

Parashat Va'etchanan, 5778, 2018:

Encountering Shabbat Nachamu

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Eliezer ben Sarah, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Tzvi Yoel ben Yocheved and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Shabbat Nachamu's *haftarah* is in many ways the single most longed-for *haftarah* of the entire year. Until now, the Three Weeks and Tisha b'Av have forced us to focus upon the seemingly endless trials and tribulations of our nation's history. It is a dark period, indeed, for any thoughtful, Jewishly-sensitive individual. Suddenly, Tisha b'Av ends, and we are greeted with the prophet Isaiah's clarion call of comfort: "*Nachamu nachamu ami yomar Elokeichem*" (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 40:1, "Console Console My people says your G-d," this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The world as we understand it returns to normal, and we no longer focus exclusively upon the dire times of Jewish history. Finally, our national *aveilut* (mourning) ceases.

Yet, what kind of *nechama* (comfort) has actually been achieved? The *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) remains in ruins, world-wide anti-Semitism grows ever stronger, assimilation and intermarriage continue unabated, and our beloved country, *Medinat Yisrael*, is continually reviled by the nations of the world in their "hallowed halls of justice." In all likelihood, it is precisely this kind of question that led such luminaries as Rashi (1040-1105) and Radak (1160-1235) to explain Isaiah's words as referring to the

Messianic times to come: “All of these comforting statements refer to the future days of the Messiah.” (Radak, *Commentary on Sefer Yeshayahu* 40:1, translation my own). In other words, our people continue to face some of the same existential threats today as when Rashi and Radak penned their interpretations. Without a doubt, as King Solomon declared so long ago, “*Ain davar chadash tachat hashemesh.*” (“There is nothing new under the sun,” *Sefer Kohelet* 1:9)

Given the above, I could readily understand if Isaiah would have written, “*Nachamu ami,*” i.e. using the word “*nachamu*” one time, since authentic *nechama* is yet to come. Why, then, did he proclaim, “*Nachamu nachamu,*” seemingly indicating that we have something to be comforted about now and in our time? Fortunately, an answer is offered by the Midrash:

Why does the text state “*nachamu*” two times? Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi said: “This is because all of their [i.e. the Jewish people’s] punishments were doubled. As Jeremiah said: ‘Destruction upon destruction has occurred’ (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 4:20), ‘She weeps, yea, she weeps in the night’ (*Sefer Eichah* 1:2)... And since all her [i.e. Jerusalem’s] punishments were doubled, so, too, will all of her consolations be doubled. As the text states, ‘*Nachamu nachamu ami.*’” (*Midrash Zuta, Eichah*, Buber edition, 1:14, translation my own)

I believe the Midrash is teaching us that the doubling of “*nachamu*” is a powerful lesson of nearly unlimited hope, and the prologue to the ultimate fulfillment of the verse, “For Your salvation, I hope, O L-rd,” uttered by Jacob toward the dawn of Jewish existence. (*Sefer Bereishit* 49:18) Moreover, Isaiah is promising us, “Never fear!” Even though the Messianic period has not yet arrived, when the *Mashiach* (Messiah) does come, we will not only be comforted measure for measure for each of the bitter and heart-rending periods of Jewish history, instead, we will be comforted twofold in measure. At long last we will witness the fulfillment of Zechariah’s stirring words, “And the L-rd shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall the L-rd be one, and His name one.” (14:9)

With the Almighty's bountiful mercy and our fervent desire, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the coming of the *Mashiach*, the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the complete fulfillment of Isaiah's words, "*Nachamu nachamu ami*," soon and in our time. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.