



Shabbos Nachamu: Continuous Consolation

Rabbi Shmuel Silber – Adapted from Shabbos Nachamu 5778

As I write these words, the tears of *Tisha B'Av* are not yet dry. We spent this past Wednesday evening and Thursday mourning two thousand years of collective loss. We mourned the 2,500,000 Jews murdered during the destruction of the second Temple, we mourned the 6,000,000 who perished in the Holocaust, we mourned every man, woman and child we have lost throughout the years. But then something amazing occurs – we find comfort. This Shabbos is called, *Shabbos Nachamu* (the Shabbos of consolation). This name is taken from the opening words of the *Haftarah*, '*Nachamu Nachamu Ami, be consoled, be consoled my nation*,' uttered by the prophet, Isaiah. We transition from profound mourning to a feeling of comforting consolation in just a matter of days. Yet, we must ask, what has changed? Has the final redemption occurred? Have the fundamental challenges of suffering and difficulty been alleviated? Where is the *nechama* (consolation) of *Shabbos Nachamu*?

Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik zt'l (1903-1993) explains this dynamic in a profound way. After two thousand years of suffering and constant challenges, one would have assumed that the Jewish people would have ceased to exist. After enduring the crusades, pogroms, the Holocaust, wars and terror attacks, one would have assumed that even if we managed to survive, our will to forge forward as a nation would have simply disappeared. But herein lies the awesome nature of the Jewish people – despite so much tragedy and adversity – we are still here. And we do not simply exist – we thrive. Every time our enemies knock us down and try to trample our soul – we get back up and answer their derisive taunts and barbaric brutality with unbreakable resolve. On *Tisha B'Av* we cry because we are truly broken-hearted over what has been lost. On *Tisha B'Av* when reflecting on the scope of our personal and national tragedies, we don't know how we can go on. On *Shabbos Nachamu* we rejoice – because we have.

The first time we see the word "*nechama*" (consolation) in the Torah is at the end of *Bereishis* (Genesis) after man had experienced a spiritual and moral decline, and God contemplated the destruction of mankind. "*And the Lord regretted (va'yinachem) that He had made man upon the earth, and He became grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:6).*" Rashi explains that the word *va'yinachem* means "*nehpecha machshavto*" – God experienced a *change of heart*.

God had high hopes, dreams, and aspirations for man. But then, *va'yinachem*. God has a change of heart, a change of perspective. God still loves man, man is still the crown jewel of creation, but God must adjust his perspective and expectations. He must accept the frailties of His creations. God must accept man's failures and shortcomings. God still knows what man can be, but He must accept that man will often not actualize that potential.

Thus, explains the Rav, *nechama* does not mean consolation; it means ***to experience a change in perspective***. There are circumstances, both national and personal, that we would give anything to change – but we can't. There are tragic realities which we cannot change no matter how hard we try. There are challenges that seem so overwhelming that I fear I will be swallowed up and enveloped by them. We do not get to choose our life circumstances – but we do have the great privilege to choose our life perspective. I can do things to find meaning and fulfillment even in compromised circumstances. When I encounter difficulty, I begin to realize that it is not the end of the road, there will be a tomorrow, I can make it. I can give up in the face of adversity, or I can find the strength to move forward and accomplish. I can let the *tzaros* conquer me, or I can find a way to conquer them. This is *nechama*. True *nechama* is not a result of everything being wonderful and perfect. This is not the reality of the human condition. True *nechama* is the result of a paradigm shift. In the midst of my pain, I thought I could not go on – but I did. True *nechama* occurs when I realize that the sun will rise no matter how dark the night before was. True *nechama* is actualized when I realize that I have the tools to rebuild, no matter the scale and scope of the damage and destruction. True *nechama* is experienced when I realize that I can get up, dust myself off, and continue to do great things.

This is *Shabbos Nachamu*. What has changed since *Tisha B'Av*? Me. I have gone from feeling helpless, despondent, and broken to realizing that although life is far from perfect, I control my reaction and spiritual disposition. I am not a victim. I am the master of my destiny. I have suffered much and may still suffer more, but I choose to see myself as a person who has much to accomplish. I can live a meaningful life, contribute to my people, and sanctify the name of God through my actions. I create the *nechama* of *Shabbos Nachamu*.

We hope and pray that we will experience the true *nechama* of complete redemption speedily in our days. But until that great day, we will continue to find personal and national *nechama* through maintaining positive perspective in all that life brings our way.