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MONTHLY PARSHA SHEET

Parshas Veeschanan
 פרשת ואתחנן
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In The Darkness There Is Clarity

By Rabbi Moshe Zionce

The Medrash (Eichah Rabbah) relates that the double expression of consolation in our Haftorah "Nachamu, nachamu" is to console Klal Yisroel for the two-fold destruction that was experienced at the time of the destruction. This double destruction was in response to a "doubling" of transgressions. "Chet, chatah Yerushalayim," Yirmiyahu lamented.

I often wonder, why are we worthy of consolation? Has Klal Yisroel repented for its transgressions? The Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinum - baseless hatred. Do we as a nation practice ahavas chinum - baseless love in rectification of our previous faults? Regrettably, it would seem this is not the case. Chazal tell us that any generation in which the Beis HaMikdash is not rebuilt, is considered as if they have destroyed it. Sadly, it would seem that we continue in our negative ways.

In response to our transgressions the enemy was granted the ability to be victorious over us. They breached the Bais Hamikdash, entered the Heichal and discovered the two kruvim above the aron, locked in an embrace. In ignorance our destroyers mocked the sight as a seemingly juvenile depiction found in our "Holy of Holies" (Yoma 54b).

The Gemara in Bava Basra (99a) relates that the kruvim were a miraculous reflection of our relationship with Hashem. When Klal Yisrael was close to Hashem, the kruvim would face each other. When Klal Yisroel was far, the kruvim turned away from one another. How could it be that the kruvim were embraced on this very day of the destruction - a day when an apparent great distance was forged between Hashem and His people?

The answer to this question reveals a deep insight into our relationship with Hashem. Indeed, at the time of the destruction Hashem's love for His people was immense. This can be compared to the love a parent experiences at the time of a child's retribution.

It does not require an intense love to reward a child for an accomplishment. However, it takes a profoundly greater love for a father to punish a child if he is so deserving. It is much easier for a parent to forego the punishment than to administer one. It is only through an intense love that the parent disciplines the child with the child's best interests at heart. Hence, the time of the reprimand is the time of an unparalleled intimate relationship between father and child.

However, the child does not feel this intense love at the time that the punishment is being carried out. At that time, the pain is far too great. It is only in retrospect, through maturity that the child is able to look back and assess the situation, and to feel the profound love of his father.

This is a secret of the month called Av, meaning Father.

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Shabbos Nachamu

By Rabbi Meir Goldberg

Summer is here. The children frolic gleefully in the pool, splashing each other excitedly as they bask in the radiant sunshine. Parents relax with an icy beverage in hand as they enjoy a well earned rest from months of toil. The pungent smell of a late afternoon barbeque wafts through the air as friends reminisce of summers past.

But all isn't well. The sad day of Tisha B'av soon arrives. The mourning for the Bais Hamikdash and wailing for the shechina scream out from before the Kosel. Jews of all stripes - Ashkenazim and Sefardim, Chassidische and Litvishe, black hats, white kipot serugot and nah nach yarmulkas - all converge to cry out to Hashem to take us back, to rebuild His shattered house, the symbol of our eternal love for Him and Him for us.



A similar theme is reflected in the current Jewish scene. The frum world has built beautiful edifices of Torah and Chesed. Yeshivos are full to capacity with talmidei chachamim plumbing the depths of the most complex sugyos in Shas. Bais Yaakovs educate cadres of idealistic young women who yearn for a Torah life. Gmach lists go on and on with people performing every type of chesed imaginable. One only needs to have a car stopped at the side of the road with the driver wearing a yarmulke to count how many other frum Jews will pull over.

Yet in the non frum world we see a very different picture. Our secular brothers and sisters know nothing of their glorious ancestral past. They excel in every area of life other than the most important one - Judaism. They haven't the haziest notion of what Torah is or why it's important. Even their relationship to Eretz Yisrael, once thought to be the one unbreakable bond for every secular Jew, is for the most part, no longer there. The ravages of assimilation and intermarriage are evident everywhere as one meets more and more Jews with names like Christenson and Stevens and non Jews with names like Sussman and Goldberg.

Yet there is hope. Those who are sitting on the ground at the Kosel will get up and rejoice seven days later on one of the happiest days of the year, the 15th of Av. We will fervently sing songs of yearning for Hashem on motzai Shabbos parshas nachamu. "Nachamu nachamu ami," will resonate.

There is hope for our secular brethren as well. There is a hunger in the land for the dvar Hashem. Not only are there hundreds of mekarvim out in the trenches, but they are now joined by baalei batim, bnei yeshiva, Jews of all stripes, inspired to reach out and teach their fellow Jew.

Let us draw inspiration from the following amazing story. Rabbi Benzion Klatzko is a national campus kiruv director and is also the founder of the site www.shabbat.com / seeyouonshabbos.com, a website which matches frum families with Jews of all backgrounds for Shabbos placement. Together with his family, the Klatzko's host dozens of students every Shabbos. R' Klatzko decided that he needed a sefer Torah in order to have a minyan in his house for Shabbos shacharis. He looked around and saw an ad for a sefer Torah with a price tag of \$35,000. He called the owner and they set up a time to meet. The owner was a middle aged man who wasn't frum. This man took out a very small sefer Torah with a beautiful ksav still in relatively good condition. He explained that the Torah was several hundred years old and belonged to

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Perhaps this is our consolation the Shabbos following Tisha B'Av. Now, days later, after the fire has been extinguished and the dust has settled, we are able to internalize the profound love Hashem had and has for us, His children. We, in response to His great love, experience a deep love and appreciation for Him. This is the power of the Jew in exile; to perceive the intense light looming through the pitch of the rubble.

In this week's parsha Vaeschanan, we read the Shemah. "Shemah Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Achad." We cover our eyes when we recite it in teffilah. There is a beautiful Chassidish approach that explains that the hand covers the eyes at this time because only in darkness can one truly perceive the Oneness of Hashem. Perhaps this is why the next passuk begins with, "V'ahavta Es Hashem Elokecha Bechol Levavcha... You will love Hashem your G-d with all your soul..." Like the galos, it is through the intense perception in the darkness that Yisroel attains the level of a deep love for Hashem.

We still live deep in the dark exile, detached from our less affiliated brethren and they in turn are detached from Yiddishkeit.

Megilas Eicha refers to Tisha B'Av as a Moed, a Yom Tov. The Ohel Moed was the Tent of Meeting. There Jews were united with Hashem. This is what a Tisha B'Av is meant to accomplish; a Oneness with our Father in Heaven. Inside the Ohel Moed embraced the kruvim, where together through love, two united as one.

Perhaps this is our double consolation. It is Hashem and us. It is man united with his fellow neighbor. There remains a great schism amongst Klal Yisroel today. We still live deep in the dark exile, detached from our less affiliated brethren and they in turn are detached from Yiddishkeit. Although many are fortunate to experience a deep relationship with Hashem, most Jews feel and have little connection to their Father in Heaven. There is no consolation for them as they don't even feel the pain.

In 1950, the intermarriage rate in the U.S. was 6%. Today it is over 52% and rising. Two million Jews do not identify themselves as Jewish. Two million Jews that do, have no connection to anything Jewish. With every Jewish wedding, there are double as many intermarriages. 625,000 Jews in North America practice other religions. Only 11% of Jews in the U.S. go to shul. Every day tens of mixed marriages take place, which means that in the time it took you to read this, some of our brethren were lost, seemingly forever.

However, in the darkness there is clarity. Klal Yisroel for the first time in recent history has a strategy to combat the overwhelming tide of assimilation. Project Inspire endeavors to help each and every one of us reach out to our neighbors, co-workers and relatives through educational programming and initiatives. Hashem's children do not know their Father. Together we can rectify the shortcomings of Klal Yisroel by relating to each other through ahavas chinum. And together we can merit Moshiach Tzidkenu, and a time when there will no longer be a need for consolation. **PI**

Good Shabbos,

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his father, a holocaust survivor who became a Rav in a dying community in the Catskills. As the shul closed the son inherited the sefer Torah. However, he never felt a connection to his father or Torah. His father came from a different world and the son couldn't get anything from him. As Rabbi Klatzko explained that the Torah would be used to help inspire young Jews the man began to cry.

"When I was young I wish I had a Rabbi like you to inspire me and to explain to me why Judaism was important. I grew up completely disconnected and I married a Buddhist woman. I want you to have this Torah for free and to use it to inspire young Jews."

Rabbi Klatzko, sefer Torah in hand, started to look for an appropriate aron kodesh. He saw an ad under a section entitled "Jewish Christian Relics." He called the owner and got a picture of the Aron. It was a beautiful hand carved small wooden Aron about the right size for his sefer Torah. However, he noticed a cross on the top. He called the owner back and asked him why there was a cross on top of the Aron. He was told that this Aron had belonged to Jews but after the holocaust had fallen into the hands of a Catholic priest who slapped a cross on top of it. Rabbi Klatzko then noticed a small piece on the bottom of the Aron. The owner's sent him a close up picture of the Aron where Rabbi Klatzko made out the words, "Hinei lo yanum velo yishon shomer Yisroel." Heshem, the Guardian of Israel, neither sleeps nor slumbers."

"How appropriate," thought Rabbi Klatzko as he purchased the Aron. "This Aron was so lovingly crafted by a G-d fearing Jew in Poland and then was taken by a priest and was humiliated by having a cross put on it. Hashem doesn't sleep and ensured that it would be going back into the correct hands to be used in order to inspire Jews."

But the story does not end here. After the Sefer Torah and Aron were purchased, the Klatzko's got a call from a woman asking them to take in a teenage girl who was had come from an abusive home. They readily agreed to host her for the entire Yom Tov of Sukkos. When the girl came to their door she was in bad shape. She always looked down to the floor and would not communicate with anyone. However, as Sukkos wore on she began to open up. By the end of Sukkos she was a changed person who was more sociable and friendly. Rabbi Klatzko asked her what it was that caused her to open up so much over sukkos. She replied,

"When you said over the stories of the Aron and Sefer Torah I was very inspired. Every night when everyone was asleep, I would tiptoe down the steps and go over to the Aron Kodesh. I would start to touch its beautifully crafted wood and I would cry out to Hashem from the depths of my heart. I would say, 'Please Hashem, this Torah which was lovingly written by a Sofer, eventually fell into the wrong hands and was lost. But You made sure it found its way back to a loving home and a proper place. And this Aron Kodesh which was lovingly carved by a G-d fearing carpenter fell into the wrong hands and was spiritually abused by the priest. But You also made sure it found its place and went home. Please help me as well. I was lovingly created by you, but I ended up in a place where I was mistreated and abused. I'm unloved and I have nobody who cares for me. Please help me find a place where I will be loved and cherished like this sefer Torah and Aron.' "As I said this teffilah every night," she continued, "I felt hope that Hashem would help me in my situation."

Klal Yisroel is in a very similar situation to this girl. 70 years ago we were abused, humiliated and exterminated by the Nazis ymsh"m. But Hashem had mercy on us and with siyata dishmaya we rebuilt our communities and mosdos incredibly quickly. But there is another chelek of klal Yisroel which has had a different experience. North American Jews are currently experiencing spiritual abuse and extermination. It is up to us to do our utmost to lovingly reach out to them and help them find their way home back to Avinu Shebashamayim. **PI**

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