



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

“Hal’veen me’ah shanah yivaled v’im Sarah – havas tish’im shana teiled?” (Breishit 15; 2).

When Avraham was 70 years old, Hashem promised him that he would be the progenitor of a great nation. When Avraham was 100 years old, he was still childless when Hashem repeated His promise to Avraham adding that He will bless him with a son. It is at that time when Avraham expressed his “disbelief” (Chazal understand it as “amazement”) that a one hundred year-old man and a ninety year-old woman could merit a child.

So what does this have to do with our haftarah this week?

I’m glad you asked.

One verse before the closing of our haftarah, the navi Yishayahu cries to the suffering nation “Habitu el Avraham Avichem v’el Sarah t’cholelchem”, “Look to Avraham your forefather and to Sarah who

bore you.” Unquestionably, we are inspired by the deeds and the faith of our patriarchs and matriarchs – but what connection is there to the theme of our haftarah?

The reading begins with Israel’s cry that Hashem had forgotten them and, indeed, had abandoned them. To this plaint Yishayahu responds that G-d could never do so, just as a mother could never forget her child, and, in fact, he continues by describing to the nation the glorious future that awaits them. He speaks of how G-d will lift them out of the Diaspora and will return them to their Land and will increase their number until their population will outgrow the borders of Eretz Yisrael. Yishayahu furthermore promises victory over their oppressors and even foresees the time when foreign rulers would pay homage to them.

He continues his words of comfort by reassuring the people that Hashem’s anger at them was precipitated by their sins and if they return to their G-d, to their ultimate Source, Hashem would return to them, comfort them and bless them. The very description of their misdeeds and shortcomings were not meant as words of criticism alone but as words of comfort to

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the nation, by emphasizing that there has not been – and could not be - any permanent “abandonment” by G-d. Rather, Yishayahu tells them that Hashem’s “estrangement” from them was caused by their own sins and, therefore, His return to them would depend only upon their desire to return to Him. The consolation found in the words of Yishayahu was in his message that the repair of their relationship with the Divine was eminently possible and the glorious future promised by the navi would indeed take place – when they change their ways.

So what does that have to do with Avraham and Sarah?

The Radak proposes that this closing message of our haftarah was meant as a response to its opening cry. The people failed to believe the promises of the navi because they felt that they had completely broken away from G-d, as they said: “Hashem has abandoned me.” And, because of that, they could not believe Hashem’s promise of a wonderful future that Yishayahu described. Simply put, they had lost all hope in redemption.

And so, the navi tells them “Habituel Avraham Avichem”, to look back to Avraham, “v’el Sarah t’cholechem”, and to Sarah. They too found it difficult to accept G-d’s promise of a son, a descendant, a great nation. And yet, we stand here today as a nation living on the same Land, speaking the same language and following the same mitzvot as we did thousands of years ago.

So when we are tempted to doubt some



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of the remarkable predictions found in the sefarim of our nevi'im, we are reminded to turn to the brachot that precede the haftarah that state “Asher bachar bnevi'im tovim v'rata vdivreihem hane'marim be'emet”, that the words of the prophets are true.

And, as we listen to those words, we should also remember Avraham and Sarah. ■

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