



PROBING

THE PROPHETS

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Over the years, we have discussed the comparisons as well as the contrasts between the stories related in the parasha and those related in the haftarah. More than once we've focused on the differences between the peaceful final days of Avraham Avinu and the tumultuous final days of David HaMelech. While the parasha details how Avraham prepared to hand over the reins of leadership to his son Yitzchak, securing Sarah's only son as his successor who would carry on Avraham's divine mission, the haftarah shares with us the story of David's struggle to do the same – as we read in the opening perek of M'lachim A.

And yet, although the contrast between the two similar events are quite stark, we would be doing a disservice were we to believe that Chazal saw only the one obvious similarity between the two, i.e., the story of the two elderly leaders insuring the viability and stability of the next generation before their deaths, because, as Rav Moshe Lichtenstein writes, there are more numerous parallels between the stories than we might have first noticed.

Both stories focus on two righteous individuals who were highly accomplished and successful during their lifetimes. Both had two possible heirs as successors: Avraham would choose between Yitzchak and Yishma'el, while David must choose between Shlomo and Adoniya (who, as the haftarah

relates, had already announced that he was the King). Furthermore, those who lived at each era had legitimate expectations that the "other" (he who was not chosen) would be named as successor. Yishma'el was, after all, Avraham's eldest and, in many ways, followed his father's life of action and wanderings, far more than the quiet and sedate Yitzchak who remained in the land – never to wander around or leave it.

In a similar fashion, Adoniya seemed to be the more obvious choice for David's successor. He was the oldest surviving son of the King – far older than the young (12 year-old) Shlomo – and he had already gathered a small army of powerful men as his supporters – including David's (former) Chief-of-Staff and the (former) Kohen Gadol. Shlomo had only the inner circle of the King's that included his mother, Bat Sheva and the navi, Natan, who pleaded his case.

But the choice of both fathers was not dependent upon the expectations of the people, nor upon the power of the respective followers nor even the order the heir's birth. Both fathers chose the son who was favored by their mother (Sarah and Bat Sheva) and the one who would best carry out the goals of the father. Only one who would keep that traditions and the basic values set by the father would be chosen. And they were.

But Rav Lichtenstein adds a fascinating post-script. He argues that carrying out the

respective father's ideals does not mean copying the exact behavior of their predecessor. Each generation posed unique challenges that had to be met in different ways. Avraham who hoped to fulfill Hashem's promise to establish Eretz Yisra'el as the homeland of his descendants did so only through Yitzchak who, throughout his 180 years, never abandoned the land. Similarly, David, who could only dream of establishing a dynasty of kings and of building the Beit HaMikdash, succeeded only thorough Shlomo, who did both.

Ultimately, providing for a successful future does not depend on birth, on popularity or on power. It depends on the sharing of common values that can move the eternal dreams of justice and morality into future generations for many, many years. ■



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