

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the sponsors of this week's Shabbos drasha:

- Julie Fried, in honor of Bruce's special birthday.
- Cheryl Mitnick, in honor of Ron and Myrna Mitnick on their Special Anniversary.
- In honor of Joey Pollak's 70th birthday this coming week, by his wife, children, and grandchildren.
- Larry and Flo Ziffer, in memory of Moshe Zev Ben Yosef. May his neshama have an Aliyah.

Wishing good health and happiness to all those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries, and continued bracha and hatzalacha to all the sponsors for your generosity.

Today is known as Shabbos Nachamu. We read the prophecy of Yeshaya Hanavi, which begins with the famous words נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם Hashem tells 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 to all times.

Traditionally, Shabbos Nachamu is a time of happiness, prime vacation time. In the world before coronavirus, kosher hotels throughout the country would advertise special programs filled with entertainment and joy. 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 that destruction and on its far-reaching effects. In Eicha and kinos we were told that the world came to a standstill, “shavas.” True joy ceased and the world stopped, in a sense, on the day of the churban.

As **Rav Shlomo Wolbe** writes in *Alei Shor* (volume II, page 407)

חורבן בית המקדש הוא חורבן העולם. עולם נחרב הוא שאין בו אף פינה אחת מטוהרה ומוקדשת להשראת השכינה...

When the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the world was destroyed, to an extent.

So what is the source of our consolation? Although we still do not have a Beis Hamikdash, after the three weeks, we hope that we can begin to grasp what that means. Now, the void is 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 only 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?

An answer to our question, the key to the nature of this phenomenon called consolation, is found in our Haftorah, which begins with the immortal words, “Nachamu, nachamu, ami.” Let us look at some key concepts that emerge from a deeper study of this Haftorah, where God Himself tells Yeshaya to teach the people how to find consolation.

Yeshaya teaches us that, 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 distractions, by bringing irrelevant humor or pastimes 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.

When Yesahaya is told to offer consolidation, he says, דברו על לב ירושלים , speak to the heart of Jerusalem, כי לקחה מיד ה' כפלים על חטאותיה, for Jerusalem has received punishment from God, double the amount her sins warranted. Focus on the devastating reality of the situation and only then can you find nechama.

But how does this work? Focusing on the reality of the loss should make it harder to get through. How does that lead to consolation?

The answer is 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 נחם, נחמה is used for the first time in Parshas Breishis, when Hashem reconsidered or changed His mind regarding the creation of the world and brought a mabul.

בראשית פרק ו: (ז) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֲמָחָה אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר-בָּרֵאתִי 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...

And similarly, in the aftermath of the cheit ha’egel, the sin of the golden calf, we read

שמות פרשת כי תשא פרק לב פסוק יד
וַיִּגְדָּם ה' עַל-הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ: פ
Hashem reconsidered—changed His mind, as it were—concerning the evil that He had originally sought to do to His nation.

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, many times stronger after the devastating experience.

Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau writes in his book *Out of the Depths*, p. 266 about consolation that he was able to help effect after the horrific Sbarro suicide bombing. He relates the tragic story of the Schijveschuuder family, who had emigrated from Holland to Israel some 22 years earlier; how the

father, Mordechai (Moti) had given up his business to build a cheder in Talmon, how the mother, Tzira, would commute each day to Yerushalayim for an hour and a quarter to teach in a special school for deaf children (called Shema Koleinu). The Schijveschuurders had eight children.

On August 9, 2001, on a Thursday afternoon, the parents, together with their five youngest children, went out to lunch in the Sbarro Pizzeria in Yerushalayim. A Palestinian terrorist, strapped with explosives, walked in and detonated a bomb, killing fifteen and wounding over one hundred. Among those killed were the parents, Moti and Tzira, as well as three of the children—Ra'aya, Avraham Yitzchak and Chemda—ages 14, 4 and 2. The other two children—10-year-old Leah-le and 8-year-old Chaya-le—were badly burned and rushed to nearby Bikur Cholim hospital. Rabbi Lau related how that evening he received a call from Tzira's sister with the heart-wrenching news—asking him to officiate the next morning at the funeral of the parents and three of their children. The request was made of Rabbi Lau not in his capacity as Chief Rabbi but because of his personal relationship with the family going back many years. Rabbi Lau had, in fact, acted as *mesader kiddushin* at the parents' wedding 25 years earlier. 8 year old Leah received special permission to leave the hospital to attend the funeral, but 8 year old Chaya was so badly injured she could not leave the hospital for the funeral or shiva. He describes how at the funeral he could hardly speak.

Rabbi Lau describes “The first thing I did the next morning was visit Chaya in her hospital room. Her face was burned, her arms and legs broken, and despite the quantities of morphine she had received, she was obviously suffering intense pain. Feeling helpless, I wondered what I could say to her. Spontaneously, I found myself telling her a story without naming the protagonist. I know a boy of eight who lost his father and mother. But unlike you, who are lucky to have a grandfather and two grandmothers, he had only one brother, until he came to Eretz Yisrael and discovered that he had another brother here. You, however, have three brothers and a sister. This eight year old boy came to Israel without knowing any Hebrew and knowing nobody except for his one brother. But you, everyone in Israel knows and loves. Everyone has heard about this terrible things that happened to your family, and they are sending lots of love from all over the country. Everyone is waiting for you to stand on your feet and leave the hospital healthy. . . Unlike your situation, almost no one waited for that little boy I told you about. Almost no one knew of his existence. But still he managed. He didn't give up, he didn't cry over his bitter fate, and he didn't feel sorry for himself. He tried to rebuild his life in the new country as best he could.

At that moment, to my total surprise, the girl said, “I know, that boy was you.” Rabbi Lau concluded “take an example from my personal story.”

He was able to help her shift her perspective at this crucial and painful time in her life, the essence of nechama.

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.”

After tragedy and loss, the painful void and gnawing questions remain, often forever, but the spirit of nechama allows us to refocus and change our perspective. But how is this accomplished? What is the formula?

I believe the Navi repeated the word nachamu--nachamu nachamu ami--to teach that not everyone finds comfort and consolation through the same channels. The double language implies a **multiplicity of approaches that can lead to nechama**. There is no one single way, no one right approach.

Nechama can come from many different avenues, very much dependent on the unique circumstances--the specific person and nature of the tragedy, helping them go on and move forward productively.

For some, nechama is found simply by acknowledging that **God runs the world**. Everything that happens is a part of a master plan. A belief that while it is beyond our ability to understand, we believe it all adds up somehow. As **David Hamelech** proclaimed: מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד ה' רֹעֵי לֹא אַחֲסֵר בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְצִינִי בְּגִיַּא צְלֻמוֹת לֹא אִירַע רַע כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי even when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death,—we fear no evil as we know that G-d is directing events and is with us in our times of distress. שְׁבִטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֶנְתְּךָ הֵמָּה יִנְחֵמוּנִי —your rod and your staff give us consolation. **Rav Chaim Volozhener** in Ruach Chaim explains this to mean that believing that God is behind everything, אִף מָה אַךְ לְטוֹבוֹתֵי שֶׁנֶּגְד רְצוּנֵי הוּא אַךְ לְטוֹבוֹתֵי gives nechama, consolation.

Other people find comfort when they begin to uncover levels of Divine grace in the tragedy, permitting them to discern the hidden hand of Providence underlying the apparent madness through miracles. The many things to be grateful for, even in difficult times. After recounting thousands of years of tragedy and exile on Tisha b'Av, they may find comfort in the fact that the Jewish people are still around. **Rav Yaakov Emden** writes in the introduction to his Siddur that the continued existence of the Jewish people is such a miracle. It is, in itself, the greatest proof of God's existence. The horrors we recall on Tisha B'Av help us realize that we are part of an immortal people who transcend natural order. For many, the perspective that we have many times “emerged from the ashes” is an integral part of our national consolation.

And others 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; the values found in those who continued their legacy. Sometimes, the nechama comes from the lessons and inner strength and resilience we discover within ourselves at a difficult time; focusing on how we grew from the challenge. It can come from a feeling of gratitude and appreciation for 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.

True nechama comes from many places and 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.

On 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 by rebuilding our relationship with God that the Beis Hamikdash symbolized, in our own lives, in our homes, and in our batei mikdash m'at—our Shuls.

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 that outlook. As Chazal teach, כָּל הַמֵּתָאבֵּל עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם זֹכֵה וְרוֹאֵה בְּשִׁמְחָתָהּ, presently, through mourning Yerushalayim, we can begin to rebuild. May we merit to a full nechama, with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, bimhera, viyamenu...amen.