

HAFTORAH COMMENTARY - PARSHAS KI SISA

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

M'lochim I 18:1

This week's haftorah reveals to us Hashem's indescribable love for His people and our inseparable relationship with Him. The setting is one of massive spiritual decline in which most of the Jewish nation was involved in some facet of idolatry. After three years of severe famine and drought Hashem instructed Eliyahu Hanavi to appear before the Jewish King Achav. This wicked leader together with his idolatrous wife were gravely at fault for the Jewish people's decline. Eliyahu faithfully fulfilled his mission and, at the risk of his life, challenged Achav and his idolatrous prophets to a crucial demonstration at Mount Carmel. Eliyahu, the only known remaining prophet of Hashem represented Hashem while the other prophets represented their false deities. Each would attempt to offer a sacrifice and whoever received a response from above would be proven the real prophet. After several futile attempts of the false prophets Eliyahu stepped forward to prove, once and for all, the authenticity of Hashem. Eliyahu filled a ditch with water, thoroughly drenched his altar and offered his bullock to Hashem. Hashem responded in a miraculous fashion and sent a fire which received the sacrifice, consumed the altar and even dried the water in the ditch. This clear demonstration convinced the Jewish people that Hashem was the exclusive power of the world and after this experience they forsook their idolatrous ways.

This incredible experience is unparalleled in all of Jewish history. Its uniqueness is due to the fact that this sacrifice was, under normal circumstances, a violation of a serious Torah prohibition. The Torah sternly warns us against offering a sacrifice to Hashem outside the Bais Hamikdash. Once erected, the Bais Hamikdash served as the exclusive site for sacrificial purposes. And yet, at this crucial moment of truth Eliyahu involved the Jewish people in a sacrifice on Mount Carmel, one normally punishable by death. Chazal, in resolution of this perplexing issue, quote a Torah passage which states, "To him (the prophet) you shall hearken." (Dvrim 18:15) This passage establishes the precedent that an unequivocally authoritative prophet may temporarily order the violation of a Torah commandment. In fact, Eliyahu's sacrifice on Mount Carmel is cited as the prime example for this principle. But, the question begs to be asked, "Why was it necessary to violate a Torah principle at this juncture? Wouldn't this clear demonstration result from the ordinary sacrificial procedure in the Bais Hamikdash?"

In search for an insight to this let us focus on a specific reference in this week's haftorah. The Scriptures, in describing Eliyahu's altar say, "And Eliyahu took twelve stones corresponding to the

twelve tribes of Yaakov about whom Hashem said, 'Yisroel will be your name.'" (18:31) Rashi(ad loc.) comments on the relevance of the name Yisroel here. He quotes the Midrash which explains that Yaakov Avinu foresaw this sacrificial procedure transpiring on Mount Carmel. In fact, this vision was shown to Yaakov at the exact moment of his name change from Yaakov to Yisroel. Hashem told Yaakov, "A nation and an assembly of nations will emerge from you." (Breishis 35:11) Rashi (ad loc.) explains that the moment will come for the Jewish people to resemble the nations of the world. They will offer a sacrifice outside the Bais Hamikdash and Hashem will accept it with pleasure.

The above reference suggests a mysterious relationship between the name Yisroel and this sacrifice on Mount Carmel. For one, this revelation transpired at the exact moment Yaakov received his new name Yisroel. In addition, the Haftorah seems to focus on this name change as a prelude to the miracle of Eliyahu's sacrifice. A careful analysis of the name Yisroel will reveal its hidden dimension and its association to the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.

The Torah, in explaining the name Yisroel, states, "For you (Yaakov) have become a prince unto E-L." (Breishis 32:29) The name Yisroel actually includes within itself the name of Hashem suggesting an essential relationship between Hashem and His people. And as is reflected by the essence of a name, this relationship continues to exist under all circumstances and at all times.

With this insight we can now appreciate the sacrifice on Mount Carmel and the necessity for its deviation from the ordinary sacrificial procedure. During Eliyahu's days, the Jewish people's perceived their relationship with Hashem as one confined to the Bais Hamikdash itself. When they approached Hashem in His sanctuary His presence could be truly sensed. However outside of Yerushalayim no tangible presence of Hashem could be felt and, in their minds, no relationship existed. This perverted perspective resulted in the Jewish people's reverting to idolatry for their sense of security.

But now, the time had finally arrived for the Jewish people to realize Hashem's presence everywhere and to appreciate their relationship with Him outside of the Bais Hamikdash. To facilitate this, Eliyahu accepted the difficult task of revealing this truth and offered a sacrifice outside of the Bais Hamikdash proper. He reasoned that Hashem's response would prove that His relationship transcended the physical boundaries of Yerushalayim. Hashem could even be found on Mount Carmel at a time when the Jewish people appeared like a foreign nation. Hashem responded warmly and displayed His presence at Mount Carmel by accepting this "foreign" sacrifice. Through this the Jewish people were convinced that their name Yisroel was the true representation of their relationship with Hashem. As their name suggests Hashem maintains an inseparable relationship with His people whenever and wherever they may be found.