



Vaeschanan – The Pain of Consolation

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“Nachamu Nachamu Ami - Be consoled, be consoled my people (Isaiah 40:1).”

We read these beautiful words of the prophet, Yeshayahu (Isaiah) on the Shabbos immediately following *Tisha B'Av*. When the fast ends we feel euphoric, excited and optimistic. But why? What is different? The Temple has not yet been rebuilt, anti-Semitism still exists and there is still in-fighting within our people. Why is this Shabbos a *Shabbos of Consolation* when nothing has seemingly changed?

Rav Ephraim Oshry (1914-2003) provides an amazing insight. Rav Oshry was the Rav of the Kovno Ghetto and answered many questions of *halacha* (Jewish law) throughout the war. He compiled these heartbreaking, yet inspiring responsa in a work titled, *Responsa from the Depths*. In his introduction to the third volume he raises an interesting question and provides an incredible insight and explanation. The Torah states:

“You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary...Therefore, it will be, when the Lord, your God, grants you respite from all your enemies around [you] in the land which the Lord, your God, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget! (Devorim 25:17-19).”

“Why must the Torah tell us to “remember” and “not forget”? Is this not redundant? God knew we would remember what Amalek (Rav Oshry relates historical Amalek to the Nazis) did to us. How can we not remember? The fire still burns, the pain is still acute. How can we not remember Auschwitz, the Ninth Fort, and Bergen Belsen? But the Torah explains, ‘when the Lord, your God, grants you respite from all your enemies...In the land which the Lord, your God, gives you as an inheritance to possess;’ God knows that we will rebuild. We will rebuild our families, we will rebuild our wealth, we will rebuild our people, and we will rebuild ourselves. And we will begin to think, why should we hold on to the pain of the past? Let the past be the past. What good does it do to hold on to the pain when all it does is hold me back and anchor us in our heartbreak? God knew that when life would once again become good and filled with happiness and accomplishment; we would try to forget our pain. Therefore, God commands, “You shall not forget.” Even when life is beautiful – never forget your pain.”

But why not? After all, doesn't there come a point in time when I must let go of the past in order to build a future? Doesn't there come a point when I should unshackle myself from the heartbreak in order to feel joy? The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. The Jew never forgets or buries his pain – the Jew owns his pain. I look at my pain and I ask myself what can I learn about myself, my life and my world from this difficult situation. I own my pain and use it as a catalyst for growth. I own my pain and use its lessons as fuel for my engine of life productivity and meaning. *“You Shall Remember,”* is the natural reaction to pain when the wound is open, and the pain is clearly felt. But lest we think that at some point we need to forget to move on – God reminds us *“You shall not forget.”* Don't try to bury, conceal or hide your pain – own it, learn and grow from it.

Perhaps, this is the consolation, the *nechama* (consolation) of *Shabbos Nachamu*. On *Tisha B'Av* we allow ourselves to experience the crushing burden of 2,000 years of national and individual pain. At times throughout the day we feel as if our collective heart will burst from the sadness and despair. But then something amazing happens. We begin the process of owning our pain. We begin to learn from the tragedies. From our tears and sadness, we learn the need for compassion, empathy and unconditional love. From our heartbreak, we learn tolerance and respect. From our adversity, we learn that we are resilient, and can adapt and rebound from the most difficult of circumstances. From our loss, we learn that there is no greater force in nature than the Jewish soul. We take these powerful lessons and make them part of who we are. We own our pain and we recognize that nothing and no one can stop us from accomplishing our spiritual goals and aspirations. The moment we learn from our pain and realize that pain is the ultimate catalyst for growth, is the moment we begin to feel a wave of comfort. Those who own their pain are comforted by their pain.

I wish each of you a Shabbos of introspective consolation.

May we merit the ultimate consolation with the arrival of the Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen.