

Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim

Vaeschanan-Nachamu 5778

Only HaShem can Truly Comfort us

Introduction

This week is referred to as Shabbos Nachamu, the Shabbos of Consolation. One must wonder where the consolation is. We just finished mourning the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash and our long and bitter exile, and now we are accepting consolation? How can we understand this apparent paradox? Let us take a closer look at destruction and exile and then we can begin to better understand comfort and consolation. When one witnesses destruction and devastation, what is the initial reaction? Certainly one feels that if he has reached this point, there is no hope left for him. Yet, it is obvious that such thinking is not rational, because if something was truly destroyed, there would really be no point in mourning its loss. We are accustomed to mourning and grieving as if there is no return, but those who acknowledge the truth of this transient world know that nothing is ever really lost, and one cannot mourn something forever. One is commanded to mourn and grieve over the loss of a loved one, but as the Ramban writes in Toras HaAdam, we all know that it has been decreed that every man who enters this world must die. This being the case, why do we cry when someone passes away?

The Ramban offers us a brilliant insight into the purpose of creation. If Adam HaRishon, the first man, had not sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, he would have lived for eternity. Once HaShem decreed that man had to die, we cry for the lost potential of every person.

Only HaShem can Truly Comfort us

Let us apply this idea to the mourning that we experience for the Bais HaMikdash and the exile. When we sit down on the floor on Tisha Ba'Av and mourn for our loss, we are in essence mourning for the lost potential of the Jewish People. We lament the fact that we cannot experience closeness to HaShem, offer sacrifices to Him, and be in a constant state of awareness that HaShem controls everything in the world. How can we be consoled in this state of mourning? We must draw a parallel to the person who is in mourning for a loved one. The one closest to him has just passed on and immediately people come and console him. Do we deem this sort of consolation to be odd? We know that not only is this behavior acceptable, it is actually required by the Shulchan Aruch, the Jewish Code of Law. Similarly, after lamenting our current state of affairs in the exile, we are required to be comforted. Who, however, can comfort us? Scripture itself provides the answer to this question. It is

said (Eicha 2:13) mah aideich mah adameh loch habas Yerushalayim mah ashveh loch vanachmeich besulas bas Tziyon ki gadol kayam shivreich mi yirpah loch, with what shall I bear witness for you? To what can I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you that I may comfort you, O maiden daughter of Zion? Your ruin is as vast as the sea. The Medrash (Eicha Rabbah 2:17) states: The One Who will in the future heal the ruin of the sea will heal you. Thus, the words “who can heal you?” refers to Hashem. The Only One Who can truly offer us consolation is HaShem.

The Shabbos Connection

In Bircas HaMazon on Shabbos we recite the words uvirtzoncha haniach lanu HaShem Elokeinu shelo sihay tzarah yagon vanacha beyom menuchaseinu, may it be Your will, HaShem, our G-d, that there be no distress, grief, or lament on this day of our contentment. One may wonder how it is possible that there should not be distress and grief on Shabbos if we are still in exile and we still mourn the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash. The answer to this question can be found in the next passage, where we recite the words vihareinu HaShem Elokeinu binechemas Tziyon irecho uvivinyan Yerushalayim ir kadshecho ki atah baal hayeshuos uvaal hanechamos, and show us, HaShem, our G-d, the consolation of Zion, Your city, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, City of Your holiness, for You are the Master of salvations and

Master of consolations. Thus, we see that HaShem is the Only One Who can truly console us, and this fact warrants our request that we not experience any distress or grief on the Holy Shabbos. With this thought in mind we can better understand why we refer to this Shabbos as Shabbos Nachamu, the Shabbos of Consolation, because Shabbos is beyond exile and destruction, and in the merit of Shabbos observance we will witness the Ultimate Redemption, speedily, in our days.

Shabbos in the Zemiros

Dror Yikra

The composer was Dunash ben Librat, the famed medieval grammarian and paytan who lived from 4680-4750 (920990 C.E.). He was born in Baghdad and, except for twenty years in Fez, lived there his entire life. He was a nephew and disciple of Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon and was acquainted with many of the Sages of his time. Rashi and Ibn Ezra quote him extensively. His name appears four times as the acrostic of the stiches in stanzas 1,2,3, and 6. This zemer is a prayer to HaShem to protect the Jewish People, destroy its tormentors, and bring the Nation peace and redemption.

דְּרוֹשׁ נְיָ וְאֵלֵימִי. וְאֹת לְשֵׁעַ עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי
Temple and my hall, and show me a sign of salvation. This passage appears to be puzzling. Is it not the other way around, that we beseech HaShem for a sign of salvation which will culminate in the

rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdash? The answer to this question is that here we are focusing on the goal, which is that we have the Bais HaMikdash which is a site of דרישה, seeking out HaShem, as it is said (Devarim 12:5) לִשְׁכֹּנוֹתֵיךָ תִּדְרָשׁוּ וּבָאתָ שָׁמָּה, there shall you seek out His presence and come there. For this reason, we first request that HaShem seek out the Bais HaMikdash, and in that manner we will witness our salvation through prayer and the offering of sacrifices.

Shabbos Stories

Studying Torah and reviewing one's studies

Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffman writes: In his preface to Peas Shulchan, R' Yisrael Shklover writes of his master and teacher, the Gaon of Vilna, "He reviewed all of Talmud Bavli every month. His toil in the study of the holy Torah defies description. He would review each chapter and masechta (tractate) hundreds, and even thousands of times. Out of immense love for the holy Torah, he once spent a long winter night reviewing over and over a single Mishna in Seder Taharos." (Quoted in For Love of Torah p. 76)

Sefer Toldos HaAdam (by R' Yechezkel Feivel of Vilna, Dyhrenfurth 1801) writes: R' Leib, son of R' Ber of Vilna, related to me: Once his father R' Ber watched as the tzaddik R' Zalman (of Volozhin, brother of R' Chaim) paced back and forth in a room, as was his way, studying and reviewing a Torah

thought with wondrous desire and powerful love, in a clear sweet voice that was music to one's ear. The soul of the listener was aroused to love of Hashem and a desire for wisdom and spiritual guidance. He reviewed the thought once, twice, three times, fifty times, one hundred times... until one lost count! All this was with a joyous heart and boundless love, which mere words cannot describe.

R' Ber observed in silent wonder. In his heart, he thought, "Torah, Torah, how great is the love in 'Zalman's heart for you! It is a consuming fire!" He then grabbed hold of R' Zalman and said, "My brother, whose soul and flesh is part of me, by the love that exists between us, I demand you tell me how many times you reviewed this matter!"

When R' Zalman saw the way that R' Ber was imploring him to reveal the absolute truth, he told him, "In truth, I have reviewed the matter two-hundred and fifty times." [Ibid]

It was not a light matter, as far as R' Zalman was concerned, to review his studies four or five hundred times. He would remind himself of Chazal's allegory (Eiruvim 54b), "Just as a hunter who captures birds, if he breaks their wings [so that they will not fly away], then they are secure with him. If not, they will fly away from him... [so too a student must review his studies as soon as he learns them, or else he will forget them]." He used to say that this allegory can arouse one's soul from its laziness in reviewing one's studies. [Ibid]

Sefer Menuchah U-Kedushah writes: “I have heard that the Gaon of Vilna would submit a prospective disciple to the following test (to determine if his soul had been sufficiently purified to taste the sweetness of the Torah): He would instruct him to review a given matter many times. If the more he reviewed, the more its love grew in his heart, inspiring him to continue to review without interruption - with this he found favor in the Gaon’s eyes to be accepted as his disciple.” [Ibid]

This Friday is the fifteenth of Av. Chazal say (Taanis 31a), “From now on (from the 15th of Av through the winter) he who increases (his hours of Torah study as the nights grow longer) adds (days to his life). But he who does not increase (the hours of his Torah study) decreases (the days of his life).” As our hours for Torah study increase, we must be sure to set aside ample time for proper chazarah/review.

Meriting giving charity

Rabbi Hoffman writes further: The holy Rebbe, R’ Zisha of Anipoli zt”l would, as a young man, study Torah for hours and days on end without ever breaking for a meal. Only when he felt so weakened by his fasting that he could no longer learn, would he allow himself to ask one of the local baalei batim to be so gracious as to give him a meal. At some stage, R’ Zisha came to feel that asking someone for a meal was in some small way a breach in his faith, and that if he truly believed Hashem takes care of all his needs, then Hashem knows when he

needs to eat, and could take care of him without his needing to ask for it. He decided that he would no longer ask anyone for a meal, but would rely that when the need arose, someone surely would offer him on their own accord. For a time this is exactly what transpired: Whenever R’ Zisha felt extreme pangs of hunger, someone would inevitably offer him a meal.

After a few months, however, a problem arose. There was no one around that in the Almighty’s eyes deserved to perform such a holy and exceptional mitzvah as to sustain the very life of a great and holy tzaddik! You don’t just give away such mitzvos for nothing. Lacking the right “agent,” Hashem implanted two spigots within the tzaddik’s mouth; from one he would suckle milk, and from the other honey. Thus he was sustained for three full months, until someone (evidently a very worthy individual) came up to him, threw him a few coins, and said, “Zisha, take these - you look like you need a good meal!” This unbelievable story was related by R’ Zisha himself to R’ Avraham Mordechai of Pintshov zt”l, and recorded by his son-in-law R’ Yitzchak Isaac of Kamarna zt”l in his Heichal Beracha.

Equally fascinating is the lesson R’ Yitzchak Isaac derives from the story. Imagine, he says, that given the choice, Hashem would “rather” perform an extraordinary miracle, than to allow someone the merit of performing an exceptional mitzvah he doesn’t deserve! Although there were many Jews through

whom the Almighty could easily have sustained R' Zisha, He chose to take care of the matters Himself, until such a time as someone truly worthy of this great mitzvah arose.

Having made this point, R' Yitzchak Isaac beseeches the wealthy and magnanimous Jews of his time to realize that simply having money - and even giving generously to charity - is not enough. He encourages them to "get up early in the mornings, say Tehillim, examine their deeds, and implore the Almighty" to lead them on a path of charity and righteousness, that they may indeed merit giving generously and wholeheartedly, and that their money finds its way to worthy and virtuous recipients. (www.Torah.org)

My Son's Different Path

by Heather deSilva

When children choose to become religious, it doesn't have to cost family harmony.

I can still remember the feeling I had when my first child, a son, was born. He was planned for, wanted, gorgeous and healthy. I was transformed into another zone. I wrote a daily journal in his voice, dressed and redressed him up each day and repeated every wonderful thing he did to anyone who would listen. I felt that he was my greatest achievement ever. When people would ask "What do you want him to be when he grows up?", I would simply answer, "Happy."

I grew up in a secular household in the midst of the newest Jewish ghetto Toronto had to offer. Everyone I knew was Jewish, yet we never belonged to a synagogue. My brother was the only one who attended Hebrew school -- when he was 12 to learn his bar mitzvah portion by rote. It wasn't surprising then that my friends and family teased me when we signed our son up for Hebrew school at the age of four, which required a synagogue membership. The only synagogue in our city at that time was Reform, and we decided that it would be a good fit for our multi-cultural, inter-religious family. That was my first synagogue affiliation.

Since my husband and I had agreed prior to marrying on the importance of religious training and that the children would be Jewish, I became responsible for the religious education of our children. To do that, I needed the help of a community. As I accompanied my three and four year-olds to services on Friday nights, I felt that I was the only one in the room who knew nothing. I knew none of the songs, the prayers, the bible stories -- it was overwhelming. Never one to back away from a challenge, I made it my mission to attend every week with my kids, took every Torah study, Hebrew lesson, and discussion group available until slowly, over several years, I attained a position of comfort.

By then, with three little boys in tow, I started to take leadership roles in the running of the synagogue and felt a great

sense of joy in having found a place that gladly accepted my odd mixture of a family; a place that embraced and taught and included us. I decided I would have a bat mitzvah to mark my 40th birthday and studied long and hard to prepare the Torah portion, haftorah and sermon. Afterwards, I decided to teach in the school to keep my skills honed. I taught beginner Hebrew to adults for many years and began to feel that I was quite learned.

His Jewish Education

Each one, in his own way, fell in love with the land.

I had always presented the after-confirmation trip to Israel to my sons as a given. One by one they graduated and made their trip, and each one, in his own way, fell in love with the land. Quickly, while I wasn't looking, the boys became young men and my first-born started his own personal spiritual exploration. His regular synagogue attendance and leadership roles in Reform youth group led me to believe he was a happy and fulfilled religious young man. However, as he became involved in the Jewish campus groups such as Jewish Student Association and Israel Committee, he found that things were done in a more observant manner in order to allow inclusiveness of all students. Slowly he began to question parts of his Jewish upbringing and gradually took on new practices.

He attended conferences in New York, Florida, California and Israel. Although

he taught at the Reform synagogue in his school's city during his first year at university, by his second year my son was attending the Orthodox synagogue and establishing a very close relationship with the rabbi. He waited to wear a kippah until he felt he could be a model for people who would identify him as a Jew. He developed a love for Israel and through his involvement in all things Jewish, managed eight trips during his university years. I watched all of this happening, trying to be supportive but with a fear of rejection and complications in my heart.

Different Schools of Thought

Some couldn't help but tell me how it would divide our family.

As his observance increased, my friends seemed to feel quite entitled to comment on this terrible occurrence that had befallen my family and pointed out all the problems that would arise. Some were shocked; others, angry. Some found it ironic that my child should become "religious" and others couldn't help but tell me how it would divide our family and end all hopes of a peaceful home. I didn't know if I should panic, fight or applaud.

It was my Rebbitzen's mother, who knew my zaidy, who told me how proud Zaida would have been of my son's chosen path -- his courage and determination, and how proud I should be that I had given him the self-esteem and the unfailing knowledge that I would always stand beside him, with pride,

wherever his path led him. So I stood aside and watched him blossom.

We did have challenges and we butted heads on many occasions -- words were misinterpreted and feelings were raw, but thank God, over a period of time, we worked through the issues, and my husband and I came to realize that our dream for our son was coming true. He was happy! He glowed. He wrote about the joy of his learning and we could not miss it. We began to share his writings and everyone saw the same thing; he was so happy! Our friends and family began to show some interest in what he was doing and expressed admiration in his strength of conviction. So when he finally announced his intention to make Israel his permanent home, to marry there, study and raise his family in a religious setting, I had to be happy for him. By that time, he was laying tefillin, wearing tzitzit and a kippah, keeping kosher, had legally changed his name to his Hebrew name, was keeping the Sabbath and, most indicative to me of his dedication, shomer negiah (not interacting physically with the opposite gender outside the construct of marriage).

I knew that how I reacted and presented to him could determine our future relationship. I looked at each problem my friends happily laid at my feet as a challenge, and quietly began to read and study and try to understand this life he had chosen and these people who would be an integral part of the rest of his life. I was also challenged by the distance and

the basic differences in thinking. In North America we hoped for our children to do well in the world and that was measured by a secular ruler, in units of money. There, in Israel, his doing well is measured by his love of learning and serving God. There, he will work to live. Here, we live to work.

Continuing Ed

After his aliyah, he sent me information of a learning program in Israel for women my age called GEM. Having only been to Israel once before, the thought of returning, studying and visiting with my Israeli son and his brother (who by then had been accepted to work on the Northern Israel Recovery Program with Livnot U'Lehibanot), was very enticing to me.

Son number two had gone to Israel vowing that he was not religious like his brother and that he was not interested in being preached to. Yet somehow during his six month stay, he was studying with a rabbi, keeping the Sabbath, keeping kosher, wearing a kippah and tzitzit! I was very nervous. I envisioned myself starting all over knowing nothing, being on the outside, feeling "less than" again and the prospect left me filled with trepidation. I was determined not to conform to a dress and behavior code that I felt was disenfranchising to women. I jokingly promised all my friends that I would not return wearing a wig and reassured them that I was just going to hear what "they" had to say in order to better understand my sons' journeys.

I arrived in time for Shabbat with my eldest in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Nof. We were the guests of his Rosh Yeshiva, head rabbi and another very wonderful family of friends for the three meals of Shabbat. I was given a room in the apartment of a young, North American couple, who had chosen to become observant like my son. All of my hosts warmly welcomed me and made me feel like an honored guest. This proved to be a recurring theme throughout my three week stay in Jerusalem.

The women were modern thinking and looking. The men stared into their partners' eyes with adoration while they blessed them for the work they did in preparing for the holiday and they helped to serve, change a baby, and make a last minute preparation. They seemed to love to refer to their partners as "my husband" or "my wife" and there was a palpable electricity between them; a deep understanding of their feelings and needs without the need to explain, cajole or whine. They had learned that they could ensure they would be taken care of, loved and respected by their family, if they made their priority taking care of, loving and respecting their family. It was so simple and yet so profound.

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The GEM program itself was a most amazing, non-threatening, enlightening

experience. The daily schedule was grueling. We studied for four hours most mornings with amazing teachers and world-known rabbis, had field trips, visited renowned yet humble rebbitzens, and did a bit of touring. We usually finished our activities and returned to the hotel by 11 p.m. Much of our time was spent in the Old City of Jerusalem and it felt very special and very holy. I was witnessing incredible things, having unique experiences and meeting Torah giants -- in their kitchens! -- experiences and people that I never would have had or met in my world, and, most impressive and important, they were relevant. It made me glad that I had stepped out of my comfort zone. My ideas were never dismissed nor was I ever spoken to with anything less than respect and interest. There was never a derogatory comment or inference.

I kept looking for the terrible people everyone had warned me of... the ones with tunnel vision, a hidden agenda and a self-righteous attitude, who would tear my child from my arms and never allow him to come home, but all I found (and I looked way under the surface) was a gracious group of individuals who were joyous and steadfast in their deep beliefs and ecstatic to share their joy and knowledge. I learned so much in the classrooms, at the sites, in the dining rooms, in the alleyways of the Old City and on the streets of Jerusalem.

But even more than the studies and sights, the chance to see the community

from the inside: to see the peace and love in the homes of the families who welcomed me on Shabbat; the total trust and respect of the families who gave me the key to their apartment while they were gone and left notes everywhere saying, "help yourself"; and the kind words from the many, many families who have fed and housed my sons, worked with them and taught them for the pure joy of sharing their knowledge; all these things brought me complete peace of mind about the decision they had made. I realized their choice was not a rejection of me and my ways, but an adoption of their own course.

Integrated Reality 101

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No, I didn't come back fully observant, but I find myself taking baby steps, like making a concentrated effort to not speak negatively on Shabbat (keeping the laws of lashon hara). I am moving forward. I have a deeply satisfying feeling that my sons are on a good path and will attain the peace and happiness in their lives that we had always hoped for them. I feel so proud of them for having the conviction to take a road less traveled and choose the life situation that is best for them. At the same time, I indulge myself a little in having given them the self-confidence and character to follow their paths away from mine.

I know that we will continue to have many more frank discussions over the

years and will disagree on many matters, but with my new insight and their new peace, serenity and belief in the laws of Torah, we will work through each of the challenges presented to us. We know that the love we share is worth all the temporary heartache we may experience due to a lack of understanding, but that rejection, on either side, cannot be considered as an option. When a big challenge arises, I remind myself of that cute little blue bundle they handed me and my simple and naive answer to people who asked after my wishes for my child's future. I wanted him to be happy and he most certainly is. (www.aish.com)

Shabbos in Halacha

קושר ומתיר - Tying and Untying Knots

Tying and untying knots are forbidden under the Avos Melachos of קושר, tying, and מתיר, untying. The halachos of tying and untying involve many details, including what is deemed a knot and differences between permanent and temporary knots. Such a discussion is beyond the scope of this work; we will merely point out several common applications of these prohibitions in the modern kitchen.

Tying Knots

When one stores food in a plastic bag or when filling a garbage bag, one is forbidden to gather the top of the bag and tie it onto itself in a single knot. One is permitted to gather two parts of a bag

and tie them to each other in a single knot, but not in a double knot. One is also forbidden to tie something with a single knot that has a bow on top. [Although one is permitted to tie shoes with a single knot and bow, one is prohibited from tying bags in such a manner. One is allowed to use a plastic twist-tie on Shabbos to securely close a bag.



Shabbos Ta'am HaChaim: Vaeschanan-Nachamu 5778

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