



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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This second perek of Sefer Yirmiyahu, also the second selection of the pre-Tish'a B'Av haftarot, comprises the bulk of this week's haftarah, stands in contrast to the earlier chapter that we read last Shabbat. In this reading, the navi excoriates Israel for her abandonment of Hashem in favor of the idolatrous pagan cults that surrounded them. If we keep in mind the final verses of last week's haftarah, psukim in which the prophet tells the sinful nation of how G-d remembers their devotion when they followed Him faithfully as they traveled through the desert, we better understand the navi's opening to this haftarah (that follows those very words), that underscores the sharp difference between their former loyalty to Hashem and their present faithlessness.

Yirmiyahu divides his nevu'ah that focuses on Israel's misdeeds, into a few sections. The first section highlights the nation's lack of gratitude, forgetting how G-d's had liberated them from Egyptian slavery and led them through the desert in order to bring to their land. Additionally, the prophet points out how the very religious leadership turned corrupt, with the kohanim, the Torah teachers and even the (false) prophets, having turned their backs on Hashem. In the second

section, Yirmiyahu excoriates the people for abandoning their true G-d in favor of foreign deities who are powerless to help them and, in the next section, the prophet delineates the punishments that await them for their sins. The navi closes his words of condemnation in the following chapter – not included as part of our haftarah - with, perhaps, the worst of all sins: the nation's lack of shame or regret over their wayward behavior, a sin that prevented the possibility of any teshuva, any return to Hashem.

In the course of describing Israel's misdeeds, Yirmiyahu quotes the people's denial of any sin, and yet, the navi adds, you can find their immorality "on every lofty hill and under every lush tree". HaRav Soloveitchik explains that such "worship" of using natural beauty as a form of religious expression was-and remains- a common technique that is rejected by Judaism.

He says: [excerpts taken from ("*Out of the Whirlwind*")]:

"Religious experience flows from a heart filled to the brim with love of G-d and from a soul stirred to its inmost roots..... Judaism is interested in a religious experience which mirrors the genuine personality (and)... that is why the Jewish (prayer) service distinguishes

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itself by its utter simplicity..... It (prayer) is nothing but a dialogue between G-d and Man, a conversation – ordinary in its beginning, simple in its unfolding and unceremoniously organized at its conclusion....

Judaism sees in all these aesthetic motifs... extraneous means of creating a fugitive mood which will disappear with the departure of the worshipper from the cathedral....Judaism concentrates on feelings which flow NOT from the outside but from within the personality, on emotions.....enhanced – not by external stimuli – but by the inner existence awareness.”

In his inimitable style, the Rav explains the failure for which Yirmiyahu condemns his generation and one that remains an all-too-common mistake in the future as well. Simply put: there are no short-cuts” to G-d. One cannot use external stimuli as a replacement for heartfelt connection. Outer trappings cannot substitute for internal commitment. The oft-repeated warning of the prophets that ritual alone is meaningless if it does not express sincere contrition and regret reflect the mistaken attitude of the ancients. The sad “joke” that one need not BE ‘frum’ as long as he LOOKS ‘frum’, reminds us that the very same sin condemned by Yirmiyahu 2,500 years ago, is “alive and well” in our society as well.

There can be no short cuts taken if one truly hopes to reach Hashem. It takes a full commitment of time, effort and “inner existence awareness”. ■

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