



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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The Haftarah's Dual Message

The Sepharadim and Ashkenazim have different customs regarding the haftarah reading for this parasha, Sh'mot. The Sefaradim have the tradition of reading the first perek of Yirmiyahu depicting Hashem's charge to Yirmiyahu to serve as His prophet to bring G-d's warnings and condemnations to the people. This theme, together with the prophet's reluctance to take on that responsibility, reflects the parasha's portrayal of Hashem's choice of Moshe Rabbeinu to bring His word to Israel as well as Moshe's reluctance to accept that mission.

On the other hand, Ashkenazim choose to read from the 27th and 28th chapters of Yeshayahu that, beyond the opening word "**HaBa'im**", which is also found in the opening verse of the parasha ("V'eileh sh'mot B'nei Yisra'el **haba'im**...") seems to have very little connection to the Torah reading. Indeed, we are hard-pressed to understand why the Ashkenazic masters chose this reading to be read this week. Consider: the parasha focuses upon the enslavement of Israel and the suffering they underwent in Egypt, in the "galut", while the bulk of the haftarah speaks of Israel's sinful behavior and the punishments that would befall "Ephrayim", for their corrupt behavior during the era of "ge'ulah"!

One might point to those p'sukim that

speak of a glorious future that awaits Israel, prophetic declarations such as "Yatzitz upharach Yisrael" ("Israel will bud and blossom") and visions of our return to the land, including the well-known "Uva'u.....hanidachim b'Eretz Mitzrayim ...v'hishtachavu... b'Har Hakodesh, be'Yerushalayim" (that those scattered in Egypt will return to Yerushalayim) as the link to our parasha - but the majority of the haftarah's theme has little to do with the events of our parasha, and indeed, contradicts the very leitmotif. Perhaps this explains the variant tradition of the Sepharadim that focuses upon the suffering in the Egyptian galut by reading the first chapter of Yirmiyahu, in which the navi warns the people of the coming exile.

In attempting to understand the view of the Ashkenazic poskim, I would submit that they saw in the events of the parasha the story of "atchalta d'geulah", the beginning of the long awaited redemption from bondage. For that reason, they focused upon the approaching redemption, the plagues visited upon the oppressors and the relief felt by the enslaved, and not upon the suffering depicted in the opening p'rakim. Chazal chose to see the horrors of the Egyptian bondage only as the background leading up to the events that followed - not as the focus of the parasha. The inclusion of Israel's difficult past in

Egypt was essential for future readers to appreciate the nation's overwhelming relief at upon recognizing the dawning of geulah. Additionally, it was important for future generations to learn of the the man who would be the instrument of Hashem to redeem the people and lead them out of Egypt. Together, the two stories create a powerful message of hope and optimism that Moshe hopes to bring to the nation. And that is also much of what Yeshayahu hoped to bring those who were facing impending exile from their Land.

It is this theme that we choose to echo in the selection of this haftorah, a theme of promised redemption that, for so many years, remained only unfulfilled.

And, how fortunate are we to recite the prophet's words in our time while witnessing their realization before our very eyes! ■

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