

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Mark and Elsa Lustman and Stan and Froma Lustman, in commemoration of the 8th *yahrtzeit* of Mark and Stan's mother, Anne Lustman, Chana Rochel bas Avraham Alter, on 21 Av.
- Tommy and Judy Weiss, in memory of Tommy's father, Fred Weiss, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 19th of Av.

May the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

The Baltimore Jewish community is in shock after the senseless murder of community member Aryeh Wolf in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. Aryeh was a grandson of our members, Hindy and David Wolf, and was one of the first attendees of my Thursday night Knish Shop high school "cholent shiur" seven years ago, and he also was a very popular group leader in our shul. Our thoughts and *tefillos* are with his family during this most difficult time. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* comfort them together with all *avlei tzion v'Yerushalayim*. Amen.

I want to take this opportunity to wish a *tzeischem l'shalom* to long time Shomrei members, Dr. Peter and Rosemary Warschawski. They have been pillars of our shul for decades. They have taken on formal roles, like the presidency and editor of *Kol Hashomrim*—respectively. Informally, they have imbued our shul with joy, passion, energy, and love—of *Torah*, *tefila*, and *chessed*. We are so happy for them to achieve their dream of *aliya*, but it is also a little sad for us to be losing their spirit and presence. **Shakespeare** said "*Parting is such sweet sorrow...*" The sorrow is obvious; but where does the sweetness come from? It is in the act of parting—you still have them and as they are in the process of leaving—and you can fully appreciate all that they mean to you as you say goodbye.

So today I say to Peter and Rosemary, on behalf of myself and the shul: thank you for your involvement; for your leadership; and for your friendship...may *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* keep you healthy and happy; and may we all merit to join you...*l'shana haba'a b'Yerushalayim habenuya...amen!*

Today is *Shabbos Nachamu*. Yesterday, we celebrated *Tu B'Av*, the 15th of Av. Some explain that the joy of *Shabbos Nachamu* is really rooted in the joy of *Tu B'Av*. So, what is the source of that joy? In the Talmud (*Ta'anis* 26b), R. Shimon ben Gamliel famously declares: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כט"ו באב ויום הכפורים "*there were no holidays as great as Tu b'Av and Yom HaKippurim.*" The Gemara (*Taanis* 30b-31a) states that Yom Kippur understandably is a holiday, as it is a day of forgiveness and atonement, but asks why is *Tu b'Av* such a happy occasion?

The **Talmud (Taanis 31a)** gives six reasons: the last one:

בבלי תענית דף לא: א: רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו: יום שפסקו מלכרות עצים למערכה. (תניא) + מסורת הש"ס: דתניא+, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: מחמשה עשר באב ואילך תשש כוחה של חמה, ולא היו כורתין עצים למערכה, לפי שאינן יבשין.
Rabba and Rav Yosef both said: The fifteenth of Av was the day on which they stopped chopping down trees for the pyre of wood that burned on the altar, as it is taught in a braisa that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: From the fifteenth of Av onward, the strength of the sun grows weaker, and from this date they would not cut additional wood for the pyre, as they would not properly dry, and would be unfit for use.

How does the end of chopping wood warrant a celebration of this magnitude? And what does it have to do with *Shabbos Nachamu*?

The *tochacha* in *Parshas Ki Savo* threatens exile as a consequence of:

דברים פרק כח פסוק מז (פרשת כי תבוא) (מז) תַחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֵב לָלֵךְ:
"your not serving Hashem, your G-d, with joy and happiness of heart" (28:47).

The Torah warns us that one cause of *churban* and *galus* is doing *mitzvos* by rote, through habit, or worse, as a burden or chore to be dispensed with quickly. We are warned of severe consequences when we serve God, not out of joy, with a sense of gratitude for the immense opportunity to do the will of Hashem, but with the unfortunate attitude of viewing *avodas Hashem* as annoying or painful, even a burden. This is part of Yeshaya's lament in last week's *haftara*—the Jewish people were just going through the motions, but without feeling, sincerity, and joy. The immense joy accompanying the *siyum hamitzva* of cutting the wood for the altar is the exact opposite of that attitude. *Mitzvos*, even the most mundane, are our mission in life--to be relished, performed with happiness, and celebrated upon their completion. We are to see life as an opportunity to serve Hashem with whatever opportunities come our way. **עבדו את ה' בשמחה!**

Parshas Vaeschanan, which is always *Shabbos Nachamu*, includes many examples of Moshe Rabbeinu's passion for *mitzvos*. Moshe asked Hashem that he be allowed to enter the holy land. His motivation was, as the *Gemara* in *Sota* (14a) teaches us, not to enjoy its beauty and physical bounty, but to pursue its unique *mitzvos*, which are not relevant outside of *Eretz Yisroel*. Similarly, Moshe seized the opportunity to designate the three *arei miklat* (cities of refuge) on the east bank of the Jordan River- even though he knew they would not be effective until the days of his student, Yehoshua. This episode also serves as an appropriate model for us to run after *mitzvos*, even if we are not able to complete them. It represents an attitude of seeing *mitzvos* as cherished opportunities—and a sense of joy to be able to do the will of Hashem. **עבדו את ה' בשמחה!** It encourages us to **change our perspective** on *Mitvza* observance.

And this, I believe, is the connection between *Tu b'Av* and *Shabbos Nachamu*. Today's *haftara* begins with the famous words of Yeshaya Hanavi נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם bringing a message from Hashem to His nation Israel that they will find consolation after the *churban habayis*. The *Medrash Yalkut Shimoni* tell us of the following conversation between the Jewish people and the prophet:

ילקוט שמעוני ישעיהו רמז תמה: רבי חנינא בר פפא אמר אמרו ישראל לישעיה ישעיה רבינו תאמר שלא באת לנחם אלא לאותו הדור שחרב בית המקדש בימיו, א"ל לכל הדורות באתי לנחם, אמר אלקיכם אין כתיב כאן אלא יאמר אלקיכם .

The Jewish people asked: "Yeshaya, our teacher, would you say that your consolations were directed only to the generation in whose days the Temple was destroyed?" Yeshaya answered them: "No, I have come to bring consolation to all the generations. For it is not written, 'comfort you, comfort you, my people, said your God,' but it says, 'comfort you, comfort you, my people, will say your God.' "

Yeshaya is teaching us that *nechama*, consolation, is relevant in all times. Traditionally, *Shabbos Nachamu* is a time of happiness, but the obvious question is: Are we magically consoled just because of a date on the calendar? What does *nechama* really mean? How does one achieve it? On *Tisha b'Av*, we reached the culmination of three weeks of mourning the *Beis Hamikdash*, three weeks during which we tried to internalize its loss. We focused on the tremendous void left by its destruction and on its far-reaching effects. In *Eicha* and *kinos*, we were told that the entire world came to a standstill, "*shavas*" on the day of the *churban*; that true joy ceased, and—in a sense--the world stopped.

So what is the source of our consolation? We still do not have a *Beis Hamikdash*, and after the three weeks, can we begin to appreciate what that means? Now, with the void as present as ever, how do we speak of being consoled? Can we just snap our fingers and make it happen? It is worth pondering in general: What are the mechanics of *nechamah*? This is not an abstract question.

There are very real practical consequences to our finding consolation within life's challenges and tragedies—consequences on the personal level, as well as the national level. How does an *aveil* (a mourner)--after being immersed in pain and sorrow for seven days--get up from *shiva* and go back to his or her daily routine with any measure of consolation? What do we mean when we offer the mourner hope for *nechama*, "*Hamakom yenachem eschem*"? How does anyone who has gone through a difficult, life-changing experience find consolation?

When Yeshaya is told to offer consolation, he says, דברו על לב ירושלים, speak to the heart of Jerusalem. He is instructing them to focus on the devastating reality of the situation and only then can they find *nechama*. In order to be consoled properly, we must never understate or underestimate the extent of our pain and our grief. *Nechama*, consolation, in the face of any challenge or tragedy, does not come from denying the reality or from downplaying what occurred. Nor is it accomplished by bringing irrelevant humor or distractions into our lives or by keeping busy with day-to-day affairs. Although it may seem counterintuitive, *nechama* begins by acknowledging the depth and the magnitude of the suffering and by facing the void and pain directly.

But how does this work? An answer may be found in the etymology of the word *nechama*, which, apart from its common meaning, “consolation,” also implies “reconsideration.”

The **Radak** in his *Sefer HaShorashim* connects the word *nachem* to *nicham*—meaning to change one’s mind. This verb נ,ח,ם is used for the first time in *Parshas Bereishis*, when Hashem reconsidered or changed His mind regarding the creation of the world and brought a *mabul*, a flood.

בראשית פרק ו: (ז) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֲמָתָה אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה ... כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתָם:

Hashem said, I will destroy man whom I created from the earth... for I regret that I made them...

Understood as such, consolation is rooted in reconsidering and changing our perspective or outlook. Why is the Hebrew word for “consolation” related to “reconsidering?” I believe *Lashon Hakodesh*, the Hebrew language, is teaching us that the essence of consolation is our ability to create a new perspective—to look at the same reality and to “reconsider,” to see it in a different light, **to develop a new and broader perspective** about the situation **and to rebuild from there.**

When a tragedy hits, the immediate pain is so raw and real, and the tragedy is viewed in such stark “black and white” terms—senseless and meaningless—that we are too paralyzed by grief to process the tragedy and move on with life. That inability to process increases and magnifies our pain.

Nechama is about gaining a new perspective within the depth of the suffering. This allows us to proceed with life, to choose a way forward, with new strength, after the devastating experience.

Victor Frankl, in describing his own experiences in Auschwitz, wrote: “*We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances — to choose one’s own way.*”

I believe the Navi repeated the word *nachamu--nachamu nachamu ami--* to teach us that not everyone finds comfort and consolation through the same channels. The double language implies trying to develop a deeper perspective that can lead to *nechama*, and also hints to the multiplicity of possible approaches.

Some people find comfort by focusing on the meaningful and lasting ways that the departed live on in the world, through the memory and the good deeds of those they touched and affected, and through the values found in those who continue their legacy. The *nechama* can also come from the inner strength and resilience we discover within ourselves at a difficult time, and from focusing on appreciating all the good things in our lives, including the love of family, friends, and community, who were there to offer support in our time of need.

Others find *nechama* when they begin to uncover levels of Divine grace in the misfortune, permitting them to discern the hidden hand of Providence underlying the tragedy, and helping to appreciate the many things to be grateful for, even in difficult times.

For many, *nechama* is found simply by acknowledging, in a time of apparent confusion, that God runs the world. That everything that happens is a part of a master plan. That, while it is beyond our ability to understand, it all adds up somehow. As David Hamelech proclaimed: מזמור לדוד ה' רועי לא אחסר בנאות "even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death—I fear no evil. That is to say, I know that G-d is directing events and is with me in times of distress. שבטך ומשענתך המה ינחמוני **Rav Chaim Volozhener**, in *Ruach Chaim*, explains this means that believing that God is behind everything, אף מה שנגד רצוני הוא אך לטובתי, *even what is against my will is for my ultimate good*, and that in itself gives *nechama*, consolation.

True *nechama* can come from many places, and it encourages us to use the painful experience as an impetus to move forward constructively—to accept the finality of the situation, while at the same time to continue living with a **newfound perspective and vision**. In short, *nechama* connotes the ability to reconsider the situation. Inevitably, a transformation takes place internally in the meaning that we assign to this harsh reality—each of us in our own way. *Nechama implies filling the void created by the loss with a new perspective on the situation.*

Simon Wiesenthal, the famous Nazi-hunter, told the following story at a conference of European rabbis in Bratislava, Slovakia. “*It was in Mauthausen, shortly after liberation. The camp was visited by Rabbi Eliezer Silver, head of Agudas Harabbanim, on a mission to offer aid and comfort to the survivors. Rabbi Silver also organized a special service, and he invited Wiesenthal to join the other survivors in prayer. Wiesenthal declined and explained why.*

“*In the camp,*” Wiesenthal said to Rabbi Silver, “*there was one religious man who somehow managed to smuggle in a siddur. At first, I greatly admired the man for his courage—that he’d risked his life in order to bring the siddur in. But the next day I realized, to my horror, that this man was ‘renting out’ this siddur to people in exchange for food. People were giving him their last piece of bread for a few minutes with the prayerbook. This man, who was very thin and emaciated when the whole thing started, was soon eating so much that he died before everyone else—his system couldn’t handle it.*”
He continued: “*If this is how religious Jews behave, I’m not going to have anything to do with a prayerbook.*”

As Wiesenthal turned to walk away, Rabbi Silver touched him on the shoulder and gently said in Yiddish, “*Du dummer (you silly man). Why do you look at the Jew who used his siddur to take food out of starving people’s mouths? Why don’t you look at the many Jews who gave up their last piece of bread in order to be able to use a siddur? That’s faith. That’s the true power of the siddur.*” Rabbi Silver then embraced him. “*I went to the services the next day,*” said Wiesenthal.

On this *Shabbos Nachamu*, we still do not have the *Beis Hamikdash*, but we can shift our perspective on our long exile by seeing God’s hand in its destruction and in the miracle of Jewish survival. We can take comfort when we focus on the moral courage and superhuman strength of our people that continues today. We can begin to move forward—in our own lives, in our homes, and in our *batei mikdash m’at* (our shuls)—by rebuilding our relationship with God that the *Beis Hamikdash* symbolized. Yeshaya Hanavi teaches the timeless lesson: **consolation is possible**. It is about attitude and about developing a fresh perspective...and moving forward and rebuilding with strength, and with that new outlook and vision.

And then, rededicating ourselves to serving Hashem, with a sense of joy and meaning: עבדו את ה' בשמחה! As Chazal teach, כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחה, *whoever mourns Yerushalayim merits and sees its rebuilding* (present tense). In our present circumstances, through mourning Yerushalayim we can begin to rebuild it with joy. May we merit to a full *nechama*, with the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*, *bimhera, viyamenu...amen*.