

We're on a higher level – Parshat Va'etchanan

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On Tisha B'Av, we were in the deepest darkness, and we sat on the ground and mourned. A moment later, we found ourselves being comforted. What was suddenly revealed on Tisha B'Av that we instantly made an abrupt turnabout and went from mourning to consolation? This is the topic of our discussion for "Shabbat Nachamu."

The Shabbat which comes immediately after Tisha B'Av is called "Shabbat Nachamu," after this week's Haftorah which is read on this Shabbat: "'Comfort, comfort, My people,' says your God" (Isaiah 40:1). After this week when we sat on the floor and mourned the burning of the Temple that was destroyed 1953

years ago. We are comforted, and we recite words of consolation during the Haftarah of this week's Torah portion which comes immediately after Tisha B'Av. This goes on for seven weeks until Rosh Hashanah, beginning with the promise of the Creator: "Comfort, comfort My people."

I want to start with a wonderful teaching which my father and teacher, Rav Chaim Kramer, who G-d should watch over and preserve, is accustomed to saying every "Shabbat *Nachamu*" at the Shabbat table, teachings which have been engraved in my heart:

The *Bnei Yissachar* (the book written by the holy Rebbe of Dinov), asks: Why is the word "comfort" repeated in the verse: "Comfort, comfort my people"? In addition, it is known that among the names of G-d, the word "*Elokeichem*," represents the attribute of strict justice. Based on this, wouldn't it have been more fitting for the consolation to have come from the name of G-d, YHVH (*yud – hei – vav – hei*) which is connected to the trait of mercy?

The *Bnei Yissachar* explains in accordance with the words of our sages, that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, which happened due to our many sins, the aspect of justice was so strong that even the aspect of mercy, which took the role of the "defender" of Israel at that time, agreed with the aspect of judgment that the Temple should be destroyed. Therefore, it is appropriate that the consolation is doubled, so that the aspect of justice will agree with the aspect of mercy that the people of Israel deserve comfort. Thus, the word "comfort" is doubled in the verse, to tell us that not only does the aspect of mercy agree to give us "comfort," but even the aspect of judgment represented by the name "*Elokeichem*" also agrees that we deserve to be consoled.

This is especially true this year, when the aspect of judgement was so strongly felt, and the people of Israel experienced, along with the difficulty of the Coronavirus,

severe public disasters such as the tragedy in Meron where 45 precious souls were lost during the Lag B'Omer celebrations. And then there was the tragedy in the Karlin Community on Shavout when the bleachers collapsed. And more recently, we had the catastrophic disaster in Miami where people were crushed in an utterly heartbreaking tragic death. Not only the aspect of mercy but also the aspect of justice will agree that we deserve comfort, and please G-d, we will receive complete and true comfort, and the building of the Temple soon in our days, Amen.

The word “comfort” is doubled in the verse, to tell us that not only does the aspect of mercy agree to give us “comfort,” but even the aspect of judgment represented by the name “Elokeichem” also agrees that we deserve to be consoled.

This week we will deal with the issue of the comfort of this Shabbat, “Shabbat Nachamu.” Let us recall for a moment the developments during the last few weeks. On Tisha B'Av, the day the Temple was destroyed, we lowered ourselves to the ground and mourned the destruction of the Temple; we sat down on the floor, in the lowest place we could reach, and mourned wholeheartedly. How is it possible, that from the 17th of Tammuz, as Tisha B'Av approached, we increased the level of mourning, and precisely on Tisha B'Av itself at the time when the Temple was burned, at the height of mourning, we were at once moving toward being comforted. Shouldn't we dedicate a few days to mourning, since the Temple unfortunately has not yet been rebuilt? How can we explain the dramatic transition to comfort and hope?

Rabbi Natan gives us the answer with a wonderful explanation:

The verse says: “Are you not like the children of the Cushites to Me, children of Israel?” (Amos 9:7). That is, G-d turned to the people of Israel and said to them: You, the people of Israel, are not much different from the gentiles around you

who practice idolatry. It is of course very sad to hear such a “complement” from the Creator. Nor is it understood how in the very next verse G-d says: “but I will not destroy the house of Jacob.” If indeed the Nation of Israel is just like the Gentile nations, why should their treatment be any different from the Gentiles who practice idolatry? Rabbi Natan reveals to us here that there is a huge kindness here since the Creator wants only that which is for our good. Let us explain this with a parable: A public figure sinned by doing something that constituted a huge stain on his personal integrity. The more he might try to explain the circumstances that caused him to stumble and sin, the worse it will appear. It would only cause the public allegations against him to intensify, for the stain was too strong. Sometimes, the only way to save him is by comparing him to an infamous person known for his corruption. The comparison will make everyone raise their eyebrows: How could anyone compare the two of them? He is so different from this known felon. No matter what he did, he is certainly a much better person than that infamous criminal. This means that sometimes the way to remove an accusation and the aspect of judgment over a person is only by exaggerating the image of the person and making him out to be a supposedly very bad person. It is precisely this that evokes his good points, and then people begin to notice that he has many positive traits.

Similarly, the Temple is called the “glory of Israel” because the beauty of the Temple is the glory of G-d taking pride in the Nation of Israel when they do good deeds. When the people of Israel sinned, the power of the accusations against them were so strong that they were unable to oppose them. The more that they tried to explain the Creator’s love for Israel and give excuses for their actions, the more the accusations would increase until the Creator was pressured into actually exterminating the Nation of Israel. Therefore, G-d destroyed the Temple, and in so doing, he gave the impression of agreeing with the Gentiles’ claim: “The Nation of Israel was

just like any other nation," as if He truly no longer took pride in the Nation of Israel and as if they really were no better than the nations of the world who worship idols.

But, in fact, the Creator did this out of His immense love for us, because at the very moment of destruction, when we were, G-d forbid, completely equated with idolatrous Gentiles, the question immediately arose: Really?! Can G-d really take no pride in the Nation of Israel? This is impossible! How can one compare a Jew, no matter how bad he is, to a Gentile who practices idolatry? After all, every Jew, even those who are farthest from Judaism, has an inner point of goodness which makes him immeasurably more worthy than an idolator. As our sages learned out from the verse in the *Song of Songs*: "Your temple (*"raktech"* referring to the temple on one's face) is like a section of pomegranate" (*Song of Songs* 6:7). The word *"raktech"* can also be interpreted as if it was written *"raikanim"* (literally "empty"), meaning that even those of you who are "empty" are filled with mitzvot like a pomegranate. Thus, at the moment of destruction, consolation began. Precisely when we are, G-d forbid, equated with the rest of the nations, our goodness begins to stand out from the other nations of the world, and then G-d's love for us is reawakened.



*From grief and mourning we make a sharp transition to comfort
and hope*

The famous example is of Joseph "Mishita," a famous Hellenist (a Jew who adopted Greek culture during the Second Temple period) who was on such a low level that when the Greeks were afraid to enter the Temple to take its holy vessels, they proposed to him that he go in first and as a reward they promised him that the first thing he would take out would be his. He went in and came out with the Temple's Menorah. When the Greeks saw the Menorah, they were greatly amazed and said to him: "This is something worthy of a king, not an ordinary citizen. Go in again and the next thing you take will be yours," but he refused and said: "It is enough for me to anger my Creator once, I will not anger him again." They tried to lure him by offering him a reduction in his taxes for three years, but he vehemently refused. Even when they tortured him, he continued to refuse, and when they intensified his torture, he said, "Woe to me that I have angered my Creator," until his soul left his body in complete repentance. So how can one compare even the lowest Jew to a non-Jewish idolator?

Rabbi Natan adds that this concept exists in every Jew at all

times. Often, a person will be seeped in sin and the aspect of judgment will make an accusation against him. The more he tries to paint his good points in beautiful colors and as much as he tries to connect his actions to the expectations of how a Jew should behave, we will still have a serious problem. It is reminiscent of the accusation of the Gentiles: "The Nation of Israel was just like any other nation," as if there really is no advantage of this Jew over a Gentile who does whatever he pleases. The advice for such a situation is to appear to agree with the accusation: "Indeed, I am utterly evil!" And just like at the time of the Destruction of the Temple, it is precisely this outrageous comparison that will bring up the obvious question: "Is it true ?!" And so, it will be easier for us to emphasize the good points we have inside us and to take comfort in the good we have and to awaken to serving G-d in truth.

(Based on *Likutei Halachot, Reishit HaGez* 4)