



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

This week's haftarah requires no deep analysis to understand our Rabbis' choice of the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Shmuel Aleph for today's haftarah. The rebellion of Korach and his followers against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon read in today's parasha was not simply a denial of Hashem's choice but also a reflection of a blindness to His guiding hand and His ongoing miracles. The rebels' refusal to recognize the divine choice of Moshe would also mean a denial of the divine hand in the miracles Moshe had performed.

In today's haftarah we read of the people's request for a king to replace Shmuel HaNavi, a request that G-d Himself states, is a rejection of His leadership. The two stories, that of the parasha and that of the haftarah, underscore the parallels between the two stories in the very language that is used. Moshe proclaims his innocence before Hashem with the argument "Lo chamor echad me'hem nasati" ("I have not

taken even one donkey from them") while Shmuel asks the people: "...vachamor mi lakachti..." ("...and whose donkey have I ever taken...?"). Shmuel reviews the kindnesses G-d had done for the nation by beginning: "Hashem, who made Moshe and Aharon (your leaders)" a phrase implying that G-d chose Shmuel to be their leader as well. Nor should we ignore the irony of the haftarah story in which Shmuel, a direct descendant of Korach himself, is now forced to defend his actions as the nation's leader just as Moshe was forced to defend his leadership from the accusations of his own ancestor.

But we would be remiss were we to see these two stories as perfect parallels, for there is an essential difference between the two stories. The Israelites of Shmuel's time had no intention of rebelling against Shmuel's leadership or questioning his being chosen by G-d. They accepted Shmuel as their prophet, their "religious" guide, indeed they loved him, but they desired a king to serve as military/political leader. As they saw it, they were fulfilling a mitzvah given in the Torah: "You shall certainly place a king over you", one of the three commandments required upon

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Baruch & Edna Leiman and family
on the marriage of their son

settling the land, according to the Rambam.

The nation's mistake, I would suggest, is that they believed that the king would "fight our battles," implying that victory would depend upon the monarch and not upon G-d Himself. This is why Hashem comforts Shmuel by telling him that the people had rejected Him, the Al-mighty, and not Shmuel. The gravity of their sin is that it reflected their blindness to the miraculous victories Hashem had wrought against their enemies, including the victory over the Plishtim that He had just vanquished. In doing so, the nation repeated the very same sin committed by Korach and his followers, a blindness to the miracles performed by G-d through His chosen leaders.

Ingratitude is more than a refusal to pay thanks. It is a selfishness that refuses to allow one to recognize an act of generosity and care.

And that was shared by both Korach's followers and the nation of Shmuel. ■

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