



VaEschanan: True Consolation

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Each and every Shabbos is a special, meaningful, and holy experience. Yet, some Shabbosos seem to distinguish themselves from the rest. *Shabbos Bereishis* fills us with excitement and hope for a bright future. *Shabbos HaGadol* (the Shabbos before Pesach) reminds us that redemption is in the air. And, it is with this excitement that we approach this coming Shabbos, *Shabbos Nachamu*, the Shabbos of Consolation. The name of this Shabbos comes from the opening words of the Haftorah where the prophet Yeshayahu says, “*Nachamu Nachamu Ami*, (Be consoled, be consoled my people)” (Isaiah 40:1). We began to feel this consolation after the fast of *Tisha B’Av*. When the fast ends, we feel euphoric, excited and optimistic. But why? What has changed? 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. 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 “don’t forget”? Is this not redundant? Rav Oshry explains: “God knew we would remember what Amalek (a reference 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 the pain when all it does is hold me back and anchor me in my heartbroken circumstances? God knew that when life became good, we would want to 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 we have to let go of the past in order to build a future? Doesn’t there come a point when we should unshackle ourselves from heartbreak to feel joy? The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. The Jew never forgets or buries his pain. He owns his pain. We look at our pain and ask ourselves, “What can I learn about myself, my life and, my world from this difficult situation?” We own our pain and use it as a catalyst for growth. We own our pain and use its lessons as the fuel for our engine of life productivity and meaning. “*You Shall Remember*,” is the natural reaction to pain. When the wound is open, 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 – learn and grow from it.

Perhaps, this is the consolation, the *nechama*, of *Shabbos Nachamu*. On *Tisha B’Av* we allow ourselves to experience the crushing burden of 2,000 years of collective and individual pain. At times throughout the day, we feel as if our soul will burst from the sadness and despair. But then something amazing happens. We begin the process of owning our pain. From our tears and tragedies, we have learned the need for compassion, empathy, and unconditional love. From our heartbreak, we have learned tolerance and respect. From our adversity, we have learned that there is no greater force in nature than the Jewish soul. And so, we take these lessons, and we inculcate within ourselves these powerful traits. 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. (Reprinted from 5777)