

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

MACHAR CHODESH

On this Shabbat, days after Yom HaShoah and before Yom HaZikaron, it is fitting that we read the second of the more-often-combined two parshiot of Acharei-Kedoshim ("following the death of the martyrs"). The haftara, however, reflects tomorrow's arrival of Rosh Chodesh Iyar with the story found in the 20th perek of Shmuel A. The well-known episode relates the difficult trial, a test of faithfulness, for both David and his dear friend (and brother-in-law) Yonatan, the son of King Sha'ul.

Following Sha'ul's failure to follow G-d's command when warring against their intractable enemy, Amalek, Hashem removed His favor from Sha'ul and placed it upon His choice of successor, Sha'ul's son-in-law, David. As a result, Sha'ul struggled with bouts of depression and jealousy, even twice attempting to murder David. When David fled the palace to escape the King's effort to spear him, he told Yonatan of Shaul's desire to kill him, something that Yonatan could not accept, as his

father had sworn to him that he would not harm David. Our haftara tells the story of how the two friends tried to reveal Sha'ul's true intentions, which, indeed, Sha'ul does - for when David's presence was twice missed at the festive Rosh Chodesh meals, the King angrily reacts by publicly accuses him of being a rebel who was trying to usurp the throne.

The next day, Yonatan tearfully reveals to David what happened and urges him to escape before he is murdered. In the end, Yonatan acts nobly, faithfully serving his father and continuing to show him the respect due to him, and, similarly, David never attempts to harm the King throughout his flight from Shaul's pursuit, despite numerous opportunities to do so.

Although the opening words of the haftara declaring "Machar Chodesh", that "tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh" form the obvious connection between this Shabbat and the haftara, there is more we see in the story that helps us understand its choice for the reading. King David is symbolized by the Moon, which is why we declare "DAVID, MELECH YISRA'EL, CHAI V'KAYAM" every month when we stand in the presence of the Moon and recite Birkat HaL'vana. The Tiferet Shlomo

explains that, as the Moon grows and is then diminished and once again reborn, so too David had times of ascendancy and power followed by times of trouble and powerlessness, only to be reinvigorated again. Most meaningful is that, like the Moon, David humbly "diminished" his "light", denied his personal glory, as, throughout his Sefer Tehillim, he credits Hashem for his successes, his strength and his victories.

I would therefore add that, this year there is an additional significance to the haftara's message and its lesson regarding David's character. The humility of Israel's second king was entrenched in David's understanding that Israel's destiny, like his own, would include difficulties, losses and, yes, even martyrdom. Like the Moon, there would be ascendancy and powerlessness. Ultimately, however, David had faith that G-d would restore the strength and success. He knew that Hashem would, once again shed His eternal light over His people, and, through them, enlighten the entire world.

DAVID MELECH YISRAEL CHAI V'KA-YAM - David, his strength, his kingship and his faith remain alive until this very day.

...which is true of his nation as well! 🌟