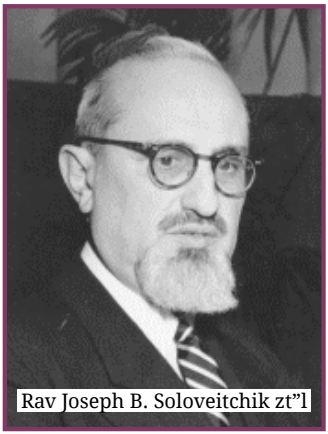


PROBING THE PROPHETS
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No, It's Not All About Yitzchak

Last week's parasha of Chaye Sarah portrayed the final years of Avraham and closed the portion by summarizing the future descendants of Yishma'el. It is only logical, therefore, that this week's parasha of Toledot would focus upon the life of Avraham and Sarah's only son, Yitzchak Avinu -and, indeed, it does.


Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l

Beginning with the birth of his twin sons, the parasha also includes Hashem's charge for Yitzchak to remain in Eretz Yisrael despite its ongoing famine, the reward he is given in agricultural success and chronicles Yitzchak's relationship with the Philistine King, Avimelech. In fact, the text even makes a point of mentioning the disputes Yitzchak had with the Philistine shepherds, which he was eventually able to resolve peacefully.

But our haftarah does not concentrate on the successes of Yitzchak or of Rivka, nor on the story of the Yitzchak's brachot given to his sons – and not even on the 'strained' relationship between Eisav and Ya'akov! Curiously, the haftarah centers upon the unsuitable behavior shown by the kohanim during the years of the navi, Mal'achi. And, although Mal'achi's prophecy does begin with the mention of Hashem's preference of Ya'akov over Eisav, the bulk of the haftarah focuses on the improper—and even profane—manner in which the kohanim conducted the sacred services in the Beit HaMikdash. Now, we would certainly understand the navi's reproach of the inappropriate **avodah** that was taking place in the holiest of places during his time...but why did Chazal see this nevu'ah as a proper haftarah for Parashat Toledot??

HaRav Soloveitchik submits that the connection Chazal saw in this haftarah to the parasha itself is found in the opening events of the Torah reading, where Eisav rejects his 'bechora', his birthright. Beyond a simple rejection, the Torah describes Eisav's reaction by using the word "vayivez", he "despised" the bechora. Given the fact that Chazal saw this rejection as Eisav's complete dismissal of any service to G-d, of any responsibility of 'priesthood'.

It is **this** connection, therefore, that our sages saw in Malachi's censure of the Kohanim of his time. The disregard and disrespect that the kohanim displayed is detailed in the prophet's condemnation is found in our haftarah as the navi charges

the Kohanim of sacrificing the sickly and weak animals as offering to Hashem and, as such, 'polluting" G-d's table. Even worse, the outraged prophet accuses the kohanim of regarding the entire service to Hashem as being 'wearisome' ["matla'ah"], and, as a result, accepting even stolen animals to be offered to G-d.

The Rav later continues by sharing with us the very depth of these grave sins and why Malachi's harsh reprimand connects so closely to our parasha. Rav Soloveitchik follows the view of Chazal, based upon the Torah's statement that, even before the nation of Israel was formed, there was a "Kohen" - an individual who served G-d. His name was Malkitzedek, and the text states "v'hu **Kohen** L'Kel Elyon", "he was a **Kohen** to the Most High G-d" (Bereishit 14:18). It was Yitzchak, who, years later, assumed this responsibility (as a result of the Akeida), and it passed down to his oldest son, Eisav (through his 'bechora"). That responsibility fell to Ya'akov – after Eisav rejected it - and then to the bechorim (the first born) of Israel. Eventually, Hashem removed that position from the first born and gave it to the Kohanim (through the tribe of Levi) [**Bamidbar 3:12**].

Clearly, our sages saw the inheritance of the priesthood as a subtle theme of parasha itself, thereby emphasizing the essential truth that the divine service must always continue. And, as Mal'achi taught, that service must always be carried on in reverence, purity and holiness. ■

Rabbi Winkler's popular Jewish History lectures can be viewed by visiting the OU Israel Video archive: www.ouisrael.org/video-library