

Message from the Haftara

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Comforting God

NACHAMU

NACHAMU NACHAMU AMI – “Comfort, comfort My people” (Yishayahu 40:1). With these words we begin the SHIV'A D'NECHEMTA, the seven haftarot of consolation that carry us from Tish'a b'Av to Rosh HaShana.

At the very outset, it is striking that the word NACHAMU is repeated. This doubling is not unique to our haftara. Across these seven weeks, words of consolation repeatedly appear in pairs. The haftara for Sho-f'tim opens, “It is I, I who comfort you” (51:12), while the haftara for Nitzavim declares, “I shall rejoice, rejoice in the Lord” (61:10). This insistent language of consolation demands explanation.

At a basic level, the repetition denotes intensification. The coming redemption will be so all-encompassing and overwhelming that the words must double to match its scale. But I believe there is an even deeper message embedded here: the word NACHAMU appears twice because there are two distinct parties in need of comfort.

The first, obviously, is the Jewish

people. We are the ones who were exiled, who watched the Temples burn, and who have carried the painful weight of that loss and subsequent persecutions across centuries. But there is a second party in need of consolation, and that is God Himself. Because we have been taught that the Divine Presence goes into exile whenever the Jewish people go into exile. This is stated plainly in the Gemara: “Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed be He. For every place to which they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them” (Bavli Megila 29a).

The Midrash makes this point even more poignantly: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘If a man’s wife dies, who must be comforted? Is it not the man himself? So too here: Zion is imprisoned in darkness; it is I who must be comforted. Comfort Me, comfort Me, My people” (Yalkut Shimoni, Yishayahu 443). Read this way, the verse is not merely an instruction to the prophet to console the nation; it is God turning to His people and asking to be consoled by them.

On a more mystical plane, the trauma of destruction and exile causes a divinely imposed bifurcation in the perceived wholeness of God. One aspect of the Divine remains trans-

cedent in the heavens, while another aspect descends to dwell closely with the Jewish people, accompanying them through every trial. Tradition describes these as the masculine and feminine dimensions of the Divine: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the transcendent, masculine dimension, remains above, while the Shechina, the immanent, feminine dimension, dwells below with the Jewish people in exile, seemingly torn from one another.

Recognition of this rift is woven throughout our prayers. One place where it is quietly encoded is in our Shabbat amidot. In the Kedushat HaYom of the evening Amida, the text concludes with V'YANUCHU VAH (“and they shall rest within her”), focusing on the feminine dimension of the Divine. During the morning service, we say V'YANUCHU VO – “and they shall rest in him”. Finally, at Mincha, as Shabbat begins to reach its spiritual pinnacle, the two dimensions are drawn together in a blessing that opens “You are One and Your Name is One” and ends with the collective plural: V'YANUCHU VAM, “and they shall rest within them”. That moment, tucked into the fading light of Shabbat afternoon, evokes the ultimate reunion of the Divine. Every week, we rehearse in miniature the cosmic reunification we await in full.

The message of NACHAMU NACHAMU is therefore twofold: Our comfort must be directed toward the Jewish people and toward God simultaneously. Both must be redeemed. The uniqueness of our relationship with God lies precisely in this mutual resilience; in His refusal to abandon us, even in the face of the darkest challenges.

This is the misconception that the doubled word protects us from. When we endure difficult times – and our history has known more than its share – it does not mean that God is ignoring us. It does not mean that we have lost the capacity to reach upward and be heard. The line of communication may be strained by pain, but it persists. The connection was never severed. God did not remain behind in Jerusalem while we were banished to Babylon and Spain and Poland; He came out into the dark alongside us. He shares our pain and awaits our return, echoed in the words of Psalm 91 (v. 15): “I will be with them in distress.”

This is both a demanding idea and a liberating one. It means we are not mere petitioners standing outside a closed door, hoping someone inside will notice our cries. We are active partners in a relationship that has been strained but never severed. Consolation will not simply be handed down to us from a distance; it is a

collaborative act - something we offer to God as much as we receive from Him.

Shabbat Nachamu opens with a double call because two entities must be renewed: the Jewish people and God. And when they are finally reunited, the final redemptive process will have arrived. 