



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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When discussing this week's haftarah, we generally focus upon the opening p'sukim – verses that open this final book (as usually understood) of the Tanach. As the navi Malachi begins these latest of Hashem's messages to His prophets, he speaks to the nation of G-d's choice of Ya'akov Avinu and His rejection of the twin, Eisav. It is, of course, the obvious connection to our parasha which details the friction between the two brothers and their "competition" for primacy in the family.

But that is not the basic theme of the prophet's message.

A quick review of the text will show that the haftarah is one of criticism and reproach of Israel – and specifically, of the Kohanim – for their laxity, and even negligence, in their conduct of the sacrificial rite. Rebuking these ritual leaders, the navi Malachi condemns these attendants in the Bet HaMikdash as "despising" Hashem's name ('Bozei Sh'mi') by offering lame and sick animals as sacrifices to G-d – gifts that they would never dare offer to their governors. By doing so, he declares, they were, in effect, saying that Hashem's "table" was despicable and contemptible.

These harsh words seem to be completely

disconnected from the parasha, and its focus on the struggle between the two brothers.

But it is not.

Rav Soloveithik reminds us of Chazal's view, reflected in the commentary of Rashi, that Eisav's rejection of the bechora, the rights of the first born, a dismissal that the text characterizes as "Vayizev Eisav et Hab'chora"- that, in this rebuff, Eisav displayed "bizui" – not simply a refusal, but absolute contempt! Not surprisingly, we find that the words used by Hashem to describe the Kohanim of that era as those who are "bozei sh'mi"- those whose actions reflect a contempt toward Hashem name.

And that, my friends, is a clear connection to the very basic theme – both of the haftarah and of the parasha: the choice of Ya'akov over Eisav. The sin of the priestly class during the Second Temple, as is described in the haftarah, is meant to underscore how the actions of these Kohanim mirrored the very behavior of Eisav in the parasha – behavior that had him rejected from the b'chora. (Especially interesting, given that the kehuna, office for those selected to be attendants to Hashem in the Mishkan/Mikdash, was originally slated for the b'chorim!).

The final p'sukim of the haftarah, however,

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turn away from critique to inspiration and encouragement. Malachi reminds the Kohanim of the covenant made with the tribe of Levi – an eternal covenant of life and peace. And a covenant that included the descendants to be the educators of Israel, those who would teach G-d's Torah to the nation. The haftarah closes with the message: “Ki siftei chohen yishmeru da'at...”, the lips of the Kohen should keep knowledge (of Torah)...for he is the agent of Hashem.

The Rav expands upon this thought by explaining that neither religious experience nor ritual practice alone can satisfy the yearnings of the Jewish soul. For, without intellectual study and understanding – ritual exercises have little meaning; without Torah knowledge, the effects of religious experiences would be short-lived.

And, I would add, that is why those who were in charge of the ritual service and those who led the religious experiences in the Bet HaMikdash were those who would educate the people in the Torah. It is especially powerful when one who models ritual service and inspires religious experiences is also the one to spread the word of Trah to all.

We, after all, are the descendants of Ya'akov – he who “dwelled in the tent” of Torah, and was, therefore, chosen over his rejectionist brother to spread the word of G-d. ■




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