which marked the beginning of the siege that culminated in the Temple's destruction, is it not essential that we ask ourselves...

Shouldn't we be doing that now???

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