

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

VA'ETCHANAN-NACHAMU 5785

The Wholeness of Incompleteness

How are we to understand the message of nechama, consolation, which follows the mournful Tish'a B'Av commemoration? Here is one of many explanations.

Our Parsha begins with the plaintive prayer of Moshe to Gd, pleading to be allowed to enter Israel. The request is not granted. Or, is it? True, Moshe would not cross the Jordan, but Gd does beckon him to ascend the mountain and from there, view the entire Land (3:27). But according to our Sages, HaShem showed Moshe much more. He gifted him with the prophecy to see all the events which were destined to occur to Israel until the end of days (B'rachot 32b, Sifrei 357). And Moshe was consoled. How can this to be understood?

Additionally, another question. Moshe persisted and prayed 515 tefillot to HaShem to be able to enter Israel (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeilech, 940). To this, the Midrash (D'varim Rabba 11:10) adds that Moshe said, "'Master of the world, if I myself cannot enter Eretz Yisrael, at least let me enter like an animal of the field to roam the

land.' HaShem said, 'Do not entreat me any longer.' Then Moshe pleaded, 'Let me be in this world like a bird that flies to the four corners of the world.' Again, HaShem told him, 'Do not pray to me anymore.'" Rav Shach asks: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu wish to remain in the world like an animal or a bird? What quality of life would that be? He answers that every living being has a specific mission in life through which the honor of HaShem is increased and spread. Even though a huge reward awaited Moshe in the eternal world, he understood a still deeper truth. If we are created to fulfill the will of HaShem, then every moment, every breath, every act of service is priceless! Even a bird fulfills HaShem's will. Moshe wasn't asking for honor or fame; he just wanted one more chance to serve his Maker. Any mission; any form, even as a simple creature in the field. And, again, when HaShem refused his request, and Gd afforded him the great vision of the future, Moshe apparently was comforted. Why?

Rav Soloveitchik zt"l, has poignantly noted the great paradox of man: that the greater the goal, the loftier the ambition - the greater the likelihood of failure. In man's efforts to reach the unreachable - to scale the highest peaks - he will inevitably experience defeat. And this is not necessarily as tragic as it sounds. As one colleague once put it: "The unfinished work of

one person may be infinitely more important than the completed task of another. All great figures in history have been failures in the short run, heroes in the long run." Consider: David beseeched, "One thing I ask of Gd, it is this that I seek, to dwell in the house of HaShem all the days of my life ..." And yet, the construction of the Beit HaMikdash would not be his to build. Avraham dreamt of seeing the fulfillment of Gd's promise of having a family whose numbers would compare to the stars of the Heaven and the sands of the sea. But the realization of that pledge would be denied him.

"(Indeed), the measure of a person, as we Jews have understood it, is not whether he finishes his assignment - who does? - but whether he has a task that is too noble, too daring, too lofty for any one person to complete within a lifetime." R. Tarfon said it well (Pirkei Avot 2:21), "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it..."

Moshe longed to enter the Promised Land, and his consolation would be in being granted the great vision to see how all his efforts would eventually play out in history, how his unfinished work would be completed by future generations - by a Yehoshua, by a Shlomo HaMelech, by a Rabbi Akiva, and ... by us! And while we are not granted such a prophecy as was gifted to Moshe, we must also believe

that no prayer ultimately goes unanswered, that no tear shed is ever in vain, and that all our sacrificing is not for naught. All our unmet goals, all our incomplete tasks, all our unfinished aspirations, can still - and must - inspire others to grasp the baton from our tired and wrinkled hand and boldly continue on.

This insight may also explain the strange juxtaposition of Moshe's setting aside the AREI MIKLAT (cities of refuge) on the east side of the Jordan and the well-known verse, "And this is the Torah which Moshe set before the children of Yisrael" (4:44). Often when contemplating the vast enormity of the Torah, both in its never-ending gushing forth of information along with its unfathomable depths, we feel completely at a loss to even begin to understand its complexities and wisdom. And if, by some measure, we could manage to comprehend some of this sacred knowledge, how much of the totality of Torah could we ever hope to grasp in our finite years in this world? Enter Moshe, and in one of his last actions prior to his death, he arranges for the three cities of refuge on Eiver HaYarden even though they would not become operative until the remaining three in Israel proper would be set up. As the Talmud relates (Makot 10a), Moshe declaims, "A commandment that is possible to fulfill, I shall fulfill."

Moshe's extraordinary celebration of the "part", of the "portion", elevated a sobering reality to a truism of rich meaning. To wit: that there is a certain poignant "wholeness" to "incompleteness". Even if we will never - by definition - ever able to comprehend the infinite entirety of Torah, whatever limited amount we are able to understand, that accomplishment is accorded a "wholeness" for which we are rewarded. Much like the partial, incomplete designation of the AREI MIKLAT by Moshe, the deed was nonetheless a great mitzva. Indeed, this "fragment" - "this [too] - V'ZOT HATORAH - is the Torah which Moshe set before the children of Yisrael."

In this regard, the meditation by the poet Eugene O'Neil on the meaning of success and failure is most apt. Although perhaps a bit on the severe side, it nevertheless captures this very idea. "The tragedy of life is what makes it worthwhile. I think that any life which merits living lies in the effort to realize some dream, and the higher that dream is, the harder it is to realize. Most decidedly we must all have our dreams. If one hasn't them, one might as well be dead. The only success is in failure. Any man who has a big enough dream must be a failure and must accept that as one of the conditions of being alive. If ever he thinks for a moment that he is a success, then he is finished."

And so, Moshe, in his waning days, remains unsatisfied, forever longing, still dreaming the great dream, with his mission to enter the Promised Land unfulfilled, and yet, in the depth of his great saintly soul, he no doubt experienced - fortunately by the voice of the Almighty - the wondrous consolation of the sacred wholeness of the incomplete.

Rav Yaakov Haber tells of his once conversation with HaRav Shach zt"l: "I have often told the story of my visit, a few years ago, to Rav Eliezer Shach of blessed memory. He was around one hundred years old at the time. After our discussion he asked me what sefer I was holding in my hand. I showed him the sefer; it happened to be one of the classic volumes of Rav Tzadok HaKohen. The Rosh Yeshiva told me that he never learned any of the works of Rav Tzadok, and as he spoke, he began to cry. He explained that he no longer had the strength to study anything new and that made him cry. At one hundred years old, after mastering most of Torah, after studying for five generations with the greatest Gedolim and after building one of the greatest Yeshivot on the face of the Earth, he cried because he didn't have the strength for something new." And yet, and yet, the Torah greatness of Rav Shach is the stuff of legend.

Did Moshe also cry? Perhaps. But, precisely because of his categorical faithfulness to HaShem, even in death, he remains the greatest of all our prophets and teachers!

Our Haftora this Shabbat begins with the famous words of Yeshayahu (40:1), NACHAMU, NACHAMU AMI - "Comfort, Comfort My People ..." After the destruction of the Temple, we were comforted once. For the second and ultimate nechama, we are still waiting. But, Be"H, it will come! The Talmud tells (B'rachot 6b) us that each person is charged to place just one block into the building of the Beit HaMikdash. Your brick, my brick - that's all, just one brick of the total - and together, over time, with all the small single bricks taken together, the redemption will surely come!

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## Sparks of Compassion

From Rav Elimelech Biderman's Torah Wellsprings (Va'etchanan 5785), the following Torah insight: It states in this week's Parsha (4:30), BATZAR L'CHA... When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you, at the end of days..." The Chesed I'Avraham of Radomsk zt'l, explains, BATZAR L'CHA, when it appears to you as though it is a tragedy. However, B'ACHARIT HAYAMIM, at the end of days, you will see that it was all chesed, all for your good. Then

it will be like someone who finds a treasure. He writes, "Just as when one finds a large treasure, he is thrilled, so too, a person will rejoice at the misfortunes he had to endure in the past. He will then understand how all that transpired was for the good." Therefore, it states (Yeshayahu 40:1) NACHAMU NACHAMU..., "Comfort, comfort My nation, says your Gd." YOMAR is written in future tense, and is a soft-spoken expression (YOMAR, in contrast to Y'DABEIR. (ELOKIM is HaShem's name that represents MIDAT HADIN, strict justice. Thus, YOMAR ELOKEICHEM means that in the future, people will say and understand that even the din was all kindness. It was a hidden treasure, all for our good.

Rav Biderman continues: "It states, (4:34), Everything HaShem, your Gd, did for you ... before your eyes.' Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh zt'l, explains that the hardships of exile are L'EINECHA, to your eyes, how you perceive them. In actuality, they were all for the good. There will come a time when we will recognize this. It states (4:7), For which is a great nation that has a Gd Who is close to it...' The Sfas Emes taught, ELOKIM K'ROVIM EILAV tells us that even when HaShem treats us with the attribute of ELOKIM, which is midat hadin, even then, it is all good, because, HaShem is close to us. It is all love, and for their good. As it

states (Tehillim 73:1), ACH TOV L'YISRAEL ELOKIM, which indicates that even when it is ELOKIM, the attribute of din and harsh justice, even then, it is only goodness for Yisrael. The word CHEIMA, anger, is the acronym for (Tehillim 33:5) CHESED HASHEM MAL'A HA'ARETZ, HaShem's kindness fills the Earth."

The above, of course, is a very wonderful and true observation. However, to sustain such a belief in the face of so much hardship and suffering is exceedingly difficult. In a powerful essay by Rav Aharon David of the Mir (D'vorim, Gilyon 38), the following fundamental idea is explained, which I present in brief with my own small additions.

R. Eliahu Palombo (19th c., Turkey) in his Yad HaMelech on Rambam's Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Y'sodei Ha-Torah 7:4), asks as follows: If, as the Talmud states (P'sachim 117a) that prophecy can only be conferred upon a person if and when he experiences simcha, profound joy, how then was Yirmiyahu able to compose Megilat Eicha, the prophetic book which laments the destruction of the First Temple - clearly one of extreme sadness? Rav David attempts to answer the question by posing another. In Eicha (2:19), we read: KUMI RONI BALAYLA - Arise, sing in the night." If the context is one of grief and crying, why does the prophet employ the word RONI which

means singing? Rav Shimshon Pincus (Shiurim b'Tefila, RINA, OT YUD) proposes that HaShem's mercy for us is so ubiquitous that if we are perceptive enough, we can discern this love and compassion even amidst the harshest of circumstances. Among the many proofs for this assertion is the very text of Eicha itself. In the third perek, there are 12 verses which strike a completely different tone. (3:21-32)

But this do I call to mind; Therefore I have hope:

The kindness of the Lord has not ended, His mercies are not spent.

They are renewed every morning - Ample is Your grace!

"The Lord is my portion", I say with full heart; Therefore will I hope in Him.

The LORD is good to those who trust in Him; To the one who seeks Him;

It is good to wait patiently; until rescue comes from the Lord.

It is good for a man, when young; to bear a yoke;

Let him sit alone and be patient; When He has laid it upon him.

Let him put his mouth to the dust - There may yet be hope.

Let him offer his cheek to the smiter; Let him be surfeited with mockery.

For the Lord does not Reject forever,  
But [He] first afflicts, then pardons in  
His abundant kindness.

This message of hope amid despair is obviously not an easy religious belief to implement, especially when one is in the painful throes of some stressful and heartbreaking situation. But our great moral teachers have taught us that there are always enough sparks of salvation, small clandestine miracles, which if we but open our eyes and souls to see, can enable us to sing even in the dark nights of affliction and misery - KUMI RONI BALAYLA.

In fact, a strong argument can be made that the common theme of six events (Ta'anit 30b-31a) that occurred on the 15th of Av - TU b'Av, which the Mishna describes as one of the most joyous days in the Jewish year (Ta'anit 4:8), is this message of recurring hope and reconciliation. For example, even in the wake of the horrific slaughter of Beitar (by the Romans in 135ce), one of the six events associated with TU b'Av, the thousands upon thousands of dead corpses did not decompose and were given a dignified burial. Remarkably, as the Talmud states (B'rachot 48b), the 4th blessing in the Birchat HaMazon was actually enacted to commemorate this miracle. But why? The answer: to remind the Jew when he concludes a

meal - which means every day - that even when catastrophe strikes and unspeakable devastation occurs, HaShem performs a miracle to let us know that He is here, and it is this ever-present Divine Immanence that merits a special blessing - HATOV V'HAMEITIV, HaShem, Who is good and does good [for all]!

Here in Israel and for Jews throughout the world, we are presently experiencing onslaughts of hatred and worse, the levels of which are unprecedented. And yet, as so many have attested in amazingly true stories, HaShem's Presence can be felt in the smallest of ways, shining through the lattices of current events - little miracles, Divine smiles, unexpected rescues - all to assure us that He has and will never abandon our people!

And that is our consolation for this Shabbat Nachamu. 🙌