



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Quality-Not Quantity

Perhaps the most surprising opening to a prophetic message of consolation are the words that begin this week's haftarah: "Roni akara"- "Sing out, O barren one". What? A barren woman should "sing out" in joy? Is this a proper beginning for a prophetic message of consolation?? And yet, this **IS** what Yishayahu cries out to his people in his very first remark to us in this haftarah! Why would the navi tell Israel, whose great matriarchs - Sarah and Rivka, Rachel and Channah - pleaded with G-d to be blessed with a child - say such things? How could he expect a nation, whose history was filled with the tears of childless families, to rejoice in their barrenness?!! Such a statement is more than "curious" - it is almost inexplicable!!

For this reason, we turn to the words of HaRav Soloveitchik who explains what-and

why- Yishayahu would utter such a troubling declaration.

The Rav, as well, is troubled by the navi's words, but he sees in them a message that was directed to future generations. Indeed, it is quite true that those in Yishayahu's time would find it difficult to see any comfort in being "the barren one". However, upon looking back in history we, as a nation, would better understand how these painful words ring true and why they were necessary.



Rav Joseph B.
Soloveitchik zt"l

When we look back over the last 150 years, we see the sharp reduction in the population of the Jewish nation. The multiple attacks, pogroms and expulsions from their homes that we have suffered, the assimilation and, of course, the Holocaust, all have decreased the number of Jews in the world. Our people that numbered over 18,000,000 one-hundred years ago, today total but [approximately] 15,000,000. And while nations and religions around us have increased steadily (even exponentially), we have not even equaled the number we were a century ago!

Yet, Rav Soloveitchik states, we should not be surprised. Quoting the pasuk in D'varim [7:7]: Ki atem ham'at mikol ha'ammim", "for you are the fewest of all the peoples". Surprisingly, the Rav explains that this statement is, actually, a bracha that Hashem bestowed upon us. He goes on to explain:

The smallest of people should rejoice in its failure to become a dominant world religion. For the greatness of the faith and the people lies precisely in its remaining small in number... *Yahadus*, by its very nature, demands extraordinary discipline

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and consistency of belief and action in every aspect of life.

He goes on to say:

Had either Rome or Arabia converted *en masse* to Judaism, the result would have been the thorough dilution, distortion and, ultimately, disappearance of Judaism as a religion (ch"v'sh).

And Rav Soloveitchik closes by stating:

...(O)ur task and our fate is to be-and remain-separate and apart, uniquely dedicated as a small minority to our unique and treasured spiritual patrimony.

Yes. As difficult and as troubling it is for us to rejoice in the "childness" of our nation, to face an overwhelming majority that may stand against us - and face them with faith and confidence - it is, nonetheless, the very secret of our survival. It is true that our people remain few in number compared with the world's larger nations, but it is also true that, due to that, we are the most eternal of all of them!

The Torah's lesson is "Quality, not Quantity"

And so, as the latest generation who can look back at our history, we should be able to rejoice "Roni Akara", for we also know why we still exist, living in our own Land, speaking our own language and following our Torah, given to us by our G-d. ■

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