



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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“Ad” or “Eid”?

Ha'azinu hashamayim va'adabeira, v'tishma ha'aretz imrei fee”.

This week's parasha begins with Moshe Rabbainu calling on heaven and earth to witness (and testify to) the truth of the words he will recite during this “Shirat Moshe”, ‘song’ of Moshe. These opening words echo that which Moshe said at the closing of the last parasha (perek 31), that this song will serve as a witness of the inevitable punishments that would befall them were they to abandon Hashem. Interestingly, at the end of parashat Nitzavim (perek 30), Moshe again calls upon heaven and earth to stand as witnesses to his plea to Israel to choose good and life over, ch”v, evil and death.

I chose to begin this explanation of the Shabbat Shuva haftarah by discussing the parasha because the *pesiqta* (a collection of midrashim on the Torah and the haftarat,

composed around 845 CE), makes a puzzling comment about the opening pasuk of the haftarah. The pasuk from Sefer Hoshea states: “Shuva Yisra’el **AD** Hashem E’lokecha,” that Israel should return **to** Hashem, while the P’siqta argues that the pasuk should properly be read as “Shuva Yisra’el **EID** Hashem E’lokecha,” - that Hashem is a **witness** for Israel!!

HaRav Soloveitchik, in one of his essays (found in “On Repentance”), sees this somewhat curious statement of the P’siqta as a support to the view of the Rambam. Maimonides declares (Hilchot Teshuva 2;2) that true repentance is achieved when the sinner resolves in his heart never again to repeat the sin, and He who knows all that is hidden can indeed testify that this person will never again repeat that sin.

The Rav is quite troubled by this comment. Is it not a condition that the remorseful sinner will find almost impossible to fulfill? How can this be the demand of G-d on one who sincerely desires to do teshuva? And, if Hashem will testify that the sinner will never again sin-then what happens to the person's freedom to choose how to act?

Rav Soloveitchik, therefore, turns to the Lechem Mishneh's explanation of the Rambam's words. The term “ya'id” that is used does not mean that G-d will testify that the sinner will never again sin throughout his



Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l

In Loving Memory of
Doris Krauthamer a”h
on her 5th yahrzeit

Much loved mother, grandmother
and great grandmother

We miss you so much

life. Rather, the word ya'id can also be understood to mean to designate one as a witness, something Moshe Rabbeinu himself does at the end of the last parasha when he calls upon heaven and earth to be witnesses, to testify for Israel in the future. The Rambam's meaning, therefore, is that the sinner himself designated Hashem to witness how sincere and whole-hearted is his intention to repent and not to sin.

During this time of year, we stand before Hashem hoping to be granted a positive and successful future. Indeed, we did the same last year, as well. And yet, for many of us - and perhaps for most of the Jewish world - this past year was not what we had wished it would be. And, as a result, we approach the unknown future hardly knowing what prayers might be most effective and how to G-d to best reach out to Hashem.

For this reason. I would suggest that we heed the opening words of our haftarah and realize that... "Shuva Yisra'el....EID", our tefillot should be based upon the knowledge that Hashem is listening and witnessing how sincere our prayers are. We must understand that **WHAT** we pray for is less important than **HOW** we pray. A sincere tefilla becomes an impactive experience that reaches the heavenly throne, and, equally important, affects our very behavior throughout the year.

And so, do not worry if we forget to pray for a specific something or someone. We simply need to pray deeply to Hashem and allow Him to "fill in the blanks" for us all.

After all, when He witnesses that kind of tefilla how can He fail to respond? ■

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