

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

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VAYIGASH - 14 p'sukim - Yechezkeil 37:15-28

Different Brachot for Different Futures

As King David's years draw to an end, he summons his successor, Shlomo, and advises him how to best ensure his hold upon the throne and create a stable government. As a young and inexperienced regent, Shlomo would be regarded by opponents as a tempting target, easy to challenge and attempt to replace. For this reason, David warns his son to be wary of those individuals who had shown strong opposition to David's reign and his choice of successor. In fact, the King uses strong language, urging Shlomo not to allow them to die of old age but rather V'HORADTA ET SAYVATO B'DAM SH'OL - to see that he meets a violent death.

This advice and these expressions rightfully concern us, especially when comparing them to the final words of Ya'akov Avinu to his sons, words of blessing and, at times, admonition that we read in this parasha. Perhaps even more troubling is the fact that, when we read the saga of King David in Sefer Sh'mu'el, we are struck by

the refusal of David to use power or violence in order to attain or retain the throne. When Sha'ul HaMelech pursued David in order to murder him, the future King refused to assassinate him (twice) - although he had both reason and opportunity to do so. Furthermore, he put to death the Amalekite who killed the wounded Sha'ul, even though the king had requested him to do, and he slew the two men who assassinated Sha'ul's surviving son (Ish Boshet), even though they thought to assure David's rule over Israel by doing so. David would not allow his men to kill Shim'i who cursed David, nor allow his men to kill his rebellious son, Avshalom, who attempted to assassinate his father. It is clear, then, how David eschewed the use of power or violence to attain the throne.

Given this past history, we are right to wonder why David - uncharacteristically - encouraged his successor to use violence against his enemies in his final words to Shlomo. In truth, however, David, quite characteristically, spoke wisely to his son, showing a deep understanding of the political situation in Israel at the time and of the danger that the opposition posed to Shlomo. Each of these opponents targeted by David had popular support and had used that support attempting to overthrow the Monarchy. David HaMelech understood well that the nation stood at a crossroads.

The ascension of Shlomo to the throne would create, for the first time in Jewish history, a dynasty - a son following his father on the throne. The importance of this reality was underscored by the fact that Hashem's promised reward to David was that his son will succeed him. A dynasty would create for the people a stable government - one that would not be beset with civil wars and uprisings upon the death of the king. The knowledge that a successor had been chosen, rallied the people behind the new king and prevented the possible political chaos that would follow the death of the regent.

David knew that the very future of the kingdom was based upon Shlomo's ability to perceive any plot or conspiracy to overthrow this first "son successor". Indeed, David's words proved true when the very people he warned of attempted, some years later, to remove Shlomo from the throne.

Ya'akov and David may seem very different when we study the two readings this week. But in reality, they were closer than we imagine. Both planned for the future; both gave sage advice to their sons.

And both built the nation of Israel. ✨