



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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SHABBAT SHUVA - PARSHAT HA'AZINU

Shuva Yisrael.... Ki Chashalta Ba'Avunecha!!

"Return O Israel" cries the navi Hoshe'a, "for you have stumbled through your sin" – a powerful call to the nation, and one so fitting for this Shabbat between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. It is no wonder that its opening plea has lent its name to the Shabbat itself. The prophet's demand to return is understandable while the explanation he offers as to why that return is necessary, that is, "for you have stumbled through your sin", opens an interesting point for us to ponder.

HaRav Soloveitchik sees in these words of Hoshe'a the implication that sin is, most often, the result of one's "stumbling." He argues that *teshuva* can be attained only after one recognizes one's "misstep", as the Rambam famously contends, as this beginning of the repentance process can take place only with the admission of the sin. To do so, the individual must realize that sin is contrary to one's own self-interest, understanding that he/her has been corrupted by

such behavior and gained nothing from it.

The Rav illustrates this – almost inborn - emotion of regret through the story of Naval and Avigayil found in Sefer Shmuel A. There, we read of how David, fleeing from the murderous threats of King Sha'ul, used his band of men to protect the local Judeans, including the wealthy Naval. At Naval's annual celebration of another successful year, David's (men) requested some gifts from Naval, ("whatever you can") in recognition of what David had done for him throughout the year. When Naval refused in a most disgraceful and appalling manner, David prepared to attack him. It was then that Avigayil, the wife of Naval, pleaded with David not to stain his own reputation and to spare her husband. The next morning, after her husband had recovered from his inebriate state, Avigayil

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told him of what he had done – and what had *almost* happened to him. Upon hearing the news, Naval realized what he had done and, as the text tells us: “his heart ‘died’ within him.”

Rav Soloveitchik goes on to say that for every Naval, every drunkard, every sinner...there come “the next morning”, a realization of what his sins had done to his very being. Everyone, eventually, has their “Avigayil” to awaken them from their sinful stupor. We call it Elul, or Rosh Hashanah, or Shabbat Shuva or Yom Kippur, as the shofar arouses us to search ourselves and realize “ki chashalta ba’avunecha!!” – we have stumbled.

Unfortunately, most of us (I know it is true of myself!) make efforts to convince others and ourselves that we did no sin – that there was a good reason to act as we did or that it was another’s fault, or that others do the same, etc., etc. But unless we can recognize that, indeed, we have stumbled, we will continue tripping down that sinful path.

But Shabbat Shuva has arrived and our Avigayil has awakened us out of our stupor. The question that remains is whether that “almost inborn emotion of regret”, as the Rav puts it, will succeed in arousing us to the harm we inflict upon ourselves... and upon others.

The Shofar has sounded. We must respond! ■

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