



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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The well-known (and often read) haftarah for Erev Rosh Chodesh seems to really have little to do with the beginning of a new month beyond the opening words of Yonatan to David - "Machar Chodesh", that tomorrow will be Rosh Chodesh. The interesting, though rather sad, story of David's flight from the royal palace (accomplished through the aid of Yonatan) has no clear relevance to the start of a new month - certainly not one important enough to have been established as the required reading for every Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh.

HaRav Soloveitchik, zt"l, posed that same question - and provided an answer based upon a midrash found in Shemot Rabba.

The Midrash indicates that all of Jewish history is reflected in the lunar cycle and therefore...

- Avraham represented the beginning of Jewish history - symbolized by the first appearance of the new moon. This "moonlight" grew stronger and brighter for fifteen generations, until the reign of....
- Shlomo HaMelech, when Jewish history reached its apex, as the Bet HaMikdash was built and all twelve tribes dwelt in peace and harmony. It was an era symbolized by the full moon. For the next fifteen generations, however, Israel's fate waned, as the moon does after the mid-month, and, with the removal of....

- Tzidkiyahu HaMelech, the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash, the collapse of the Davidic monarchy and the exile of the nation. Everything turned dark - (perhaps represented by King Tzidkiyahu's blindness), which reflects the state of the moon on erev Rosh Chodesh, the day before Rosh Chodesh, when its light is no longer seen.
- wAnd, of course, the cycle begins once more on Rosh Chodesh when the moon's illumination grows stronger and stronger, just as the Kingdom of Israel, her strength and her vibrancy, will be renewed and rejuvenated.

It was this message, the Rav argues, that Yehonatan, taught David. Although things look bleak, although you may be pursued by my father and his men, remember - "Machar Chodesh" - despite the darkness that surrounds you today, it is only because it is the last day of the month and the moon's light has disappeared. But tomorrow, "Machar" there will be "Chodesh", a new month and a new moon that will grow in strength, in illumination and in vitality. Today is black; tomorrow will be bright. This is not hope nor even prophecy; it is, as the Rav puts it, "Jewish Destiny."

And this is the message - the essential message - of which Jewish communities had to be reminded over the generations on each and every Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh.

And, in a powerful postscript, Rav Soloveitchik

turns our attention to Masechet Rosh HaShana (25a) where we read of an era when the “occupier” of the land would not allow the Jews to recite the Kiddush Levana, (sanctification of the new moon). The G'mara records that Rabba asked Rav Chiya to observe and report upon the appearance of the new moon. But rather than reporting the event explicitly to the bet din he was asked to use a coded message and to tell the court: “David Melech Yisra'el Chai V'kayam”! It was a message that the ancient scholars understood, that the moon has appeared and, indeed, a brighter future awaits.

The Rav closes his message by commenting that the Jewish people may have seemed to “disappear” over the last 1900 years; we will reappear with the arrival of the Messianic Era.

And, I would add, we have already begun to see the moon getting brighter and brighter.

The new moon has reappeared! ■

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