

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Shoftim

The seven weeks between *Tisha b'Av* and *Rosh haShana* are called the *Sheva d'Nechemta*. *Nechemta's* root is *nechamah*. This word is often translated as comfort or consolation. The three week period that leads up to *Tisha'h b'Av* is a process of mourning the destruction of the Temples, as well as every other calamity that has befallen the Jewish people throughout history. The seven weeks of *nechamah* is the opportunity for us to come to terms with the destruction we have suffered throughout our history. The question is, how can we resolve suffering and difficulties? How can we attain a measure of *nechamah*? How can we change our perspective so that we can come to terms with our reality? The *parshiot* and *haftorot* that we have been reading help us solve this challenge.

Traditionally, human suffering is considered a function of *din* (the trait of strict judgment). Perhaps one of the challenges of coping with *din* is that we are uncomfortable being judged. Conceivably, we are uncomfortable with the Judge. We are unsure of the relationship that we have with the One who determines reward and punishment. Additionally, we worry and agonize about G-d's opinion of us. Perhaps we feel down and depressed. We have already suffered thousands of years of exile and persecution. Is there no end in sight? Has He abandoned us? Has He decided we are not worthy?

G-d responds with, "*nachamu nachamu ami*" – be comforted My people [Isaiah 40:1]. The fact that we are *His people* is of comfort. Even so, we still find room to complain "*vaTomer Zion Azavani Hashem*, - G-d has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me" [Isaiah 49:14]. Again we are reassured, "*Anochi Anochi Hu Menachemchem*" - "It is I, I am He who comforts you" [Isaiah 51:12]. The fact that we are His people is comforting because it reminds us of a perspective that enables consolation. It enables us a new outlook on life.

The Parshiot we read during these seven weeks are replete with words and verses alluding to our unique relationship with G-d. In *Parshat va'Etchanan* we read: "*Shemah Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*." According to Kabbalistic sources, each name of G-d represents a different facet of the way He interacts with humanity. The name YKVK represents G-d's trait of *rachamim* - mercy. The name *Elokim* indicates *Din* – strict judgment. At times, G-d acts with us in a merciful manner, while at other times, He appears to be harsh. Are there two separate gods? No, *Hashem Echad* – G-d is One. G-d is unchanging. It is we who change and thus G-d responds to us in an appropriate manner. It is comforting to know that G-d is unchanging. The rules of the game remain the same. The verse in the aforementioned Parsha states: "For what great nation is there that has G-d so near to it, as the L-rd our G-d is at all times that we call upon Him?" [Deut. 4:7].



JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

continued ...

G-d is unchanging. In every situation G-d is close to us and we are His *karov* (relative). However, the question remains. What about the times that appear to be *Din*? Where is the *kurvah*? Where is G-d's closeness at times of loss, suffering and destruction?

The Torah clues us in when it tells us in *Parshat Ekev*, "You shall know in your heart, that just as a man chastises his son, so does the L-rd, your G-d, chastise you" [Deut 8:5] G-d disciplines us as a parent disciplines a child. *Meshach Chachmah* explains, just as when a father disciplines a son, the lesson is measured and intentional, so too G-d steers us onto the correct path by acting in a disciplinary manner. Contrast this with a different relationship; a slave and a master, wherein the slave's beatings are without measure and without purpose. The verse in Proverbs states as much very pithily: "For the Lord chastens the one He loves, as a father placates a son" [3:12].

The Gaon of Vilna explains that in a relationship without meaning and purpose, in a case of two people who are past the point of caring, there is no communication, there is no contact. It is only when I care about someone that I do whatever I can to repair and sustain the relationship. At times, this calls for conflict. G-d's message is a product of Love! He still cares. If He did not care, He would leave us alone.

One final verse from the previous *Parshiot*. The verse states explicitly in *Parshat Ekev* "You are children of the Lord, your God" [Deut 14:1].

It was mentioned above that these seven weeks of *nechamah* take us from *Tisha b'Av* to *Rosh haShana*. Considering all that is presented here, the connection between *nechamah* and *Rosh haShana* is clear. The famous song "Avinu Malkeinu - our Father, our King, is the focal point of the Holiday. *Avinu* comes before *Malkeinu*; we are children before we are servants. The month of *Av* is referred to as *Menachem Av*, the Consoling Father. The *din* of *Av*, the suffering, oftentimes occurs during the month called *Menachem Av*. If we recognize that the harsh reality is not random and uncontrolled, but rather a directive issued by our Father, than it may be that in the very admonishment of our father, we feel *nechamah* – even in the very teeth of the difficulties.

With this perspective on suffering we can we can attain *nechamah*, we can reorient ourselves and find meaning in difficulty. If we believe that we are the children of Hashem and we come to terms with this during the seven weeks of *nechamah*, than we can truly proclaim *Avinu Malkeinu* on *Rosh HaShanah*.

Shabbat Shalom

JSN PARSHA TEAM

3921 Fabian Way Suite A-017
(650) 493-5764



Palo Alto, CA 94303
www.jsn.info