



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

The story of Yiftach HaGiladi that we read in this week's haftara is a troubling one, indeed. While most of the previous shofetim chosen to lead Israel out of a threatening or oppressive situation were individuals who were perceived by their peers as proper leaders for having an honored ancestry or having shown leadership qualities or having been chosen by G-d. At first glance, Yiftach lacked all of these. The choice of one who was rejected by his family, denied any portion of his father's inheritance and, ultimately, forced to flee his birthplace—all of this having been done with no objection from the leaders of Gil'ad - to then be chosen by those same leaders is certainly difficult to understand.

And if we might consider that Yiftach did, indeed, show leadership qualities, he had, after all, gathered a small army, nonetheless, the text describes his men

as "anashim reikim", "empty men." That expression, found when describing the cohorts of Avimelech (Shofetim 9; 4) and the followers of David (Shmuel A 22; 2), implies men who were lacking land and wealth, proper ancestry and legal rights, basically, people who were isolated from general society and, therefore, were quick to attach themselves to their own social (and military) group. It is also understood that they supported themselves through thievery and robbery (Da'at Mikra).

But Yiftach was Hashem's choice.

Why he was might trouble us.

And yet, upon receiving the leadership from the local leaders, Yiftach does exactly as a G-d-fearing, Israelite leader would do. He first gathers the elders and leaders to Mitzpah, where a mizbe'ach to Hashem stood (hence "lifnei Hashem") and formalizes his new position by



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gathering the support of the people. Following that, he attempts to negotiate with the enemy and avoid war and loss of life, and, before embarking on the military campaign, he prays to G-d for success. This was an individual who was rejected by his family, his local leaders and his general community but rather than rejecting them he risks his life for them. G-d's words to Shmuel HaNavi upon the prophet's mistaken belief that Eliav was G-d's choice as Sha'ul's successor: "Man sees with his eyes; Hashem sees into one's heart" (Shmuel A 16; 7) ring true with the choice of Yiftach. Despite his past and his rejection by the community, Yiftach had the potential to become a successful leader. Something Man was blind to - but something that Hashem saw clearly.

Half of the haftara, as well as its very connection to our parsha, is Yiftach's review of history, clarifying how Israel came in to possession of the region being claimed by the King of Ammon. Yiftach's arguments are powerful.

Israel never conquered this land from Ammon or Moav, but, rather from Sichon and Og, the Emori kings who had conquered the land from Ammon and Mo'av.

Israel went to war with the Emori only after they were attacked by the two kings-not in order to gain land.

Israel avoided war when both Ammon and Mo'av (and Edom) refused them passage, and traveled around those lands rather than trespass through them.

Our possession of the land was the gift granted to us by our G-d, just as you would keep those lands granted to you by your god.

Israel has been dwelling in these lands for hundreds of years. If your claim is a valid one, why wasn't it made over all these centuries?

Yiftach's arguments were, indeed, powerful ones. But they were not effective. And we wonder why it was so necessary for the text to use twelve p'sukim in order to include every one of these arguments instead of simply condensing them into a concise summary - especially if the arguments failed to sway the enemy anyway?

I would suggest that perhaps Hashem wanted us to learn that when an enemy desires your land, no history, no facts, no truth will help convince them of their errors. Facts will be twisted, truth will be perverted and history will be changed in order to serve their false narrative and support their desire to conquer our land. Our responsibility, therefore, is to follow the path of Yiftach: to turn to the Torah so that WE know the REAL truth. That, and only that, will make sure that we and future generations will know that "I'cha ul'zar'acha natati et ha'aretz hazot"! ■

Mazal Tov

To Passy and Cyril Brill

On the occasion of their
60th Wedding Anniversary