



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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My father, a”h, was not able to complete his yeshiva education. He was the youngest of six children from a poor family who, therefore, was compelled to leave high school at the age of sixteen to help support his family. Nonetheless, my father continued to study what his father and his yeshiva taught him and, over the years, he used that knowledge to serve as Shamash, Shliach Tzibbur and Ba’al Kriah for his Bet Knesset – and, throughout his life, taught many others what he learned. I was blessed to be his “closest student” and, at this time of my life, I understand that what he taught me – what he TOLD me -remained in my mind and my heart even more profoundly than that which I studied from books or even that which I learned from my Rebbe’im

This Shabbat, we read the first words of Sefer D’varim and, likewise, we read the first words of Sefer Yishayahu. On this Shabbat, our haftarah reading will initiate the prophecies of Yishayahu HaNavi to his generation, as the Torah reading will commence with Moshe Rabbeinu’s final “speech” to the nation. And, although these truths are well-known and not at all surprising, Chazal see

these connections in a different light.

Our scholars note [in Tachuma: Ha’azinu Bet] how Yishayahu opens his first nevu’ah with the words: “**Shim’u shamayim v’ha’azinu eretz**” and Moshe Rabbeinu opens his final address to the nation with similar words: “**Ha’azinu hashamayin** va’adabera, **w’tishman ha’aretz** imrei fi”. In fact, the similarity between the prophetic message of Yishayahu and the farewell speech of Moshe is more noteworthy than we would have first realized.

In his book “Hamevaser”, Rav Yigal Ariel points to the numerous similarities of themes that are found in both “Shirat Moshe” (Ha’azinu) and in Yishayahu’s “Chazon”.

Consider:

- Moshe reminded Israel that they are the **children** of Hashem: “Hu **Avicha** kanecha”
 - As did Yishayahu: “**Banim** gidalti v’romamti”
- Moshe condemned the nation for their lack of **understanding**: “V’**ein bahem tevunah**”
 - And so did Yishayahu: “Ami lo **hitbonan**”
- Moshe asked the people “how?” (“**eichah**”): “**Eicha** yirdof echad-elef...”
 - And Yishayahu echoed...: “**Eicha** hayeta l’zonah kirya ne’manah”
- Moshe equated the sinful nation to the corrupt of **S’dom** and **Amora**: “Ki mige-fen **S’dom** gafnam umishadmot **Amorah**”
 - Similarly, Yishayahu censured Israel...: “Kim’at k’**S’dom** hayinu, la’**Amorah** daminu”

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- Moshe closed his “shira” with a comforting promise of **retribution**: “**V’nakom** yashiv **l’tzarav**”
 - Yishayahu did so as well: “Hoy, enachem mit**zorai** v’**inokma** me’oyvai
- And, in conclusion, we find that both nevi'im concluded their respective messages with the common theme of “**Mishpat**”, justice:
 - Moshe said: “V’tochez b’**mishpat** yadi”
 - Yishayahu closed his nevu'ah with: “Tziyon b’**Mishpat** tipadeh”

Our Chachamim noted these similarities, and, undoubtedly, saw in them a significant lesson. But what might that lesson be?

I would humbly suggest that Yishayahu, addressing a generation influenced by foreign philosophies and values, a population turning away from Torat Moshe, understood that his message could not simply be one of warning or of possible punishment, nor one of reiteration or duplication of Hashem's laws. He may have felt that the most powerful – and impactful – way to re-educate this wayward generation would to echo the final words that the greatest of prophets shared with his nation – “Shirat Moshe”, Ha'azinu. It is for this reason that HaKadosh Baruch Hu placed in the mouth of this navi the message most likely to inspire the populace so lost and so aimless.

It would be the heartfelt words of the ‘Father of the Prophets’ (“Av Ha-nevi'im”) that could best remain in the hearts and minds of the children.

.....I know that my father's words did! ■

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