



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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"Al Tashlicheini"

Once again, we have the privilege of reading the episode of David and Yonatan from Shmuel A (Perek 21) for our haftarah. Of course, I use the term "once again" because it is a selection that we read whenever Erev Rosh Chodesh coincides with Shabbat, something that generally occurs more than once each year. The very opening words of the haftarah, "Machar Chodesh" declare the unique character of this Shabbat and also give us the reason why it is read on this Shabbat, and how it is connected to the date and not to the parasha itself.

Over the years we have reviewed the events that take place in the reading: the jealousy of Sha'ul that leads him to plot David's death, Yonatan's plan to alert David of his father's true intentions and Yonatan's actions that signal David to quickly escape Sha'ul's wrath. The story is well-known. But perhaps we will be able to better understand the entire episode if we study the events that preceded this story.

The relationship between Sha'ul and David

actually began following Israel's war against the Amalekim, the battle that Hashem commanded Sha'ul to wage in order to destroy the nation that was a source of evil in the world. David was not involved in the war at all and Sha'ul had no idea who he was. But it was after that battle that G-d told King Sha'ul that, due to his failure to follow Hashem's command no destroy all of the Amalekite property, Hashem had "regretted" having chosen Sha'ul and that He would now find another better than he. In the very next chapter, G-d chooses David. But it was at the moment that Hashem told Saul that He would choose another that Sha'ul began to suspect any possible "usurper" to his throne. Hence, the "relationship" begins then.

To further underscore this connection, the Tanach tells of the secret anointing of David in Bet Lechem and adds: "Vatitzlach ru'ach Hashem el David", "The spirit of Hashem passed over David", and in the very following pasuk it states: "V'ru'ach Hashem sara me'im Sha'ul," "Hashem's spirit departed from Sha'ul". This is no coincidence. The text makes it quite clear that as David became more and more popular and successful, Sha'ul became less so. The result, especially after David's heroic defeat of Golyat (Goliath) and his repeated military victories, and after hearing the people cheering that Sha'ul has defeated thousands but David has defeated tens of thousands, the King knew full well that David had been designated by G-d to be his successor.

Given this background, and given the textual admission that "an evil spirit (of melancholy) descended upon Saul," we should not be surprised at the King's repeated attempts to kill



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David. To be fair, Sha'ul, who saw David as a threat to the throne, could have legally judges him as a “mored bamalchut”, a traitor who threatened his reign, as, therefore, deserving of death. But given Saul's knowledge that David would replace him as king, a fact he himself admitted to David (Shmuel A 24; 20) and one he knew was decreed by G-d, Sha'ul's pursuit of David was nothing less than a refusal to accept G-d's decision and, therefore, an act of defiance, undoubtedly brought upon by the “evil spirit”, the emotional instability he suffered when he was abandoned by Hashem.

In retrospect, Sha'ul's willful defiance of G-d's command when battling Amalek led to his almost unwitting act of ignoring of G-d's will when dealing with David.

The story of Sha'ul is a tragic one. He who was described as “head and shoulders” above the people, who was called Sha'ul HaTzaddik by Chazal, ends his career and his life in ignominy, pursued by his implacable enemy and unable to hear from G-d. And all for one reason alone: G-d's divine spirit had abandoned him.

We pray to HaKadosh Boruch Hu for many things throughout our lives. Yet, perhaps the simplest thing to request is that prayer that we repeat in our Selichot and throughout Yom Kippur: “Al Tashlicheini”-do not abandon me, G-d. For when we walk with G-d, when He is by our side, we have everything we need. ■



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