



PROBING

THE PROPHETS

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The G'mara in Makkot (24a-b) tells us something interesting about the final pasuk of this week's haftarah

"Six hundred and thirteen mitzvot were given to Moshe.....Along came David and established them upon eleven ethical requirements (see Tehillim: 15);along came Yishayahu and established them on six ethical requirements (see Sefer Yishayahu: 33; 15)along came Michah and established them on three ethical requirements: (Sefer Michah: 6; 8) ..."Asot mishpat, v'ahavat chesed v'hatzne'ah lechet 'im Elokecha"

The haftarah for parashat Balak is taken from the two final prakim of Sefer Michah (5&6), both being part of the final section of the book and share a common theme. This final section is one of comfort and consolation which foresees the defeat of Israel's enemies and the arrival of the promised Mashiach. Our haftarah closes this section with the insistence that all of this, the victories over her foes, her return from exile and the arrival of the scion of David to rule over Israel, will be

brought solely by Hashem Himself – much as G-d had redeemed them many times in the past. It is in these psukim that Michah reminds the nation of how Hashem saved them from the plot of Balak and from the efforts of Bila'am to curse Israel – hence the connection to our parasha.

But the most well-known part of this selection is its final verse, that which is quoted in Masechet Makkot. Commenting on these three "ethical requirements", HaRav Soloveitchik focuses primarily on the final one in trying to understand the importance of "hatzne'ah lechet", walking humbly with G-d. Certainly, the value of doing justice ("asot mishpat") is a pillar of any moral society – especially for the Jew. Indeed, Tanach is replete with the demand for justice, starting from the very beginning of our nationhood, as Hashem, explaining his choice of Avraham by explaining that Avraham is one who would pass down to his descendants, "...derech Hashem...". G-d's way, that is "la'asot tzdaka umishpat," – doing charity and



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JUSTICE” (Breishit 18;19). Likewise, the ethical requirement of “ahavat chesed”, is a very part of Hashem’s character that we are told to emulate. He is an “Oseh CHESED la’alafim” and the One who is “notzer CHESED l’alafim” (Shmot 20:6; 34:7).

Yet, the Rav wonders, why is “walking humbly” regarded as the third “ethical responsibility”? How does this equal the importance of the other two requirements? In analyzing the human condition and the story of the Jew, the Rav comments (I paraphrase):

“Catharsis of religious life is the awareness of long interludes during which Man finds himself an infinite distance from G-d. Even a prophet encounters moments of exile from the presence of the Almighty, (but) those periods of dark despair contain the cathartic element which cleanses and redeems religious life”.

The Rav continues: “The breaking of the *luchot* is an experience that every committed individual must endure. On the life-long journey....one (will) find oneself bankrupt and forlorn. (And) Man must be cognizant of this tragic fact.”

In effect, the Rav sees the requirement of “walk humbly” as a constant realization that he can falter and fall, for he is not perfect. Only with the humble realization that will fall can he then have the strength to rise up again to overcome any future vicissitudes of life.

Those who fail to “walk humbly”, who see life only as a string of successes, cannot survive when he finds himself an infinite distance from G-d. Walking humbly therefore, is, in the view of Rav Soloveitchik, the very requirement for one to survive as a committed and hopeful Jew. ■

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