Rabinowitz Danny

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There are clear differences between the group that recently signed the so-called "Kinneret Covenant" and the group of intellectuals assembled by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) in 1999 to work out a formula for Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. The group that met at the Kinneret was entirely Jewish, whereas the IDI group was mixed. The Kinneret Covenant was drawn up in a few months, whereas the IDI group met for three years. Among the signers of the Kinneret Covenant, the religious sector and the settlers were heavily represented, whereas the IDI group was mainly secular. The efforts of the Kinneret group reflect a strong desire for broad consensus between all segments of Jewish society, whereas the IDI emphasizes bridging the gap between Jews and Arabs.

Yet these differences are dwarfed by the overwhelming similarity between the two initiatives. When the Jewish and Arab intellectuals and politicians brought together by the IDI were asked to formulate a joint document at the end of 2000, two Jews and two Arabs were chosen to write a draft. They easily agreed on the changes needed in the distribution of national resources in order to end discrimination against the Arabs, but they failed miserably when it came to writing a general preamble.

The Jewish team members wanted to declare Israel a state founded with the purpose of articulating the Jewish people's right of self-definition. The Arab participants felt that such a statement would keep them from achieving equality. Although the talks were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and the endeavor was a fascinating one, the parties went home without a document. A year has gone by since then. The group is scheduled to meet again soon, but a breakthrough remains doubtful.

The initiators of the Kinneret Covenant took a shortcut. Realizing in advance that good intentions were not enough to make Israel's Arab citizens feel that this state is theirs, too, they purposely concentrated on trying to reach an agreement between Jews. As it turns <u>ןויכראב שופיח</u>

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<u>עדימ וויכראה לע</u>

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out, these two very dissimilar projects produced the very same conclusion: a recognition that striving for agreement between Jews and Arabs at this moment is doomed to failure.

This insight on the current state of affairs between Jews and Arabs in Israel is vital: If we do not recognize the gravity of the situation, there is no chance of finding ways to change it. The chasm that exists today between Jews and Arabs in Israel did not open up because of cultural differences, social discrepancies, ignorance or lack of intelligence. To understand it, we must recognize that we are living in a twilight zone, an era of profound change in the basic thought patterns on both sides.

For many years, the Jewish majority in Israel lived in total denial: It rejected the notion that the Arabs here constituted any sort of legitimate, historical community with rights and needs. Ignoring the existence of this community later changed to denying that there was any gap, discrimination or deprivation.

In the 1990s, a certain enlightenment took place. Many Jews were persuaded that the problem did exist, that it could be addressed as a sectorial matter, and in this way, rectified. All the majority had to do was grant the minority a more generous slice of the pie, and "salvation would come to Zion."

Now many political moderates are beginning to see that the dispute is not really over resources, and that pumping more money into this sector will not make the problem disappear. Israel's Arab citizens are demanding a different definition of the state, a rethinking of its purpose, of its objectives, of the kind of democracy it claims to embrace.

The representatives of this community will no longer sign documents, however vague, that perpetuate their status as second-class citizens. Their new point of view, and their determination to put the state to the test rather than be the tested ones, will slowly penetrate the consciousness of the Jewish majority and force it to confront dilemmas and decisions graver by far than increasing the quota of crumbs to this or that demanding sector. To a large extent, the ability of the Jewish majority to respond wisely to this challenge will determine Israel's ability to survive in its present social configuration.