

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Balak - 17 p'sukim, Micha 5:6-6:8

V'HATZNEI'A LECHET IM ELOKECHA

The rather obvious reason as to why our scholars of old chose the message from the navi Micha (5:6-6:5) as a fitting haftara for Parshat Balak is the mention of Hashem's "rescue" of Israel from the designs of Balak and the curses of Bil'am. It is, of course, the very story we read in the weekly Torah reading. And, although the same message was delivered by Yehoshua to the nation before his passing (Yehoshua 24:9-10), the Rabbis may have preferred to use the message from Micha, which the prophet includes as part of the censure of the nation - something that our scholars felt would be far more instructive for future generations, (as suggested Rav Moshe Lichtenstein).

And yet, one might see another reason for the Rabbis' selection of this specific passage in Sefer Micha - a passage we find in the closing words of the haftara. These words are quite well-known and they list what Hashem demands of us: "to do justice and love kindness..." - qualities that we would expect G-d to demand - and the added quality that

closes the haftara (and is the title of this piece): "and walk humbly with your G-d."

A somewhat puzzling addition.

In trying to understand the underlying importance of the third demand, I share with you the words of the Rav, HaRav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik:

G-d requires from Man the highest of sacrifices - anonymity, humility. He loves the actor who appears on the stage for a short while, plays his or her part humbly, and disappears immediately without receiving applause... What does the Megila tell us about Mordechai the Jew and Esther the Queen before and after the Haman episode? Nothing! The Megila refers us to the history books of Media and Persia. Only the activities during a short time period of time are memorialized. The rest is enveloped in mystery.

The Rav expands this approach with the following thoughts:

...Man not only rises but falls as well, and rises again from his fall, only to fall once more. Moral erring and culpability are interwoven into our very existential fabric. No man can claim that he is perfect... In a word, the Bible is confident of man, but it is also very suspicious of man.

The result of Man's imperfection causes, in the words Rav Soloveitchik...

...periodic states of ecstasy, engendered by the feeling of closeness to G-d [that] alternate with the states of black

despair... during moments of exile from the presence of Hashem. Those long periods of black despair contain the cathartic element which cleanses and redeems religious life.

In short, (and in his inimitable style), the Rav sees the prophet's call "to walk humbly with G-d", as meaning more than the requirement to understand our insignificance vis-a-vis G-d Himself or even to internalize Hashem's desire that we be "the actor who ... plays his or her part humbly. Rather, R. Soloveitchik suggests that our humility be built upon the person's understanding of one's relationship with the Divine, i.e., that the G-d fearing-individual comprehend that there are ups and downs in our journey to G-d, no matter how "G-d-fearing" one may consider him/herself. One must accept the inevitable days of light with those of darkness, the times of ecstasy becoming times of despair - without questioning Hashem's decisions.

When we cultivate the humility to realize that we do not know everything nor do we understand Hashem's immutable ways, we will have attained an essential tool in fostering a closer relationship with the Almighty. ✨