



PROBING

THE PROPHETS

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“...V'torat chessed al l'shona”

The events we read of in this week's *haftarah*, a selection from the fourth perek in M'lachim Bet, bear a close resemblance to the events we read of in the Torah itself. The story Elisha and the Shunamite woman tells of the astonishing birth of a son to a once-barren woman and her elderly husband, a birth foretold by the navi Elisha and doubted by the woman. It then goes on to relate how, years later, the parents almost lose that cherished son who is miraculously saved only through the intervention of Elisha. The story echoes that of Avraham and Sarah, a story that also tells of the astonishing birth of a son to a once-barren woman and her elderly husband, a birth foretold by G-d Himself and doubted by Sarah. Years later, they too almost lose that son who is saved only through the intervention of Hashem's angel.

But there is an introductory story in the *haftarah* that also echoes the events found in the *parsha*. Here we read of a woman, widowed of her righteous, G-d-fearing husband, who stands to lose her only two sons, just as the *parsha* tells of a righteous, G-d fearing husband who stands to lose both of his the sons: Yishma'el, whom he was told to send away, and Yitzchak, whom he was told to sacrifice.

It is interesting to note that the miracles found in our *parasha* were performed directly by G-d or His angels while those we read of in the *haftarah* are brought through the navi. This change reflects the conscious desire of Hashem to have Man move from a purely G-d-based

existence to one where he too shares in the responsibility of building an ethical and caring society.

But perhaps most interestingly, is that we find a righteous woman at the center of each of the stories-both in the Torah and in the *haftarah*. It was our virtuous matriarch whose saintliness was rewarded by G-d with the birth of Yitzchak and it was her concern for the upbringing of her only child that had her demand the removal of Yishma'el from the house. Her demand was not acceptable to Avraham, yet her foresight and concern was supported by Hashem, Who told Avraham to do everything that Sarah tells him.

The two stories of the *haftarah* also highlight the deeds of righteous women. The pleas of the righteous widow were answered by Elisha and the barrenness of the wealthy Shunamite, was removed by Hashem as a reward for her generosity and acts of kindness. In both navi stories men play almost no part, (indeed, none of their names are mentioned) with one husband having died and one merely tangential to the story. It is the acts of women that capture our attention in the deed they performed in the *haftarah* and in the more subtle actions in the Torah.

What is made clear is that our Torah is a *Torat Chessed*. It is a moral code grounded in acts of kindness and compassion.

And, more often than not, it is the women create that culture within the home and, by doing so, lay the groundwork of *cheded* in each and every generation. ■