

Shabbat Shalom, everyone.

I want to thank the *drasha* sponsors:

- Dr. Allen Bennett and Rabbi Mordechai and Hadassah Bennett and family, as a *zechus* for a *refuah shleima* for Mordechai Tzvi ben Sarah Rachel.
- Jeremy and Devora Gradon, in support of the new "Main Minyan."
- Isaac, Yair and Tamary, Shimy and Rivka, Ezri and Zahava, Ahuva and Yaakov, Esti and Shlomo Zalman, Yair and Sarah, Yoni and Shevy, and Netanel, in memory of Chavie Klein, a'h, on the occasion of her first *yahrtzeit*. May her *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Mendy and Peshie Vim, in memory of Peshie's father, Shlomo Parasol, Shlomo ben Rav Yitzchak Simcha, z'l, whose *yahrtzeit* was on the 21<sup>st</sup> of Av. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their generous support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

Last week, we read the famous *haftara* of נחמו נחמו עמי. Yeshayahu HaNavi delivers a message of comfort directly from Hakadosh Baruch Hu to the Jewish people.

המקום ינחם אתכם, "may Hashem comfort you," is the traditional statement of consolation to mourners, as Hashem is the ultimate source of comfort, so we would expect the Jewish people to warmly accept Hashem's message of comfort.

However, the **Abudraham** cites a striking Medrash that says just the opposite!

ספר אבודרהם סדר הפרשיות והפטורות: ואומר במדרש על דרך צחות כי תקנו לומר בתחלת הפטרות הנחמות נחמו נחמו עמי כלומר שהקב"ה אמר לנביאים נחמו נחמו עמי. על זה משיבה כנסת ישראל ותאמר ציון עזבני ה' . כלומר איני מתפייסת מנחמת הנביאים.

The **Medrash** says that today's *haftara* וה' שכחני and *Zion, said Hashem, has abandoned me, and Hashem has forgotten me* is the Jewish people's reponse to Hashem.

Put bluntly: the Jewish people respond with a tone of rejection: we do not accept Your condolences...we feel abandoned and forgotten...and words of comfort just don't help.

The **Malbim** explains that the Jewish people were saying—we can understand why You kicked us out—our sins made it unreasonable for You to stay with us...but how could You forget us? Are we that disgusting and repulsive? אבל השכחה היא מפני המיאוס ואז לא יזכור בו עוד כלל Forgetting is the end of the relationship...it implies that there is nothing left to be salvaged...no future...

What is Hashem's response to that harsh accusation?

First, Hashem assures the Jewish people that He has indeed NOT forgotten them

הַתְּשַׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָה מֵרֵחַם בֶּן-בִּטְנָה גַם-אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחַנָּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֲשַׁכַּחְךָ:

*Can a woman forget her baby, or disown the child of her womb? Though she might forget, I never could forget you.*

כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵי זֶה כִּפַּר כְּרִיתוֹת

*Thus said Hashem: Where is the bill of divorce...?*

Hashem uses the imagery of both a mother's connection to her child, and a husband's connection to his wife...highlighting our relationship with Hashem...

But then Hashem turns the tables and gives blunt *mussar* to the Jewish people. Says Hashem—you are not comforted by My words of comfort—you are looking for action. Throughout history, I have been here—and YOU are the ones who have not responded...you are the ones who have offered words and no action.

*Why, when I came, was no one there., Why, when I called, would none respond?*

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ו עמוד ב: אמר רבי יוחנן: בשעה שהקדוש ברוך הוא בא בבית הכנסת ולא מצא בה עשרה - מי הוא כועס, שנאמר: מדוע באתי ואין איש קראתי ואין עונה.

This statement of Hashem is understood by Chazal (**Brachos 6b**) as meaning that Hashem expects us to perform mitzvos—and He is ready and waiting...and constantly disappointed by the one-sided relationship.

But more broadly, Hashem was saying—look at Jewish history and notice that Hashem has not forgotten the Jewish people. Despite all the mystery and confusion, He has called out to us many times in our history—has spoken to us through world events...and we have not answered His call...

**Rav Soloveitchik** famously wrote in Kol Dodi Dofek:

*...in the midst of a night of the terrors of Majdanek, Treblinka, and Buchenwald; in a night of gas chambers and crematoria; in a night of total divine self concealment . . . in a night of continuous searching for the Beloved — on that very night the Beloved appeared. The Almighty, who was hiding in His splendid sanctum, suddenly appeared and began to beckon at the tent of the Lover, who tossed and turned on her bed beset by convulsions and the agonies of hell. Because of the beating and knocking at the door of the mournful Lover, the State of Israel was born. How many times did the Beloved knock on the door of the Lover? It appears to me that we can count at least six knocks.... The sixth beckoning, of which we should also not lose sight, was heard at the time of the opening of the gates of the Land of Israel. A Jew escaping from an enemy's land now knows that he can find refuge in the land of his forefathers. This is a new phenomenon in the annals of our history. Up to now, when a Jewish population was uprooted, it wandered in the wilderness of the nations without finding shelter and habitation. The shutting of the gates in the face of the exiled caused total destruction for much of the Jewish people. Now the situation has changed. When any nation expels its Jewish minority, the exiled now direct their steps to Zion, and she, as a compassionate mother, absorbs them.*

So, what does Hashem want? What is the response He is looking for? What will bring Him back into our world?

Our Parsha gives us some direct insight...He wants us to follow Him by keeping his Torah...by aligning our worldview and our sense of ethics and morality and justice with His.

דברים פרק ז: יב: והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אלקיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך

Hashem tells us that, if we listen to Him and keep His laws, He will keep the covenant He made with our r ancestors. He is looking for שמיעה which leads to שמירה ועשיה—listening which leads to action...

Why did the Torah use the word *ekev*, instead of the standard word *ba'avur*?

One possible message suggested by this unusual word is that a life of success and achievement, spiritually and materially, is about getting our heels to follow our heads. It is sometimes easy to talk the talk--to commit in our heads to a course of action, to commit mentally to a lifestyle or to a plan. But going through with it, actually “walking the walk,” not just “talking the talk,” is sometimes very difficult.

The great Shammai taught in **Pirkei Avos (1:15)** that one should say little and do much.

משנה מסכת אבות א:טו: שמאי אומר עשה תורתך קבע אמור מעט ועשה הרבה והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות:

As Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel also taught in **Pirkei Avos (1:17)**, the main thing is not teaching or espousing. The main thing is taking action.

משנה מסכת אבות א:יז: שמעון בנו אומר כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה ולא המדרש הוא העיקר אלא המעשה וכל המרבה דברים מביא חטא:

Commitments and mantras are not ultimately what bring achievement and success.

עקב תשמעון is teaching the Jewish people that God wants us to follow Him, not just with our minds, but also with our heels, our actions.

*Ekev*, a heel, connotes walking the walk—showing commitment to Hashem through our lifestyle.

And there is another meaning hinted to in the word *ekev*. The **Baal HaTurim** writes

בעל הטורים דברים פרשת עקב פרק ז פסוק יב: עקב. עשה תורתך קבע (אבות פ"א מט"ו):

**Ekev rearranged spells keva—consistency.**

For Torah to be internalized, to become part of our identity, it must not be an infrequent and erratic choice. Instead, it needs to be a consistent lifestyle.

Shammai, who taught us *emor me'at v'asei harbei*, stressing action, also taught קבע תורתך עשה.

Make constant and consistent actions a part of who you are. It is not by accident that Judaism demands daily acts like *brachos* and *tefilla*, as contrasted with infrequent, even intense, acts of spiritual pursuit.

This is all summed up in a Medrash I have cited before, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century **Ein Yaakov** in his introduction. There, he records a dispute regarding the most important *pasuk* in the *Torah*. The first *pasuk* suggested is the famous *Shema Yisrael*, declaring the unity of God. The second *pasuk* is *V'ahavta l'reiacha ka-mocha*, a directive for proper interpersonal relations. But the third, and victorious, verse is the description of the *Korban Tamid*—את הכבש האחד תעשה בבוקר ואת הכבש השני תעשה בין הערבים *You should sacrifice one sheep in the morning and a second sheep in the afternoon*

**The reason for the utmost importance of this *pasuk*, according to many commentators, is that it represents action and consistency--the fundamental key to living properly. תעשה it must be done—twice a day.**

Without consistency, even the greatest intentions—both between man and God, and between man and man—will not be actualized. Making something real, and a part of yourself, requires action and consistency. Consistency and attention are what ultimately allow the grander ideas in *Shema Yisrael* and *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, to take root in our lives.

We must find ways to consistently make *avodas Hashem* a real part of our life. Our parsha also hints to this concept, when the Torah asks מה ה' אלקיך שואל ממך כי אם ליראה, what does Hashem want? Only fear of Hashem. The Gemara in Menachos (43b) quotes Rabbi Meir, who understood that this *pasuk* alludes to the concept that one should make 100 *brachos* each day. What is the connection between these two concepts—God exhorting His people to fear Him and the *mitzva* of making 100 *brachos* each day? And why is it described as a small thing כי אם?

**Rav Moshe Shternbach**, in his sefer *Taam Ve'daas* writes:

והכונה דע"י מה שמרגיל עצמו לברך כל יום מאה פעמים ומזכיר שם ה' באימה וביראה מתעורר האדם לזכור לפני מי הוא עומד ומשריש בלבו יראת ה' והיינו מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלקיך . . .

that a fear of God is developed through constant and consistent attention to His will and commandments, in small ways. It is found in the commitment to making 100 *brachos*, day in and day

out. One-time declarations or even extreme sacrifices are not sufficient, even though they may seem so much more powerful and heroic. While *brachos* may not be the most glorious of *mitzvos* [indeed, a bracha is usually regarded as a light mitzvah], they are an opportunity to encounter God--100 times a day. It structures our day and all our actions to focus on God. That is the response Hashem is looking for.

The Navi ends f the *haftara* this morning with another double language of *nechama*...

כִּי־נָחַם יְהוָה צִיּוֹן נָחַם כָּל־הַרְבֵּי־תֵיבָה וַיִּשְׂם מִדְּבָרָהּ כְּעֵדֶן וַעֲרַבְתָּהּ כְּגַן־יְהוָה שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה יִמְצָא בָּהּ תּוֹדָה וְקוֹל זִמְרָה:

*Truly the LORD has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins. He has made her wilderness like Eden, Her desert like the Garden of the LORD. Gladness and joy shall abide there, Thanksgiving and the sound of music.*

**Rav Shlomo Ganzfried** author of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, in his sefer on Chumash called *Apiryon*, points out that the word *nicham* is in the past tense, and not in what we would expect, the future tense, because Hashem has already planted the seeds of consolation. It is up to us to respond and bring things to fruition, the tools are already here...it is up to us to answer the call.

As **Rav Soloveitchik** writes further in his *Kol Dodi Dofek*:

*...Judaism has always believed, as we said at the outset, that man has it within his power to take fate into his own hands and shape it into the destiny of a free life, a life full of meaning and saturated with the joy of living, turning isolation into aloneness and disparagement into significance. For this reason Judaism places so great an emphasis on the principle of free will. [And] for this reason [Judaism] so appreciates the human intellect, which has it within its power to free man from his enslavement to nature and allow him to rule over his environment and its blind circumstances and subjugate it to his will. The Community of Israel is obligated to use this free will in all facets of life, and especially for the good of the State of Israel.*

May we respond to Hashem, Who has called us many times over this past year, shaking up the world order. May we respond to Hashem's call with a renewed commitment to *chessed*, *Torah*, *tefilla*, and respect for one another—with concrete steps and real actions. May we be *zoche* soon to see the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, bimhera viyamenu...amen.