

Time to Rebuild – Shabbat Nachamu

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If someone were to curse and totally demean you, wouldn't it seem strange if he told you moments later how great he is going to make you? Well then, take a look at what's going on:

First, the prophet Amos informs us that God compares the Jews to Cushites, saying, "Are you not like the children of the Cushites to me, O children of Israel?" (Amos 9:7).

Comparing us to Cushites wasn't exactly a compliment. The Cushites were the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham. After Ham either castrated or sodomized his father Noah, he was cursed by God with slavery and lowliness. "So shall the king of Assyria lead the captivity of Egypt and the exile of Cush, youths and old men, naked and barefoot, with bare buttocks"

(Isaiah 20:4).

But immediately, Amos continues, "But I will not destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord... On that day, I will raise up the fallen Tabernacle of David... And I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall rebuild desolate cities and inhabit [them], and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their produce... And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no longer be uprooted from upon their land that I have given them, said the Lord your God" (Amos 7:8-15).

So where exactly do we stand?

We just finished the mourning period of the Three Weeks. At the climax of this period, Tisha B'Av, we commemorated the destruction of both Temples.

But just a few hours after Tisha B'Av, we blasted our boom boxes and everything is permitted once again. Wouldn't it seem more appropriate if after three weeks of preparation and then the destruction of the Temple, we had at least a few days of actual mourning? Instead, we are all preparing for a very special Shabbat: *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Sabbath of Consolation.

There was once a chassid who truly desired closeness with God but would constantly experience setbacks. He truly wanted to amend his ways, but many years passed and he was still unable to escape his issues. Still, he never gave up, and always tried again and again. However, he was extremely bitter about this. Rebbe Nachman, with great wisdom, told the chassid in a very simple way, "How can I speak with you, you are completely evil." The chassid immediately retorted, "Yes, but isn't it also true that I never gave up and still try to push myself?"

The Holy Temple was called *Tiferet Yisrael*, the Pride of Israel. It was at the Temple that the holiness of our mitzvot would be gathered up. This was the landmark that glorified our special relationship with God. When it was destroyed because

of our sins, it was as if our pride were thrown down and shattered. It was as if our special status were cancelled. This is also why, on Tisha B'Av morning, we don't don our *tefillin* – *tefillin* are our crowns that exemplify our status as God's special people. However, this is all for our own good.

As soon as we are compared with the other nations, our special characteristics and many mitzvot shine through! It's immediately obvious that yes, we are different. So, too, regarding our spiritual growth. When we look to compare ourselves with great Tzaddikim, or with very lofty goals, we are almost always dismayed and fall away. However, by first realizing that we are human beings born with a *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), and then searching for the good, we can rebuild ourselves. Now, after Tisha B'Av and after we have swallowed our pride and realized our faults, we can start to rebuild and become the People we truly are.

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