

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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## **Korach**

**MOSHE V'AHARON B'CHOHANAV  
USH'MUEL B'KOR'EI SHMO... [T'hilim  
99:6]**

The psalmist describes how the righteous, like Moshe, Aharon and Shmuel HaNavi, cry out to Hashem - and G-d responds. Chazal are struck by the inclusion of these three specific personalities rather than other virtuous individuals. They are likewise amazed to find that Moshe and Aharon stood on one side of the comparison, balanced out by Shmuel HaNavi. In fact, the G'mara (Ta'anit 5b) tells of a conversation that Shmuel HaNavi had with G-d when pleading with Him not to remove Shaul from the kingship of Israel. Referring to this very pasuk from T'hilim, the navi argues "You equated me to Moshe and Aharon - so just as their 'handiwork' (Yehoshua) did not go for naught (i.e. did not die during their lifetimes), neither should mine (Shaul)."

As we turn to this week's haftara, a selection taken from the 11th and 12th p'rakim of Shmuel Alef, I believe it a

proper time to address that very question: What did the psalmist see in Shmuel HaNavi that would have him compared to two greatest leaders? Our haftara relates how G-d had acceded to the nation's request for a King and Shmuel prepares to relinquish his post as "political leader", retaining only his positions as national seer and judge. Given the fact that the haftara deals with the prophet's "retirement" address it is a good time to review his accomplishments and try to understand what it was that made Chazal regard him as one of the greatest prophets - surpassed only by Moshe Rabeinu himself.

The parallels between Shmuel HaNavi and Moshe Rabeinu are quite striking. Both were Leviyim and both served Israel as prophet as well as judge. Their births - though not divinely prophesied, were, nonetheless, miraculously blessed: Shmuel having been born to a once-barren woman, and Moshe having survived the pharaoh's decree against newborns. Neither of these future leaders were heralded to be a "saviors of Israel" before their births, and yet that is what they both became.

But what made Shmuel HaNavi so remarkable was his ability to unite a fractious nation. Shmuel was the last

of the shof'tim, the local chieftains, who led Israel for more than three hundred years. But Shmuel was the only one who led ALL of Israel. Earlier in that era, Israel lacked a unifier who would attract the different tribes to follow any one leader. These "judges" were generally military personalities who could organize an army and often ruled over some part of Israel - but not one of these thirteen shof'tim succeeded in uniting the tribes into one nation.

Not so Shmuel who rose to leadership NOT as a military hero (although he did motivate Israel to victory through prayer) but as a spiritual guide. His inspirational leadership succeeded in the bringing sh'vatim together when others before him could not, because he reached out to the people themselves. As opposed to the former shof'tim, Shmuel truly WAS a judge, who, as the text relates (7:16), "traveled around Bet-El, Gilgal and Mitzpa and judged Israel in all of these places". The people knew him and he knew the people, and, as such, they listened to him.

And, ironically, it was his success in convincing the masses that they were ONE nation that led them to demand ONE king that led to Shmuel's reluctant "retirement".

But this success was a reflection of

his greatness.

And so, when he steps down from his "political" leadership in favor of a king, he does more than say farewell. Continuing his life's mission to guide his people, Shmuel criticizes the nation for their misdeeds, reminds them of Hashem's kindnesses and urges them to stay faithful to Him.

And that is where haftara ends... but Shmuel's speech does not. In his very next words he says: "...far be it from me to sin to G-d and refrain from praying for you; rather, I will instruct you in the good and proper path..."

This was the man.

This was the prophet

This was he who, like Moshe and Aharon, called out to Hashem... and was answered! ✨