



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Two Prophets; Two Purposes

This week's haftarah selection, taken from Sefer M'lachim Bet, shares with us two stories of the miraculous deeds of the navi, Elisha. As we have mentioned in previous articles, these two stories closely parallel the stories of Avraham and Sarah that we read in the parasha. In the first episode we learn of the widow of a G-d-fearing husband, who was saved from the loss of her two sons to servitude of her creditor, through Hashem's miracle (wrought by Elisha) of extending the small amount of oil she had, thus providing the money she needed to pay off her debt.

This story reminds us of the Torah portion where we read of the G-d fearing Avraham who stands to lose both of his sons: Yishma'el, whom he was told to send away, and Yitzchak, whom he was told to sacrifice, and yet was saved by G-d's word. In the second episode of the haftarah we are told of a righteous barren woman, miraculously granted a son from her elderly husband, a son who dies and is brought back to life. Similarly, the parasha tells the story of the righteous, barren Sarah who is granted a son from the elderly Avraham, a son who was almost killed but was miraculously saved.

But beyond the similarities to our parasha, these stories also bring us back to the miracles performed by Elisha's teacher and mentor, Eliyahu HaNavi. Just two prakim

before these stories (in the second perek of M'lachim B), we learn of how Elisha spent the final moments of Eliyahu's life in this world with his teacher and how he succeeded his mentor as navi to the people. Interestingly, this bond between teacher and student endured throughout Elisha's life, as many of the wonders he performed bore a striking resemblance to those wrought by his master, Eliyahu.

We note that Eliyahu sustained a poor widow and her son throughout a period of famine by miraculously having the widow's small amount of flour last until the end of the famine, just as the miracle performed by Elisha in this haftarah, saving the poor widow by miraculously extending the small amount of her oil. Eliyahu brings a child back to life, a miracle duplicated in almost the exact way by Elisha - an event we read in our haftarah. And when Elisha dies, King Yo'ash cries out "Avi, Avi, rechev Yisra'el ufarashav", "My father, my father, the chariot and horsemen of Israel", the precise words that Elisha cried upon Eliyahu's departure from the world!

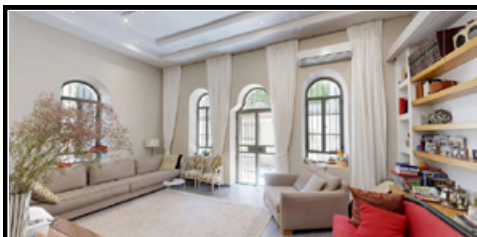
Yet, despite the many similarities shared by these two great prophets, the contrasts between them are even more stark. We know little of Eliyahu, neither his father's name nor his tribe is mentioned in the Tanach; Elisha is introduced to us with his father's name, the name of his city as

well as his profession. Eliyahu, on the other hand, was a mystical figure who fled from the people and hid from them for years, returning only at G-d's command, to admonish the King, while Elisha traveled to the people and often advised and helped the King. The first miracle performed by Eliyahu was his call for a drought, bringing severe scarcity of water to the people; the first miracle wrought by Elisha was providing potable water for the people.

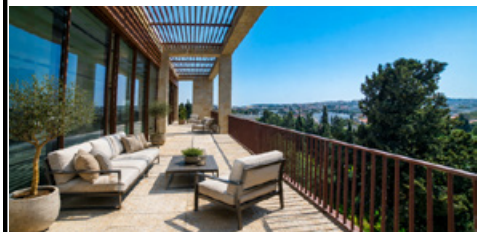
The differences between the two are powerful and we rightfully question why. I would suggest that Hashem chose those personalities that could most effectively bring His word to the nation. Eliyahu prophesied at a time when the powerful King Achav was leading the people astray. At that time there was a need for a powerful-even mystical – figure to impress G-d's message on the King and the nation. Elisha spoke to a different generation-one that needed to understand what Hashem wanted of them. For that reason, Hashem chose a navi who knew that teaching is most effectively done by one who was close to the people and not distanced from them; by a warm figure who understood their weaknesses and their needs; an individual who knew that, for that generation, Torah is best taught through education and not simple legislation.

Hashem has many agents to carry His message-and they are not all the same. Our challenge is to realize that the message is truly divine and, by doing so, follow G-d's directive. By doing so, we might no longer need His messenger! ■

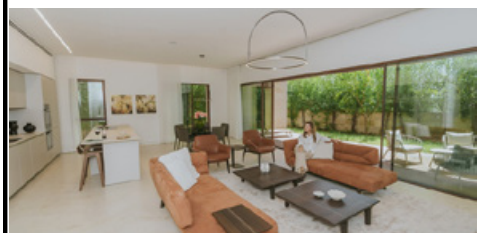
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