

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 13 Av 5770, Shabbat Nachamu (called this way because of the beginning of the Haftarah). We may say Kiddush Levanah tonight.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 755 Hz) (p. 1008 S) (p. 666 Hi) (p. 958 AS)

VA'ETCHANAN וְאֶתְחַנֵּן

1. Moshe makes a last appeal to Hashem to have the decree revoked and he be permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael. His request, according to the simplest reading, is not that he would continue as the leader of the nation. That has already been prescribed for Yehoshua to be Moshe's successor. Moshe is content to enter Eretz Yisrael to sightsee and to perform those mitzvot that can only be performed in Eretz Yisrael. He wanted to live there in retirement. This is the Talmudic approach to understanding Moshe's last request. Hashem denies Moshe this request. It is for the Torah student to conjecture why Moshe is being denied this privilege. He is even being denied being buried in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash's perspective on this is that Moshe did not deny or object to being labeled as an Egyptian when Yitro's daughters introduced him to their father. (Yosef was identified proudly as a Hebrew in the Egyptian court and therefore was buried in Eretz Yisrael.) Moshe's reluctance to identify himself quickly as a Jewish person cost him dearly according to our Sages. There is a possibility of reinterpreting this differently in light of the impossible task that Yehoshua would have had being Moshe's successor if Moshe were still living and residing comfortably amongst the people. (RED)

2. Moshe tells the people that they should remember the day that they stood at Sinai (4:9,10). The problem with this statement is that the people whom Moshe was addressing were not the same ones who were the people who stood at Sinai. The Sinai generation died out in the 40-year trek in the desert. According to the Chizkuni Moshe understood that there is a great threat to the children and grandchildren of the current generation. How do you transmit the Sinai experience of seeing and hearing the revelation of the Divine to the next generation? This is the task. Perhaps Moshe was telling the people that you should see yourselves as those who stood at Sinai. Some of you did when you were quite young. Others certainly heard about it with firsthand testimony of your parents, and even grandparents. That should suffice to make it real, true and relevant. It is your task to transmit that relevance to the next generation, and the generation thereafter. Hence Moshe's challenge to the people is critical and extremely important to understand what comes next in terms of the future of the Jewish people.

3. When describing the Exile that will be forthcoming for the Jewish people, even after successfully conquering and dividing the Promised Land, Moshe tells them that there is a future beyond the Exile. "You [in

plural] will seek from there [the Exile]... and you [singular] will find Hashem..." (4:29). The fact that the first verb is in plural and the second verb is singular is instructive to tell us the true prophecy that we realize even today. For example the Jewish people in America are dwindling in numbers, and it is not all through aliyah to Israel. Many Jews have sought the discovery of the truth in life. Consequently we are beyond the proper percentage of American Jews who have joined Buddhism and other "isms" that are offered. The Jew does not always find his roots in Judaism. This is exactly what Moshe was saying. In plural, Jews will be seeking the truth in life, but only the select few will rediscover Judaism and understand fully their roots and come back to Hashem. This verse was in the Torah reading for Tisha B'Av and with this interpretation, this verse is on the mark in understanding the Jewish experience in America for the centuries that America exists and offers such beautiful guarantees of freedom for its citizens, Jewish people included.

4. The first paragraph of the Shema is read in today's parsha (6:4-9). The Shema is the belief in Hashem and accepting the yoke of heaven and Hashem's mitzvahs. For us to recognize Hashem as *the* God of the Universe is an important step in bringing about the Final Redemption. Rav Kasher zt"l (20th century Europe, America and Israel) in his waning years in Yerushalayim wanted to embark on a new project – a Shema Yisrael project, where all Jewish parents would say this one line of Shema Yisrael to their children when putting them to bed at night. He said if parents would do that it would have a tremendous impact on the growth and development of their children because their children will in turn remember it eternally for the rest of their lives, and cherish it as a meaningful line. One would be quick to dismiss this project instead of understanding the possible impact that Rav Kasher was referring to. It is possible to create a revolution out of one line. We know the importance of this line, and it does leave an identity mark on a child, with a memory that will in turn possibly give him the keys to fulfill what Moshe was referring to, as mentioned earlier in this Torah Dialogue. The Shema is a paragraph that has great importance, but also great value to the Jew in his quest for spirituality and connection to Hashem.

5. The Torah mandates that the Jewish male should wear Tefillin. Seemingly the mitzvah should apply all day long. Why is it that we limit the mitzvah of Tefillin to morning prayers?

6. The Torah has an expression at the end of this week's parsha (6:11) that God will give us "houses filled with every good thing that you did not fill, chiseled cisterns that you did not chisel, orchards and olive trees that you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied." The Talmud tells us that these were items that Bnei Yisrael would inherit as part of the victory of the war to conquer the Promised Land and take these

houses and possessions from the Canaanite inhabitants. The Talmud (Chulin 17a) states that this refers to even non-kosher pork products that they would discover in these homes. According to the Rambam this is a law of war time and would apply not just to the Canaanite wars, but for wars of all time. When the Jewish army goes to the next battlefield against its enemy, and finds itself in need of food, they are permitted to take from the conquered homes of the enemies, and eat even if it is non-kosher food! This can be found in the Rambam's Laws of War (8:1) and would have a meaningful application in the Hezbollah wars that Israel fought just a couple of years ago when the supply lines to feed the army were inadequate. By halachah they were permitted to feed themselves from the Lebanese inhabitants, even if it is non-kosher food. The Ramban has a different interpretation and does not codify in accordance with the Rambam's teaching. But the Rambam's clearly stated law here is unique, and it echoes and applies the Talmudic teaching to our generation and situation.

7. At the end of the parsha is the prohibition of intermarriage. Actually it might seem that we are not permitted to marry Canaanites, but it would refer to any intermarriage. The seriousness of intermarriage is clear to us in our time, but the truth is that this has been a problem in every generation in Jewish history. Even if the mother is Jewish, and therefore the child is Jewish, the influence and presence of a non-Jewish father will jeopardize the transmission of the Jewish faith to this next generation. Nothing is definitive, but it is clearly a problem that we confront even as we go through the modern period. Personally I have had teenagers who come to me wanting to convert to Judaism, but as long as they are living in their parents' home I cannot accept their request because of the current living situation that they have. It might be a fad, and even if it is a very convincing teenager, he is still living in the house and under the protection of non-Jewish parents which makes the conversion a real problem for the Beit Din. Today I would think that no Beit Din would accept this situation as a fulfillment of their mandate to convert with the greatest confidence that there will be observance of the mitzvot in the future.

HAFTORAH

(p. 776 Hz) (p. 1028 S) (p. 909 Hi) (p. 1196 AS)

ISAIAH ישעיהו

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people saith your God." (Isaiah 40). These are the opening words of the Haftorah for this week's parshah – for the Shabbat appropriately known as Shabbat Nachamu. The Midrash (Yalkut Shemoni) on this verse proclaims: *"May it be a comfort for those above and for those below, for the living and for the dead, for this world and the world to come."* This Midrash seems to be conveying an important message. Unless comforting or consolation is total, there is no real comfort at all. To comfort an individual or a people

half-heartedly is no consolation. To offer a sympathetic word conveying only half the situation is meaningless in the final analysis. In fact, the Midrash elsewhere states that when Yeshayahu first mouthed the words "Nachamu, Nachamu," the Jews wanted to kill him. It is only when he completed his message with "says your God" that they were assuaged. The Jews at the time were so distraught and in such despair that nothing short of a direct message of comfort from Hashem would do. Anything less would ring empty of meaning and speak poorly of the messenger. When we as individuals are put to the challenge of having to offer comfort such as on the occasion of comforting mourners, we must be aware of the same hazards of offering incomplete Nechamah. In essence, saying "the right thing" at the right time is an art. Unfortunately, all too often, we are all called upon to be artists.

SHABBAT HALACHAH

After the reading of the Torah on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we read a portion from the Navi which is similar and corresponding to the portion just read from the Torah. The reason for this is because there was a time when governments forbade the reading of the Torah. In place of the Torah reading, the people read a portion of the Navi to remind them of the Parshah. There is a difference of opinion regarding from which source the Haftorah should be read. Some say that it should be read only from parchment similar to a Sefer Torah. Others say that one may also use a printed Sefer which has Neviim and Ketuvim. If, however, one cannot use either of these choices, one may read from the portions which are printed separately in our Chumashim. One must be careful, if parchment is not being used, to read quietly along with the reader word by word. If this is not done, one does not fulfill his obligation of Haftorah. Leaving the Sanctuary for the Haftorah is not appropriate.