



PROBING

THE PROPHETS

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Upon analyzing this week's haftarah, a nevuah found in the second perek of Sefer Hoshea, we would find ourselves somewhat limited in understanding the complete message of the navi if we fail to take a look back to the prior chapter. It is there where Hashem tells the prophet to take a wayward woman as his wife (symbolic of the nation that was wayward in their faithfulness to G-d), and to give his future children names that would reflect the punishments that await Israel. In the final pasuk before the opening of our haftarah, Hashem tells Hoshea to name his youngest son "Lo Ami" – **NOT** My nation" – an expression of G-d's abandonment of His people.

And yet, then, immediately following these most troublesome prophecies, Hoshea starts our haftarah reading with the words: "The number of Israel will be as the sand of the sea that cannot be measured nor counted, and, instead of being said of them "You are **NOT** My nation", it will be said of them "They **ARE** the children of the living G-d." It would appear that this new chapter does not begin a new nevuah but is a continuation of the first perek! Hoshea seems to be telling the people that the terrible prophecy of Hashem's abandonment of Israel of which he spoke, is but a temporary one.

How beautifully does Rav S.R. Hirsch translate the haftarah's opening words (the obvious connection to the "number" of Israelites counted in the parasha) as "**HOWEVER**,

the number of Israel will become (as important) as the sand..."and, by doing so, he clearly explains how the haftarah is meant to "soften" the harsh prophecy found in the first chapter and to give hope for the future to the people.

But, if so, we would find the message that follows especially difficult. Clearly, Hoshea is returning to the original theme of Israel being a wayward "wife" to Hashem, and, as a result, would suffer fitting punishments for their faithlessness. "Argue with your 'mother', G-d says, "I will have no compassion for her children", adding, "I will cancel her joy, her festivals....and lay waste to her vines and vineyards..." – are these the words of comfort, words meant to soften the harsh prophecy or give the nation hope as Rav Hirsch contends?? Certainly not!

However, the final verses of our haftarah are indeed comforting, as they promise G-d's return to His people and that, upon His return to His "wife"/nation, they will refer to Him "husband". The description of Israel's relationship with G-d being one of a wife to her husband is purposely continued through the psukim of punishment as well to underscore that, as upset the "Husband" might be with his "wife", He could never abandon her.

That message is driven home in the very last verses of the haftarah, words that men recite upon winding the tefillin straps around the fingers- a betrothal "ring" in a sense: "And I will betroth you unto Me **forever**..."

As a final note, I feel compelled to share with you the words of HaRav Soloveitchik commenting on this closing message:

“Marriage is not merely a civil institution pertaining to property and pleasure by two individuals starved for love and a convenient life....It is rather a covenantal community which is nurtured by the awareness of absolute belonging to each other. Married life is an existence in fellowship, togetherness. In it, a person finds completeness and existential fulfillment.

Today, as we stand one day before the celebration of Yom Yerushalayim, we find ourselves, once again, in a difficult situation. As demonstrations and protests spread around the world against Israel’s ‘audacity’ of allowing Jews to visit (but not pray at) the Temple site, as a movement established by those who deny all “non-believers’ freedom of worship, devotes its efforts to spreading misinformation and falsehoods about our Holy site and G-d’s Holy nation, we might wonder if our “marriage” to the Holy One has, G-d forbid, returned to the time of Hoshea, weakened, unfaithful and deserving of punishment.

The Rav’s approach to the message of Amos reminds us that, even during this difficult time, Hashem remains committed to His faithful “wife” and will stand by their side! As Rav Soloveitchik declares:

Marriage....distinguishes itself by a deep sense of loyalty and faith.....And when the prophet Hoshea portrays the eternal bond between G-d and Israel in (these) glowing ecstatic words, he exclaims that Israel is similarly betrothed to G-d in faith.”

And no more need be said!

Yom Yerushalayim Same’ach! ■



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