



# PROBING

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# THE PROPHETS

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”ענייה סערה לא נוחמה”

This week's haftarah is the third of the “Shev D'nechemta” and yet its very first phrase “O, you poor tempest-tossed, uncomforted one” indicates that Israel had not yet been comforted. After past haftaroth declaring Yishayahu's messages of “Nachamu, Nachamu Ami” (Comfort My nation) and “Ki nicham Hashem Tziyon”, (Hashem has comforted Tziyon), we can rightly ask why the consoling words have not succeeded in bringing the much-needed solace to Israel. To discover the answer in this selection, one of the shortest of these haftarot (only twelve p'sukim), presented me with a challenging task.

So I believed ..... until I was enlightened by the writings of Rav Shimshon Rapha'el Hirsch.

Rav Hirsch focuses on this very first phrase and, with his explanation, opens worlds of understanding for us all. The words of the navi were not to be understood as a message to his generation alone but one addressed to the future sufferings of Hashem's nation. For two-thousand years, writes Rav Hirsch in the mid-nineteenth century, we Jews have been “tempest-tossed. As he portrays it:

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Israel finds herself in the midst of states that, to all appearances, have established themselves firmly. Israel alone that is without any firm external hold, like a ship without an anchor that has no resistance to any wind: today driven by the force of the storm to the west and tomorrow to the east...[This is] the most descriptive characterization of the Jews throughout so many dark centuries...You came near to despairing altogether of your future...

As Jews across the globe and across the centuries read the prophet's description of the nation's condition, they well identified with their inability to be comforted by the prophetic words share with them. How, after all, could they feel any solace when they look at their condition in comparison to the rest of the world? If the Jews of 12th century Germany and 14th century Spain and 17th century Ukraine found themselves in that same condition – they would well identify with the Jews of Yishayahu's era, they too would feel no comfort in these words!

And, understanding this, the navi tells his people (v. 14): “B'tzdaka tikonani” – you will be firmly established upon righteousness. For, though you perceive the surrounding nations, drunken with power and wealth, and you wonder how you might ever match their success or their supreme authority you must realize that such “achievements” will not guarantee your happiness or your survival.

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No, that is not your challenge.

True, you might be blessed with power and material success but these will not bring you the happiness for which you strive. Your future will rest only upon your moral strength, “B’tzdaka tikonani”.

Rav Hirsch, however, sees yet another lesson in the words of our haftarah. Simply doing what is “right” is not sufficient, he explains. Together with that must come knowledge...the knowledge of what is truly “right” and what is actually “wrong”. And then, he adds a thought that, in my estimation, speaks powerfully to us, who are challenged to do the right thing but, too often, are too confused to know what that is. Rav Hirsch writes:

The ideas of men as to ‘good’ and ‘evil’ changes according to the times and the nations. There is only one everlasting

source of....’good’ and ‘evil’ – and that is G-d!!

It is for this reason that Yishayahu promises that your children shall be “limudei Hashem” – “pupils of G-d” who will understand what right and wrong is, what good and evil is, and, by possessing that knowledge, will have the moral strength to build a lasting future based upon “B’tz-daka”, true righteousness. ■

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