



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

The twenty-seventh perek of Sefer Yishayahu, the chapter that opens this week's haftarah, is actually the last of three prakim in which Yishayahu closes a series of prophecies addressed the idolatrous nations of the world by warning them of the punishments that Hashem will rain down upon them in the future. In this latter perek, the navi reassures Israel that, though they too had sinned and would be punished as well, they, however, would never be destroyed-as would the other nations. In fact, G-d reassures them that, after their punishment, they will be gathered from the Diaspora and be returned to their land. It is at this point that Yishayahu closes the prophecy with the well-known nevuah that we quote during the Yamim Nora'im "Uva'u ha'ovdim b'Eretz Ashur...", that the dispersed of Israel will be brought back to Yerushalayim, there to worship Hashem.

And then comes "Hoy".

And in one word, the entire mood and theme of the prophecy changes.

"Hoy", "Woe", is a term that Yishayahu uses to introduce harsh words; words of criticism, of condemnation and of punishment. And indeed, harsh words do follow. As this next perek begins, the navi, who prophesied during the time of the exile of the ten tribes, turns his attention to Efrayim, the Northern Kingdom, and condemns their "drunkenness" and hedonism which they glorify but which leaves them blind to their sins. As a result, the prophet warns them, their wealth and opulence in which they take pride, will be swiftly consumed by the enemy.

He then turns to his people, the Kingdom of Yehudah, and tells them that, although they were spared punishment, they too are liable for punishment for their sins and their refusal to listen to the warnings of Yishayahu – but are guaranteed that they will not be destroyed. The final psukim



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are taken from the end of the twenty-ninth chapter and close the haftarah with words of comfort and encouragement, promising that, ultimately, the Jewish nation will sanctify Hashem's name and bring glory to their ancestors.

So...what does all of this have to do with Parashat Sh'mot???

This question that troubles us today, troubled many of the parshanim who find much of the symbolism and esoteric meanings of the haftarah quite difficult to understand. Some find the connection in Yishayahu's promise of a return to the Land of Israel after the nation's suffering in Galut, found in the haftarah, with Hashem's promise to bring the people to the Promised Land after their enslavement in Egypt, as described in the parasha. Rashi sees the connection in the haftarah's opening words that, according to his commentary, refer to Ya'akov arrival into Egypt, something mentioned in the parasha's opening words. I suggested in last year's article, that can see the connection in the navi's description of teaching the people of his time as one would teach a young child, "tzav latzav, kav lakav" in small "steps" – analogous to the condition of Israel in Egypt who were first learning of G-d and His promise of redemption from Moshe Rabbeinu.

I would like to suggest perhaps yet another connection, one that reflects a general theme found in both the parasha and in the haftarah. Yishayahu's words that begin by promising punishment and destruction to the idolatrous nations and then continue

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to warn both the Northern and Southern kingdoms that they too would be punished. But the contrast between both warnings is clear: one will end with destruction and one will end with survival. The history of the Jew is one of Sin – Suffering – Survival. It is difficult to convince a suffering people that it will ultimately survive. And, throughout the millennia, Jewish leadership faced that very challenge. How will they convince their communities, in the cities, in the shtetls or in the ghettos that their nation will survive?

So they would turn to Yishayahu and deliver hi message and, then teach them that this is how the nation was born – in Egypt, in slavery, in suffering – but they survived. To a nation in distress, Chazal offered them the Shabbat Parashat Sh'mot. "Listen to the parasha", they said, "Hear the words of the haftarah", they urged – for that is where you will find solace and hope.

As we do today, as well. ■

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