

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsor

- Anonymous, with *Hakaras Hatov* to Rabbi Marwick for the very meaningful Tisha B'Av Kinos program. Next year, may we all celebrate together in Yerushalayim!
- Ruthie Zygler, in memory of her father, Leiv Goldbaum, Hertz Leib ben R' Chaim haLevi, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 22nd of Av. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.

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

There is something startling about the opening words of this week's *haftarah*. After three weeks of mourning. After the fast of *Tisha B'Av*. After *Eicha*, after *Kinnos*, after reliving the destruction of both *Batei Mikdash*, Hashem's very first words to us are simply: נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יְאֵמַר אֱלֹהִים. "*Comfort, comfort My people.*"

But it seems like nothing has really changed. The *Beis HaMikdash* is still in ruins. Yerushalayim has not been rebuilt. The exile continues, antisemitism is still out of control, with a horrifying incident on the Upper West side of New York on *Tisha B'Av*, and in many ways, our enemies still appear to have the upper hand. So why open with comfort? How can we speak of consolation before redemption has arrived?

I would like to suggest that Judaism teaches something different from how the world understands comfort. The world believes comfort comes after circumstances improve; when the illness is cured, when the relationship is repaired, when the war ends, when the tears finally stop. But the Torah teaches otherwise. Sometimes the first step toward redemption is not changing our circumstances. It is changing how we understand them. Before history changes, our understanding of history changes. That may be why the same root in *lashon hakodesh*, נַחַם, can mean both comfort and reconsideration, or reframing a situation.

The **Tzror HaMor**, Rabbi Avraham Saba, who personally endured the 15th century expulsions from both Spain and Portugal, asks a striking question on *Parshas Masei*. Why does the Torah devote an entire chapter to listing all 42 journeys of Bnei Yisrael through the desert? Wouldn't it have been enough to say "They traveled from Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael"? These are not travel notes, he answers. They are the map of Jewish life. Every individual has his own 42 journeys. Every generation has its own 42 journeys. Some stops are beautiful, others painful. Some feel like progress, others like setbacks. Some are places we linger; others we cannot wait to leave. But each one of them is part of the road toward Eretz Yisrael.

How often do we ask, "Why am I here?" "Why did this happen to me?" The Tzror HaMor offers a different question: not "Why am I here," but "Where is Hashem taking me?" There is a profound difference between being lost and being on a journey. A person who is lost sees only random detours. A traveler understands that every mile, even the hardest ones, is bringing him closer to his destination.

After *Tisha B'Av*, it can feel as though Jewish history has lost its way. Hashem's answer is: No. You are still traveling. The road has been long — sometimes unbearably long — but you are still on it. A wanderer has no destination. A Jew, even in the deepest *galus*, was never a wanderer. We are travelers.

This is not only philosophy. It is the story of our people. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** took great inspiration from a *pasuk* in *Shemos*. The Egyptians had a plan: Enslave the Jews, oppress them, crush their spirit, and eventually they would disappear. But the Torah tells us the opposite happened: וַיַּרְבּוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ וַיִּשְׁרָצוּ וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ וַיִּשְׁרָצוּ וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ וַיִּשְׁרָצוּ וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ וַיִּשְׁרָצוּ. "*The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread.*"

Rabbi Sacks noted that this became a pattern throughout Jewish history. Again and again, our enemies believed they had reached the final chapter of the Jewish story. But after every disaster, the Jewish people discovered hidden reservoirs of faith, courage, and creativity. We did not merely survive adversity. We rebuilt through it. That, no less than oppression itself, is part of what it means to be a Jew. Again and again, what was meant to destroy us became the occasion for extraordinary renewal. Jews are the people who not only survive but thrive in adversity.

Let us be precise about what we are and are not saying. We do not say suffering is good. We do not celebrate tragedy or minimize loss. When Yosef finally confronts his brothers after 22 years, he does not tell them what they did was wonderful. He says something far more exact: אַתֶּם חָשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה, אֲלֵקִים חֲשָׁבָה לְטָבָה. "You intended evil against me, but God transformed it for good." Notice the precision: The brothers' actions remain evil. Hashem does not redefine evil as good. He brings good from evil. Rabbi Akiva said כֹּל מֵאֵן דְּעֵבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטַב עֵבִיד...everything Hashem does leads to good. That is the story of Yosef and the Jewish people.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (*Igros Ukesavim* 126) once wrote to a student who had become discouraged by his repeated failures. The student looked at the *Gedolei Yisrael* of his time and imagined that they had always been successful, confident, and spiritually whole. Rav Hutner reminded him that the world sees only the finished product; it does not see the struggle through which greatness was formed. He, therefore, read the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (24:16) שָׁבַע יְפֹל צָדִיק וְקָם, not merely to mean that the righteous person rises despite falling, even seven times, but that—through the struggles—he becomes able to rise. The same is true of the Jewish people. We have become who we are, not despite all our journeys, but through them.

Now take that idea from one person and lay it across an entire nation. Have we become who we are — not despite our journeys, but through them? Would there have been Yavneh and Torah Shebaal Peh formally developed without the Churban? The Mishnah, the Gemara, the great yeshivos of Bavel, the flowering of Torah across Europe, the rebuilding after the Holocaust, the rebirth of Medinat Yisrael and the resurgence of Torah in Eretz Yisrael today — would any of it exist if every chapter of our history had been easy? This does not explain every tragedy; many questions remain beyond us. But it suggests that no journey is wasted in the hands of Hashem. No tear is meaningless. No chapter is the end.

The **Maharal** gives this idea its deepest foundation.

ספר נצח ישראל פרק כג: וקאמר (ב"ב ס ב) כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בנחמתה. כבר אמרנו לך שהחסר הוא שמתהוה ומקבל הויה, והדבר שהוא שלם אין עומד לקבל הויה, כאשר הוא שלם קודם זה, ואיך יתהוה. ודבר זה ענין ברור מאוד, ונתבאר גם כן בחבור הזה. והמתאבל על ירושלים, והרי הוא חסר בשביל ירושלים, ובשביל שמתאבל זוכה לראות בנחמתה. כי החסר הוא ראוי אל קבלת ההויה, כי ההעדר הוא סבת ההויה, ודבר זה ידוע.

Bava Basra 60b "Whoever mourns for Yerushalayim merits to see her comforted." *We have already told you that it something lacking that comes-into-being and receives existence, whereas something that is complete has no capacity to receive further existence since it is already complete beforehand. This matter is very clear, and it has also been explained elsewhere in this work. And one who mourns for Yerushalayim he is thereby lacking on account of Yerushalayim, and because he mourns, he merits to see her comfort. For the lacking one is fit to receive coming-into-being, since absence is the cause of coming-into-being — and this is a known matter.*

The Maharal is teaching us that destruction is not always the opposite of creation. Sometimes, in the providence of Hashem, the very experience of absence creates the space in which something new can emerge. A seed placed in the ground appears, to anyone who knows nothing of agriculture, to be dying. It darkens. It softens. It disintegrates. If you judged only by what your eyes could see, you would bury it and mourn it. But that apparent decay is not the end of the seed's story, it is the only way the seed's story can continue. The husk must break apart before anything can grow through it. That is *galus*. That is *Tisha B'Av*. That is Jewish history, viewed from underground rather than from above.

Which brings us to one of the most famous scenes in all of Chazal. The **Gemara in Makkos (24b)** tells us that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva ascended together to the ruins of Yerushalayim after the destruction of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*. As they approached *Har HaBayis*, they saw something no one should ever have to see. A fox walked out from where the *Kodesh HaKodashim* had stood. The single holiest square foot of ground on earth — the place where, once a year, only the *Kohen Gadol* himself was permitted to enter — had become a den for a wild animal. Picture the silence before anyone spoke. Four of the greatest men of the generation, standing at the edge of the ruins, watching a fox move through the rubble of the Holy of Holies. Then the weeping began. Three of the four sages tore their garments and cried. And Rabbi Akiva

laughed. They turned to him, stunned. "Akiva, why are you laughing?" He turned it back on them *and asked*. "Why are you crying?" "How could we not?," they answered. "This is the place the Torah says only the Kohen Gadol could enter, and now foxes roam freely through it."

Rabbi Akiva told them he felt the same grief they did. But he had never stopped holding two prophecies together. Uriah had foretold that Zion would become a plowed field. Zechariah had foretold that elderly men and women would again sit peacefully in the streets of Jerusalem, and children would once more fill its plazas with the sound of play. Until he saw Uriah's prophecy of destruction fulfilled so precisely, he had not yet seen with his own eyes the assurance that Zechariah's prophecy would be fulfilled with equal precision. But now — now that he had watched Uriah's word come true so completely that a fox could walk through the *Kodesh HaKodashim* — he knew, with total certainty, that Zechariah's word would come true as well. And the other sages answered him with a double language similar to נחמו נחמו : עֲקִיבָא נְחֵמָנִי. "Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us." Listen to what they did not say. They did not say, "You explained the *Churban*." They did not say, "You made us feel better." They said: You comforted us. Because nothing in front of them had changed. The fox was still there. The *Beis HaMikdash* was still in ruins. Rome still ruled the land. What changed was how they were able to see it—*nechama*--reframing. Rabbi Akiva taught them that destruction is not the final chapter when Hashem is the Author of the story. That is exactly what Yeshayahu means by נְחֵמֵנוּ נְחֵמֵנוּ עִמֵּי. The comfort comes before the rebuilding, because comfort begins the moment faith returns.

Chazal note that because *Klal Yisrael* suffered a double destruction, we merit a double consolation, but there may be another layer here as well. The first *nachamu* says: Hashem has not abandoned you. He sees your tears. He hears your prayers. He remembers His covenant. The second *nachamu* says something even deeper: your suffering is not meaningless. Hashem is already weaving it into the story of your redemption. The first comfort says: You are not alone. The second says: Your journey has a destination. Perhaps that is why the seven *haftaros that we read after Tisha B'Av* gradually bring Hashem's voice closer, until He says directly: אֲנִכִּי הוּא מְנַחֵמְכֶם, "I, I am the One Who comforts you." Comfort is itself a journey: first we hear that Hashem has not abandoned us; eventually, we feel His presence ourselves.

Perhaps no one embodied all of this more than the **Klausenberger Rebbe**. He lost his wife. He lost 11 children. He survived Auschwitz. If anyone in the last century had earned the right to despair, it was he. Instead, he built. He rebuilt a *Chassidus* from nothing. He established *yeshivos*. He gave broken survivors, thousands of them, a reason to keep standing. And then he did something that seemed almost impossible: he decided to build a hospital in Eretz Yisrael. People questioned him, a *rebbe* builds Torah, they said, not a hospital. His answer became a philosophy of Jewish history in a single sentence: The Nazis built factories of death. We will build a house of life. Laniado Hospital in Netanya has treated hundreds of thousands of patients. Every child born there, every life saved there, every act of healing performed there is a quiet declaration that Jewish history did not end in Auschwitz. It never did. That does not erase the Holocaust. Nothing can. But it proves that evil never gets the final word. Only Hashem does.

We have watched a version of this in our own lifetime. October 7 was among the darkest days in modern Jewish history. Nothing about that day was good, and its pain remains with us. Yet the Jewish response revealed extraordinary reservoirs of courage, faith, generosity, and unity: reservists reporting without hesitation, communities mobilizing overnight, Jews across the world gathering to *daven*, give, and reconnect. The tragedy was evil. But evil did not determine our response. Hashem does not call evil good; He enables us to bring courage, faith, and renewed life in response to it.

Until now we have spoken about Jewish history. But *Shabbos Nachamu* is not only about what happened to our ancestors. It is about us — about every person in this room, each somewhere along his or her own journey. Some are celebrating. Others are struggling. Some are carrying burdens no one else here knows about — a child who worries you, a parent who worries you, an illness fought quietly, a family under financial strain, a private loneliness behind a public smile.

The Torah never promises that faithful living means easy living. Avraham endured ten tests. Yosef spent years in slavery and in prison. Moshe Rabbeinu himself never entered the Land. Dovid HaMelech lived through betrayal and loss that would break most of us. The question was never "Will there be challenges." The question has always been: What will those challenges make of us?

Rav Soloveitchik, in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, draws a distinction between fate and destiny. Fate is what happens to us; we do not choose it. We did not choose exile. We did not choose the Churban. We did not choose the Holocaust. We did not choose October 7th. And in our own lives, we do not choose every illness, every disappointment, every heartbreak that finds us. But destiny is different. Destiny is our response. The question stops being "Why did this happen to me," and becomes: Now that it has happened, what does Hashem ask of me? How can this bring me closer to my ultimate destination.

That is the shift from *Tisha B'Av* to *Shabbos Nachamu*. On *Tisha B'Av* we cry over what has been lost. On *Shabbos Nachamu* we begin asking how we will help build what comes next, because redemption does not begin when the stones of Yerushalayim are rebuilt. It begins when the hearts of the Jewish people begin rebuilding.

Notice something in the words of our *haftarah*. Hashem does not say, "I will comfort My people." He says נִחַמְנוּ — "comfort, comfort, My people," a command, addressed to the *neviim*, and through them, to us. Perhaps there is a timeless instruction hidden in that grammar. Hashem comforts the Jewish people through Jews. When friends come to sit with a mourner during *shivah*--that is *nachamu*. When someone quietly arranges meals for a family in crisis--that is *nachamu*. When we visit the sick, forgive an old grievance, reconcile with someone we've been estranged from, or make the first phone call after months, even years, of silence — that is *nachamu*. If the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed through *sinas chinam*, it will be rebuilt through *ahavas chinam*. Comfort is not only something we receive. It is something we become.

The **Tzror HaMor** teaches that every generation has its own 42 journeys. Perhaps ours includes the rebirth of the State of Israel. The ingathering of exiles from over 100 countries. A flowering of Torah learning on a scale that would have seemed unimaginable a century ago. And, yes, it also includes painful stops along the way. We do not know where we stand along the road, or how close we are to the final redemption. But we know that the journey has not been abandoned. History is not drifting. Hashem is still leading it.

To sum up, the prophet repeats the word: נִחַמְנוּ נִחַמְנוּ. Perhaps because there are two comforts, and we need both. The first comfort: do not think your pain goes unseen. Hashem knows. Hashem remembers. Hashem is with you. The second, deeper comfort: do not think your pain is meaningless. The journey is not over. Hashem is still writing the story. Rabbi Akiva looked at a fox in the ruins of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* and saw children playing again in the streets of Jerusalem. Yosef looked back at slavery and prison and, finally, recognized the hand of Providence guiding all of it. The Klausenberger Rebbe looked at the ashes of Europe and was inspired to build a hospital, *yeshivos*, and living communities. Our task is not to explain every chapter while we are still living inside it. Our task is to remain faithful until the next chapter is revealed.

When we walk out of *shul* today, our lives may look exactly the way they did when we walked in. The illness may still be there. The family difficulty may still be unresolved. The loneliness may still ache. The war may not be over. Antisemitism is still a huge problem. The *Beis HaMikdash* still stands in ruins. But if we have truly heard Yeshayahu's words, something in us has already changed, even if nothing around us has. We no longer see ourselves as wanderers. We are travelers. *Tisha B'Av* teaches us that the road can be long. *Shabbos Nachamu* teaches us that the road still leads home. A wanderer has no destination. A Jew, even in the deepest *galus*, was never a wanderer, only a traveler, walking with Hashem through 42 journeys that lead, every one of them, back home. May we merit to see the day Zechariah promised, when this fast of the fifth month becomes לְשָׁשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה, when elderly men and women once again sit peacefully in the streets of a rebuilt Yerushalayim, when children fill its courtyards with laughter, and when the ultimate consolation is no longer proclaimed to us by a *navi*, but felt by every last one of us. May we see that day soon, *bimhera viyamenu*.