

## **A Word of Prophecy**

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As the Jewish calendar creeps towards the end of the summer we arrive at the fast of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. In the few days around this somber day in our History there seems to be one word which keeps popping up. The word is infrequently found in our literature and yet it seems almost ubiquitous in this short period. It is the title of the Megilla which is read on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, Eicha. It is the first word of the Megilla and it is a difficult word to translate. It means 'how' but in this case it brings with it a sense of mournful disbelief. How is it that the city of Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and spirit, has come to this?! Not coincidentally, the word Eicha appears in the Torah reading and Haftorah of Devarim which always falls out right near the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. But what is the relevance of this word and what is the connection between the three appearances?

The 'Eicha' in the Torah is uttered by Moshe. He is recounting how they came to appoint judges to help him adjudicate the plethora of cases which were brought before him each day. He had said, "How can I carry this nation alone!" Moshe, commenting on the size of the nation and the need for manpower to assure that the Judiciary system runs smoothly, points out that is not a one person job.

In the Haftorah (section of Navi read in connection with the weekly parsha) we find this word being utilized by Isaiah the prophet. He is commenting on the Jews at an unfortunate time in our History. We are entrenched in sin and, as a prophet, he is charged with warning us before it is too late. We must realize that we are mired in the muck and off the proper path before punishment is needed to catalyze our realization and return to Hashem. "How has the nation strayed like a prostitute?!", he laments.

Finally, only a few days later we read the Megilla of Eicha where the entire text seems to continue the echo of the first verse. "How does the city of Jerusalem sit alone!? She is like a widow!" Jeremiah the prophet writes of the destruction of the Temple and the atrocities he saw in the aftermath. We didn't heed the call of Isaiah and so we faced the destruction he had told us about. Jeremiah laments the fact that he must witness the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah.

The Midrash seems to mention a sobering connection between these three prophets. It compares them to seeing a woman in three stages. "Moshe saw her in her serenity, Isaiah then saw her in her hurriedness and then Jeremiah saw her in her disgrace." This word seems to speak of a downward spiral culminating in the disgrace that Jeremiah witnessed at the time of the destruction of the Temple. It seems to highlight the unfortunate state of affairs in the aftermath of the destruction. By reading in the Torah about our pinnacle, the depth of the nadir is that much starker. How the mighty have fallen!

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk has a beautiful and much more upbeat understanding of the word that connects these prophets. He comments that Moshe who first used the word was speaking about the burden that the people posed to him which at first blush

seems to be a negative just like the other instances. However, when we take a step back we can see Moshe's comment in a far more favorable light. There is no question that Moshe needed assistance to be able to handle the needs of the people, but this need stemmed from something very positive. As Hashem had promised, the people had multiplied and grown into a large nation. In this mature state they needed a much larger structure of leadership than they previously had. They had grown from a scant seventy people when they entered Egypt to around two million at this point. Moshe was expressing a very happy notion: "We should have such problems." No doubt, when a nation becomes so large we need many more leaders to help direct us in our spiritual path. Moshe was injecting a blessing that this should always be the type of complaint that is on the lips of the leaders of the Jews. Never should we reach a point when a leader can say, "This nation seems small and easy to handle, things won't get out of hand." Moshe's blessing is fulfilled by Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the midst of both the sins witnessed by Isaiah, and the destruction that Jeremiah saw, they still echo the notion that we are still alive and thriving.

This positive spin may be the proper way towards the repentance we seek in this period. Even in our most difficult times Hashem is still receptive to us and even actively taking care of us. When we fall in our spiritual quest and lose sight of the path we must remember that the fact that we are still here throughout all of the difficulties our people have experienced means that Hashem is with us. At any time we can turn ourselves to Him and change the path we have chosen. He is always ready to receive us with open arms.