



Rabbi Katz's Drashah for Shabbos Nachamu & Vaetchanan

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Last week we mentioned the seemingly purposeful confluence of all three “Eichah”s in Tanach. We had the Eichah of Moshe Rabbeinu in Devarim, the Eichah of Yishayahu in the Haftara, and the Eichah of Yirmiyahu on Tisha Bav itself. Based on that, one might conclude that the reason we read the parshiyot in the order that we do is to make sure Devarim immediately precedes Tisha Bav. There might, however, be another reason, not one specific to Devarim, but one specific to Vaetchanan.

In a responsa of the Geonim we find an interestingly-phrased rule. While a similar sentiment is found in the Gemara, the presentation of the teshuvah is very telling: “One should always read Parshat Tzav before Pesach, Parshat Vayedaber (ie Bamidbar) before Shavuot, one should fast on Tisha Bav before Vaetchanan, and read Parshat Netzavim before Rosh Hashanah” (Teshuvot Hageonim Chadashot 25). The clear indication from their description is that the main order we’re concerned about is having Tisha Bav before Vaetchanan, not Devarim before Tisha Bav. This is even more apparent when contrasted with each of the other holidays listed, in which the Parsha precedes the day.

Two intriguing lessons emerge from this peculiarity- one general, and one more specific. When we consider the different days listed, Tisha Bav is not only the outsider from the perspective of when to orient the parshiyot, but also in terms of the nature of the days. Tisha Bav, as we know, is the only one of the group with a mournful quality (as opposed to the simcha involved with Pesach, Shavuot and (probably) Rosh Hashana). The Parshah with which we emphasize for a celebration, a success, is the one which leads up to it. Because when it comes to successes, what matters is how we got there. When it comes to failure, however, what matters more is how we react, how we grow in its aftermath. In this sense, we understand very well why the focus of Tisha Bav is the Parsha we read afterwards, Vaetchanan.

When analyzing, more specifically, the message of Vaetchanan being after Tisha Bav, we also keep in mind that the haftara we read with it is “Nachamu, Nachamu Ami”, of Yishayahu 40. What is the “nechama”, consolation, of Tisha Bav? The ultimate comfort (as we discussed after Mincha last Shabbos, based on the “Nachem” brachah) is the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, of course. But in the present, on an emotional, religious level, what makes this Shabbos “Shabbos Nachamu”?

In 5644, The Sfas Emes explained that the tefilah of Moshe Rabbeinu at the beginning of the Parsha wasn't simply for his own personal gain. Sure, he wanted to enter the land of Israel, but he already knew he couldn't. Instead, explains the Sfas Emes, Moshe Rabbeinu created the ability to connect emotionally and intellectually to the internal power ("penimiyut") of Eretz Yisrael, and the service of the Beit Hamikdash, specifically. He explains that this is the meaning of the phrase used at the beginning of Masechet Brachot, that the davening we do nowadays was "established according to the Tamidim". We have the ability, through calling out to Hashem and knowing that He hears us, to harness the same spiritual cognizance of the sacrifices.

Connecting such a concept to Tisha Bav, our minhag is that the chazzan does not recite the line in the kaddish "accept our prayers..." on Tisha Bav. As a sad realization of our distance to Hashem, our prayers don't have that same efficacy as they usually do. In this way, the nechama of post-Tisha Bav, beginning even in the afternoon of Tisha Bav, is our ability to speak directly, again, with Hashem. It is no coincidence that the "Vaetchanan" of Moshe Rabbeinu and the "Tefilah" we utilize nowadays have the same gematria: 515.

We know this notion of nechama from our own unfortunate experience of visiting a mourner during shiva. The Shulchan Aruch rules (Yoreh Deah 376:1) that when consoling a mourner, one should not initiate the conversation, but should rather wait for the mourner themselves to speak first. Our job, as the ones to *provide* comfort, is to allow the voice of the mourner to be heard, first and foremost. We should not force them to talk about what's on our mind, or decide for them what we feel they should deal with. When it comes to our own consolation in the aftermath of Tisha Bav, our nechama comes from having our voice heard, through our davening.

At the same time, we know that a mourner cannot speak to themselves, that there must be another person present to accomplish this goal. And so it is with Hashem. We're consoled because now, as opposed to how we felt on Tisha Bav, we know that Hashem is listening to us. As I've noted before, this could be the meaning of what we say in Shma Koleinu of our weekday Shmoneh Esrei: 'You won't leave us empty-handed, because (we know) You're listening to our tefilot'. Even if Hashem doesn't provide us with everything we think we want, we're comforted nonetheless, knowing that He hears us.

When it comes to our relationship with Hashem, or our relationship with a spouse, child, parent, or friend, sometimes the strongest comfort we can provide comes from making sure that they know they're being heard. That's why, the Geonim say, after we fast on Tisha Bav, deprived of our usual sustenance, we read about Vaetchanan, the importance of our davening. May our davening continue to have the influence in the same way Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us, and may we be comforted among the other mourners of Zion, knowing that Hashem hears our prayers.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Katz