



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

It seems that each time I review the story of Devorah HaNeviah, the prophetess Devorah, and the victory of Israel over the Canaanites, I learn new thing or unveil a new concept that I had not understood before. Over the past five years, I have, in these pages, shared the many similarities between the events in the haftarah and those we read in the parasha. They share not only the victory over an oppressive enemy and the resultant song of victory and praise to Hashem, but even the destruction of the enemy armies through their “entrapment” in the marshy ground, which made their many chariots ineffective. Likewise, both battles were fought upon the command by G-d to His prophets, both clashes left but one survivor (“lo nish’ar...ad echad”) and after both wars, a woman prophetess sang a “shira”-Miriam together with the women and Devora together with her general, Barak. There are, of course, other parallels

between the two stories, as the G’mara in Pesachim (118b) enumerates, but I was struck recently at a parallel that I had not previously realized.

“Aseh lahem ...k’Sisra k”Yavin b’Nachal Kishon. Nishm’du b’Ein Dor, hayu domen la’adama”. The psalmist turns to Hashem (Sefer Tehillim 83: 11-12) asking Him to defeat Israel’s enemies as He had done to Sisra and his king Yavin. Given the miraculous victories that G-d had wrought for Israel over the years, I was curious as to why David HaMelech chose this war, the war fought by Devorah and Barak against the K’na’anim, as a “model” of a complete victory for which he prayed. And it dawned on me that this battle was the very last one that B’nai Yisra’el were to fight against any of the local Canaanite tribes. It was a total victory which, as the final words of the haftarah indicate, provided for a forty year era of peace. And, in this way as well, the saga of Devorah parallels the story in the parasha, for, after all, this too was a complete victory and was the very last battle that the Israelites would have to wage against the Egyptians for many years.

I would like to add, however, two differences between the two stories that are important to note. The newly freed slaves at Yam Suf were incapable of facing the Egyptians. They cried out to Moshe

In loving memory of my mother

Lillian Klaff

Leah bat Meir Leib & Shprintza a"h

on her 13th yaahrzeit, 17 Shvat

and on her mother's 54th yaahrzeit

Shprintza bat Dovid and Raizel a"h

Rosh Chodesh Shvat

Debbie Dan


that they preferred remaining slaves to the Egyptians than meeting their inevitable deaths in the desert. Their perception of their oppressors as still being their “masters” weakened any resolve they may have had to fight them. Moshe silenced their cries by reassuring them by saying: “Hashem yilachem lachem” (“Hashem will fight for you...”). Devorah, however, turns to her general, Barak, and directs him to gather an army from Yissachar and Zevulun, turning to all of the tribes with the call to join Barak in battle.

The difference between fighting their own war rather than have G-d fight for them may well have been due to the second difference I alluded to. The threat of Sisera and his army was not simply to control Israel and demand tribute and taxation from them. The perek in Tehillim makes it quite clear that their purpose was “nirsha lanu et neot Elokim”, “to conquer the “meadows” of Hashem-i.e., Eretz Yisrael! And when your own land, promised to you by Hashem, is threatened, you cannot sit idly by and say, as Moshe had to tell the nation, “Hashem yilachem lachem”, G-d will fight for you. No. It is not up to G-d alone to fight for your land. He will help you in battle but will not do so by Himself.


The essence of victory is Man’s efforts and Hashem’s support. Hashem expected that of D’vora and Barak.

Hashem expects no less from us! ■

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