



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Departing or Arriving?

“Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh Hashem Tz’vakot...”

What a powerful declaration!

What a glorious revelation!!

And what a remarkable introduction to Yishayahu’s divine mission!!

Here, within the very first p’sukim of our haftarah, Hashem summons His prophet and shares with him the image of G-d’s divine throne, allowing the navi to hear the praises called out by the surrounding seraphim. Who could fail to feel overawed by such an experience?!

So how will Yishayahu respond?

How would he regard this overwhelming theophany he had just experienced? What WILL he say?

And herein lies our bewilderment, for his very first words are:

“Oy li - chi nidmeiti!” – “Woe is me – for I am doomed!”

Why does he react in such a way? Simply because he sees himself as being unworthy for such a revelation, explaining that he is of “impure lips” and not deserving of such a revelation. And, at first, we might imagine that the reaction is quite understandable. Until the navi adds a troubling – even “bewildering” – comment: **“and I dwell within a nation with impure lips.”**

Why, after all, would Yishayahu open his first conversation with G-d with words of censure against Israel? Why would he speak ill of his own people? G-d had not yet told him anything negative about Israel - so why did Yishayahu speak negatively? Indeed, Rashi shares our bewilderment, commenting that the need for the angel to “purify” Yishayahu’s mouth with a burning coal was because he had criticized his nation. Additionally, the text itself indicates that very point (v.7), telling the navi that upon the touch of the coal: “your **sin** will be atoned” - and it was Yishayahu’s criticism that was considered his sin!!

So, why did the navi start his conversation with HaKadosh Baruch Hu with a critique of Israel? Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch shares with us a salient point about the opening vision that, I believe, helps us understand the prophet’s behavior.

The prophecy shown to Yishayahu, depicted Hashem’s glory sitting upon His throne but with only the “corners of His cloak” [“shulav”] filling the Temple. Rav Hirsch comments that the vision is speaking of G-d’s glory *departing* the Holy Temple with only the edges of His cloak still found in the Heichal. Yishayahu saw G-d’s shechina being “forced out” of His holy sanctuary due to Israel’s sins.

It is THIS, therefore, that caused the navi to feel that he was “doomed” and why he expressed his negative thoughts about Am Yisrael.

And yet, if this were so, why did G-d consider Yishayahu’s words a “sin” for which the prophet had to atone? Why would Hashem

regard His prophet's disappointment with His people if that was exactly the purpose of G-d's vision - a message to the sinful nation to repent or else find Hashem's presence "departing" and distancing from them?

I would humbly suggest that perhaps the vision, as understood by the navi, was not considered fully. Clearly, much of the prophecy Yishayahu was to share was focused upon Israel's turpitude and faithlessness to G-d. Many of them were filled with warnings of the punishments, defeat and exile on the nation.

But these were not the totality of Hashem's mission for the navi. Not at all. Much of Yishayahu's future messages would be ones of comfort, consolation and hope; there would be depictions of remorse, repentance and return as well as promises of rebirth, restoration and redemption. But Yishayahu saw in that vision only how the Shechina **departed** ... and never considered that it might also have been **arriving**.

And **THAT** was his sin.

How do we see the difficult events that might befall us? What do we think about when we study the history of our people? Only oppression? Suffering? Golus?

Is the story of our existence only a story of Hashem departing?

Or can we also see – in so many ways – G-d's returning and arriving back to His nation?

I imagine that it all depends on **our** vision! ■

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