



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Our Rabbis' selection of Chapters 54-55 in Yishayahu as this week's *haftarah* seems to be rather obvious. These chapters are found in the latter part of Sefer Yishayahu in the section that includes the *navi's* visions of comfort, which is why they are included among the *haftarot* of consolation that we read recently. The connection to our parsha specifically, is found in the prophet's words "ki mei Noach zot li." Through these words, G-d pledges that, after redeeming Israel from her exile, He would never again pour out His wrath against them. Hashem then reaffirms this promise by comparing it to the oath He made to No'ach, saying: "for this vow is like the oath I made regarding the waters of Noah (never again to flood the earth)," an oath, of course, that we read in this week's *parsha*.

But Rav Soloveichik, delves more deeply into this comparison between the generation of No'ach and that of Yishayahu. In commenting on G-d's decision to inundate the world, the Rav quotes Hashem's reasoning for the flood as found in an earlier verse

(*Breishit*; 6:5): "*v'chol yetzer machshevot libo rak ra ...*" - Hashem saw that Man's natural inclination is only of evil. G-d knew that a society so corrupt, one that was enmeshed in satisfying the evil inclination, could never fulfill His demand that humanity create a world of morality and justice. Strangely, however, when he promises No'ach never again to bring such a catastrophe upon the world, He explains (*Breishit*; 8:21): "*ki yetzer lev ha'adam ra min'urav*", admitting that Man's natural inclination is "evil from his youth." The Rav asks why G-d gives the very same rationale as to why He would **not** destroy the world as He gave to explain why He **must** destroy the world.

In response, Rav Soloveitchik points to the subtle difference between Hashem's explanation as to why He was determined to destroy the world and his reason as to why He would never again do so. In describing the absolute corruption of the antediluvian Man, Hashem declares that "*v'chol yetzer machshevot libo rak ra*" – **all** of humanity's natural inclination is **only** to do evil. However, when He describes the new post-flood society he states "*yetzer lev ha'adam ra*", that the new generation would also be one whose inclination would be drawn to

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malevolence one....but not “v’chol” – not all and not “rak”, not only.

And this subtle “tweak”, says the Rav, makes a world of difference, for humanity in the post-flood generation would now have the capacity for repentance and, with that, the ability to remove the “v’chol” and the “rak”.

It is through this understanding that we better appreciate the message of our haftarah as well. In appealing to a mournful nation, Yishayahu prophesies an unprecedented increase of Israel’s population, a surprising expansion of their settlement and an unexpected renewal of the once destroyed and abandoned cities. The nation, still smarting from years of punishment, wonders how, after their corruption and their sinfulness, G-d would agree to do such a thing. The response of the navi is Hashem’s oath to No’ach: just as one sinful generation was punished and a new one was reborn with the potential for repentance, so too, the people of Israel could do the same!

Indeed, a mere month after Yom Kippur, this message is especially comforting. While some might be doubtful regarding the efficacy of their attempts to repent, whether tho one day and some weeks of effort could move Hashem to forgive, Yishayahu sends us a reassuring message in our haftarah.

We, too, despite our tendency to be selfish and fall into sin at times, we, as the post-flood generation, can also remove the “kol” and the “rak”, we too can repent. ■

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