

Nachamu Nachamu Ami: Our Destiny

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

In the haftorah of Shabbat Nachamu, the prophet Yeshaya consoles the Jewish people, "Be comforted, be comforted, my people." The suffering of exile and the sins that brought it about are part of a journey. The day will come when we will see that it was all meant to bring us to our destiny. This is true for *geulat haprat* (individual redemption) as well as *geulat haklal* (national redemption). The Malbim says Hashem is speaking specifically to the prophets. He tells them, "You must comfort my people. You must tell them that the *geulah* will eventually come, either because of their merits or because they received their just punishment and achieved their rectification"

The Gemara writes that whenever Hashem remembers our sins he remembers the sin of the golden calf. The Lubliner Rav explains that the golden calf did not lead to our end. In fact Klal Yisrael gained atonement. Similarly, however far we fall there is always hope for return.

The prophet Yeshaya says further, "Speak to Yerushalayim's heart and call out to her that her time has been filled and her sins have been appeased." The heart of Yerushalayim is our ability to accept emotionally, not just rationally, that the process of exile was worth it. Part of the exhilaration that a runner experiences is not only the knowledge that he's reaching his goal, but the feeling of pushing his limits and seeing how far he can go. We grow by facing challenges. It's not just a trade-off, it's an expansion. This is our consolation.

The prophet Yeshaya continues, "There's a voice calling out in the desert, clear the way for Hashem, straighten out the plain, make a path for Him." In the end we will be comforted seeing that Hashem led us exactly where we needed to go. Rashi says this road is meant to return us from exile. At the seder we say, "Next year in Yerushalayim," but do we mean it? Do we find living in exile easier? The Gemara teaches that a person who lives outside Israel is considered an idol worshipper because he can only achieve an indirect relationship with Hashem. There's no parallel to the Divine intervention inherent in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Navi says, "Every valley will be uplifted and every mountain and high place will go down and what is crooked will become straight." There are many obstacles, both material and spiritual, that will prevent a person from coming to Israel. They are compared to hills and valleys. But in the end Hashem will take them all away and reveal His presence.

"The grass will dry and the flowers will wilt but the word of Hashem will be established forever." No matter how much we suffer in exile, we must keep our spirits up. The mishna says the beginning of defeat is retreat. When we let ourselves despair, we prolong the journey towards our destiny.

"On a high mountain I'll go up to you, you who give good news to Tzion. Uplift your voice powerfully, you who bring good news to Yerushalayim. Lift up your voice loudly. Don't

be afraid. Say to the cities of Yehuda, behold here is Hashem." The Radak explains that just as a person who wants his voice to be heard will stand in a high place, our yearning for Hashem will elevate us to be willing to hear the prophecy that was given to us. Ultimately we will be redeemed and we will return.

"Behold Hashem will come with force. And his outstretched hand will be the source of his dominion. And his reward is with him and his action and repayment is before him." Hashem will reward the *tzaddikim*. He will shepherd us like a shepherd who gathers in his sheep. When Mashiach comes, Hashem's greatness will touch everyone at whatever level they're at. We will discover our *tikkun*, the messianic part within us that's redeemable. We will find our way back because Hashem will make the mountains low and the valleys high. We must not be afraid if we see people that seem irredeemable or distant.

"Who is there from whom we could take counsel, who could give us the understanding to go in the way Hashem has measured out?" The Torah itself is our guiding light in exile. It tells us how to respond to every possible life situation. We can't be taken in by the nation's threats or predictions. They are like dust on a scale. We don't understand Hashem's way but we have to be attuned to miracles. We are a nation that lives beyond the laws of nature.

Each one of us is created for a specific purpose. We are all redeemable and none of us will be left behind.

Marriage: The Eternal Structure

Based on a Naaleh.com structure by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Shem Mishmuel quotes a perplexing Gemara in Brachot. The Rabbis asked Rav Hamnuna to sing a song at a wedding and he began to sing, "Woe to us people, we will die. Where is the Torah and *mitzvot* that will protect us?" Why did Rav Hamnuna sing such a mournful tune at a wedding?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that marriage is the antithesis of death. It is a *binyan adei ad*, an eternal structure that is created through

the couple's descendants. In this world, both the soul and body can ascend by making the right choices. After death, the soul can no longer be sanctified by engaging and lifting physicality. If it didn't achieve what it needed to on this world it cannot do it anymore after death. But the Gemara says there is a way out. If a couple's children continue to do *mitzvot* it is as if the parents never died and their souls will continue to ascend in heaven. That's why Rav Hamnuna mentioned death

and *mitzvot*. Clearly the *mitzvah of peru urevu*, having children, is a central part of the joy of a wedding.

In Parshat Balak, Bilam says concerning Hashem, "The Almighty in heaven counts the offspring of the Jewish people." Chazal say this refers to children. Bilam questioned how Hashem could be involved in something so physical.

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The Shem Mishmuel explains that in many ways the material world is the antithesis of purity and sanctity. There are religions that teach their adherents to live an ascetic life. Bilam only understood spirituality as an entity on its own. However, the mainstream Torah view, which is emphasized by Chassidut, is to take physicality and elevate it to spirituality. This is the secret of Torah. There is holiness embedded in the material world which is brought out through the *mitzvot*.

The most important institution where this idea is expressed is the Jewish marriage. The deeper one digs in a mine, the better quality diamonds one finds. The more physical

something is, the more sanctity can be extracted. Marriage is called *kiddushin*. The *kohen gadol*, the holiest leader of the Jewish people was required to have a wife. The bond of marriage creates a very deep and intense holiness.

The Gemara explains that when we dance at a wedding we lift our body up in the air. We take physicality and elevate it to something holy. This is the essence of marriage. Hashem fashioned man in His Divine Image. He gave us the power to create. Hashem is the third partner in bringing children into the world and since He is eternal it is a *binyan adei ad* (an everlasting structure).

When we raise children to serve Hashem, we generate more holiness. Chassidut emphasizes the concept of "*Olam chesed yibaneh*." Hashem created the world as an act of kindness. He wanted to give us reward in the next world. Bringing up children is one of the greatest acts of *chesed*, a part of which is sharing the wisdom of Torah with them. Spend ten minutes a day with each child one on one, preferably with a Torah book. In this way you will be actualizing one of the greatest aspects of *kedusha* of a Jewish marriage.

Finding G-d, Friendship and Leadership

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

Antignus Ish Socho taught, "Do not be as a servant who serves his master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as a servant who serves his master not for the sake of reward." This Mishna was misunderstood by the Tzedokim and Beitusim who inferred that there was no system of reward and punishment in Judaism.

In truth, accountability is a basic foundation of Jewish belief. Hashem gives us freedom of choice and there are consequences to our decisions. Every action brings results, either positive or negative. Antignus taught that our motivation to do good should not be for the sake of a reward. Rather we must serve Him because that is His will. With the exception of charity, we are not allowed to test Hashem. Although there is always reward for *mitzvot*, it's not always in this world.

Antignus continues, "The fear of heaven should be upon you." Chazal teach that the beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem. It is where everything starts.

Yosi ben Yoezer taught, "Your home should be a meeting place for Torah scholars." A person should build an ongoing relationship with them and his home should be a place where they feel comfortable. A Torah scholar who masters Torah is not simply a great intellectual

but his learning impacts him as a person. Seeing them in an informal setting can teach us volumes.

"And trace the dust of their feet." Observe how a Torah scholar interacts with people and how he behaves. Chazal say that Yehoshua merited to become the next leader not because he was the most accomplished student but because he served Moshe. He served his teacher and learned from him on a constant basis.

"Drink their words up with thirst." A person can be successful in any endeavor if he does it with passion. If you want to learn from Torah scholars, drink their words as though you were thirsty. If a person approaches Torah this way he'll reach immeasurable heights. Yehoshua had an incredible desire to grow. He attached himself to Moshe and eventually merited to become the next leader.

The Gemara discusses the prayer of Hallel, a collection of passages from Tehilim. The psalm, *B'tzait Yisrael*, refers to the giving of the Torah. The Midrash explains the verse, "*Heharim rakdu k'eilim*." All the mountains wanted the Torah to be given on them. They skipped like deer to Sinai. Yet their mission failed. How is this a reference to the giving of

the Torah? They had the burning will to be that mountain and that is what *matan Torah* is about, the desire and yearning to grow in Torah.

Yehoshua ben Prechaya said, "Make for yourself a Rav and acquire (*kneih*) for yourself a friend." While animals share a parent-child relationship, they don't have friends. In this area we are separated from them. *Kneih* means to buy. Usually a sale involves two parties. Friendship is a give and take relationship. *Chaver* can also mean a person who is trustworthy in the laws of *kashrut* and *maasrot*. It's important to find a friend you can trust completely.

"Judge everyone favorably." Give people the benefit of the doubt. We are quick to come to conclusions but it's important to know the facts and judge people in a good light. Jewish law states that when someone dies there should not be exaggeration about the deceased at the funeral. Yet the Shulchan Aruch says one may speak somewhat more than the norm. The Taz questions, is a bit of a lie ok? He explains that we have a tendency to knock people down. When we describe a person, we don't usually do him justice. Therefore, exaggerating a little is really telling the actual truth.