



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Not a Gift - But an Obligation!

The Book of Vayikra revolves around the concept of “Mikdash”, both the recently built Mishkan and the “to be built” Bet HaMikdash. The Torah begins by detailing the laws of Korbanot (in Parashot VaYikra and Tzav), continues with the laws of Tum’ah and Tahara (in Parashot Shmini, Tazria and Metzora) and, starting with today’s parasha, the laws of sanctity and holiness (of the Mikdash and the nation itself). Indeed, the basic theme of both parashot is expressed in the “bridge” between both readings, with the closing words of Parashat Acharei Mot telling us not to defile the land with moral turpitude, and continues with the opening words our next Parashat Kedoshim: “Kedoshim t’h’yu”, demanding that we are to remain holy.”

Throughout his commentary, Rashi sees

the fulfillment of the mitzvah of “kedusha” – being holy, as a requirement to “separate” ourselves, i.e. that we be separate, unique, avoiding the immoral behavior practiced by the other nations. It is the same demand included in Hashem’s cry at Har Sinai: “V’atem t’h’yu li Mamlechet Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh”, to be a holy nation dedicated to the service of G-d.

How then can we understand the opening words of our haftarah that express precisely the opposite view: “Hahlo chiv’nei Chushiyim atem li”, “Behold, you are no different to me than the Cushite nation”, explaining that, just as G-d had done for Israel, so, too, had He “liberated” other nations from foreign lands. We are “No Different?” We are NOT a “Mamlechet Kohanim”? We are NOT a holy nation dedicated to the service of G-d? Are these the words of G-d’s prophet???

We can understand the chilling words of the navi Amos only when first reading his opening prophecies in the first two p’rakim. There, the prophet addresses the sins of Israel’s neighbors (Aram, Edom, Mo’av, among others), and foretells the resultant punishments that would befall them. However, he then includes Israel (and Judea) among these sinful nations and details their resulting punishments for their sinful behavior. And this is precisely why Amos opens this haftarah with these “chilling” words, impressing upon Israel that their corrupt deeds make them no different than other sinful nations! This moral is a basic theme found in the Book of Amos in the prophecies of other n’vi’im as well (Hoshe’a,

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Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel).

But why must we read this haftarah specifically after reading these parashot of Kedusha??

In truth, this selection is especially pertinent to the theme of “holiness?”, for it expresses a most important idea: the “specialness” of Israel is predicated upon her retaining that status of kedusha, something which can be done only through their fealty to G-d and His mitzvot. When Israel shrugs off her commitment to Hashem, when she ignores her miraculous past and, thereby, denies her glorious future, she is no different than any other nation. In fact, she is worse than they are. It is precisely THIS demand of Hashem that Amos expresses so powerfully in our haftarah, saying: “Rak etchem yada’ti...al ken efkod aleichem et kol avonoteichem” - it is **because** G-d revealed Himself to us, **because** we have witnessed His

miracles over and over again, that He expects fidelity and faithfulness from us **more** than He does from other peoples!

No. Kedusha is not a **gift** bestowed upon us; it is an **obligation** we are challenged to fulfill. ■

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