



PROBING

THE PROPHETS

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This haftarah, the 60th perek of Sefer Yishayahu, is one of complete *nechama*, a chapter of total comfort and consolation, including the following promises:

1. Israel will bask in Hashem's divine light.
2. Those of the nation who remained in the Diaspora will return
3. Outsiders will also be drawn to the divine light and will come.
4. All those who arrive will praise Hashem and bring their wealth with them.
5. Justice and Integrity will rule in the land.
6. The future generations will be filled with the righteous in whom G-d will take pride.

Interestingly, we find the first visible, concrete steps of the geulah to be the return of the nation Israel, her “sons and daughters from afar”, in such an assemblage, that, upon witnessing it, you will have two reactions: “אז תירא ונהרת” , first, you will be “astonished” and even “startled” and then “ופחד ורחב לבבך”, your hearts will be “frightened and broadened”. And, although different parshanim suggest various definitions to the term “pachad” (because, after all, it seems rather counter-intuitive to have one’s heart broadened yet frightened), I prefer to understand the word in its most obvious meaning of frightened. And I do so, perhaps because,

as opposed to those outstanding scholars, I have the benefit of hindsight.

When I read these inspiring words of Yishayahu, I cannot regard them as a prophecy that would yet be realized. When I read of a flood of immigrants that would cause “astonishment” and “fright” or of an unimaginable influx of Jews from the Diaspora that would return to the Land of Israel....I read HISTORY!!! I imagine the story of the early chalutzim who came from Russia and Eastern Europe to farm the Land and bring it back to life; I remember the experiences of those who came in the “second aliya” (1904-1914) and joined the agricultural “revolution” and that also included immigrants from Yemen and adults with families who settled in-and helped create- the urban areas. And, when hearing this haftarah, should I not think of the “illegal” arrivals to the shores of “Palestine” who sacrificed everything to kiss the holy ground of a place they had only dreamed of and could only yearn for?

Did this not “startle” the world?

Did it not “worry” the British and “frighten” the Arabs?

And did it not also “frighten” the early leaders of the nascent State of Israel who wondered how a population of 600,000, a not-yet developed country struggling for economic survival...how could they *ever* manage to absorb an influx of immigrants

that numbered twice the amount of residents who lived the State? Yes, ופחד ורחב, “frightened and broadened”, frightened by the task at hand yet broadened with the love of their people and with the generosity of heart to successfully meet the (seemingly) impossible challenge!

This is why I strongly believe that Yishayahu hoped to let us know that the hearts could be both frightened as well as broadened.

I also see the navi’s description of Israel’s massive return to her homeland as a clear reference to our recent history. Allow me to explain: Throughout the Tanach’s depiction of Israel’s return we usually find G-d “bringing” us back to our land, and “gathering” us from the four corners of the earth. But in our haftarah, Yishayahu does not speak of Hashem BRINGING the nation back but of a nation being DRAWN back by the light that would shine upon them. In other words, this first step of the redemption will not be effected by a divine decision to reverse His laws of nature but by a people’s desire to reverse their common history!

Although, I admit, these are my thoughts upon studying this haftarah reading, I hope that some of you might share the same thoughts and, if enough of us do, perhaps we can find a common ground upon which we can all build a future together. ■

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