



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Kohen & Navi

This year, we have the privilege of reading the haftarah earmarked only for Parashat Tazria - a somewhat rare occurrence, as this parasha is generally read together with Parashat Metzora when the haftarah of that parasha is read. In fact, given that this parasha is usually paired with the special maftir readings that precede Pesach (or with Shabbat Rosh Chodesh or "Machar Chodesh"), the last time we read this haftarah was actually ten years ago!

The selection, found in Sefer M'lachim Bet (4:42- 5:19) tells the story of the tzara'at that infected Na'aman, the commander of the armies of Aram, who was the northern nemesis of Israel. The story, therefore, creates a clear connection to our parasha that deals, primarily, with that very subject. However, as R. Yehuda Shavit points out, there is a basic difference between these two sources. The haftarah story focuses

upon Na'aman's need to be cured from his sickness; the Aramean general simply hopes to rid himself of the debilitating ailment. As a result, as one of those who regard the illness as a normal manifestation of the natural world, he searches to find a cure for the solution in nature. But after time when he realizes that he cannot be cured with any of the usual medications, he, reluctantly, looks for the solution in the "supernatural". And this explains why Na'aman listens to the advice of his simple Israelite captive who advises him to go to the prophet in Shomron who, she declares, would certainly cure him. The Aramean general even convinces his King of Aram - a nation that had hegemony over Israel and that generally regarded the Israelites with disdain - to send him to Israel and demand of the King that he heal Na'aman ("Va'asafto mitzor'ato").

In contrast to the episode we read in our haftarah, our parasha gives no medical advice as to HOW to heal a person from the tzara'at. Instead, it tells those afflicted with Tzara'at what they must do after the contagion - how they are to rend their garments, let their hair grow and conceal their eyes and nose (v. 13; 45). It does NOT teach us how to treat the illness. Rather, the Torah demands this public display - even requiring the Tzaru'a [the infected one] to publicly call out "Tameh, Tameh" - for it sees the affliction as being a result of a spiritual

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failure. As such, the “cure” could be brought about by having the afflicted one recognize his shortcoming through public admission which would lead to his repentance. And, ultimately, THAT is the Torah’s “cure”, i.e., **purification**..... through contrition and atonement. So, while Na’aman concentrated on a medication **FOR** the disease, the Torah focusses on a purification – which would lead to protection **FROM** the disease.

It is for this reason that the Torah’s aggrieved victim turns to the Kohen for relief, as he is the one who serves in the Mikdash and sacrifices the sin offerings. Na’aman, on the other hand, one who considered his ailment a normal manifestation of the natural world... and yet, could find no cure in that world, turns to the Prophet, whom he considers to be “supernatural”...and perhaps that is precisely what he is.

Essentially, however, the cure for our illnesses is, indeed, in the hands of He Who controls nature, but relief from some sicknesses can be found, in some way, within our own hands.

If we would have Kohanim serving, once more, in our Mikdash. ■

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