

"Any interest in giving the drash this week?"  
(Given at B'nai Israel on August 12, 2011)

Rabbi Alfi texted me this question earlier this week. "Of course" was my answer - after all, how could I say no? She even sent me an idea from the daily email "10 Minutes of Torah" that she thought might interest me. It had to do with the Reform Jewish perspective on *Tisha Ba'av* - the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, which occurred this past week - which most notably commemorates the destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Temples. As I thought about what I wanted to teach I began with *Tisha Ba'av* and its correlation to this week's Torah portion, *Va'etchanan*.

*Va'etchanan*, meaning to beg, begins with Moses begging God to allow him entrance into the Promised Land. God denies Moses' request, but allows him to view the land from the east side of the Jordan. Moses then descends to us the people and begins to reiterate what we need to take with us as we cross the Jordan into our future lives: namely a detailed explanation of the 10 commandments; The obligation to remember and teach about our God who delivered us from slavery in Egypt; The steadfast belief in our ONE God and our profound connection to Adonai - the covenant we made together. Moses also prophesizes that we as a people will turn our backs on

our obligations and will be thrown into exile. We will not, however, disappear into the cultures we migrate to, but will thrive as a people and reconnect with Adonai.

But no, I didn't want to delve into the Torah portion. After all, tomorrow morning our Bat Mitzvah will be teaching on this very subject. Perhaps I would return to Rabbi's suggestion of Tisha Ba'av.

This Shabbat, the Shabbat following Tisha Ba'av, is called "*Shabbat Nachamu*." "*Nachamu*" means "comfort" and refers to the special Haftarah reading from this noted Shabbat. The portion comes from Isaiah and begins with the words, "*Nachamu, Nachamu, Ami*." This is most commonly translated as "Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye, Oh My People." There are a myriad of commentaries on the meaning of these words as they relate to *Tisha Ba'av* and our exile, *Va'etchanan* and Moses' prophecy of exile, and Isaiah's message of hope as we struggle to remain a people in exile.

But again, I did not find this particular line of thinking to be as compelling as I wanted. And then I came upon this midrash in Plaut's Haftarah Commentary:

This midrash proposes a different translation of the first line of the Haftarah portion. Instead of reading, "*Nachamu, Nachamu, Ami*," "Comfort Ye Oh My **People**," the midrash reads "*Nachamu, Nachamu, Immi*," meaning Comfort, O Comfort together **With Me**. God, in this translation is joining together with us in a search for comfort - a reciprocal need for comfort **FROM** us as well as the ability to provide comfort **TO** us.

While it is easily apparent why we, the people of Israel, and all people for that matter, need comfort - from each other and from God, it is more of a stretch to contemplate why God needs comfort from us.

*Kabbalah* teaches that God did not finish creating the world at the end of six days. A little corner of the world was left unfinished. Adonai left disease. Adonai left poverty. Adonai left drought and starvation. Adonai left free will for humanity, which by definition creates chaos and leaves much undone. The cosmos is unfinished, humanity is unfinished, and who will complete creation? We will. Perfecting God's universe is the task for humanity in general and for the Jewish people in specific.

For this reason, Adonai needs our comfort.

How many of us are parents? I would say that as a member of the community we are all parents of a sort. We invest in our children, an essential piece of creation. We provide for our children an environment with the physical things they need. We teach them rules, guide them with structure, even imposing a firm hand when needed. We nurture them with love. We admire and adore them. We reassure them of our commitment to them and our presence at all times. And yet . . . And yet we can only do so much to ensure that our children take the best path.

We all, in turn, are God's children. Adonai's experience with us is on a scale far greater than we can comprehend. And yet we do understand our responsibility to aid

and assist in the completion, the repair of creation. God led us out of Egypt and gave us the promised land. But perhaps exile was a necessary part of the picture. As so often happens, perhaps in our complacency we became too self-absorbed. Perhaps exile provided an actual opportunity . . . an opportunity for us to reach beyond ourselves to the greater world in order to continue the process of *tikkun olam* - repairing *ha-olam* - repairing the world. It was not enough that we work on *tikkun Yisrael* - repairing Israel. Because of the sacred covenant we have with Adonai. A contract, a joining with God to help complete God's creation. How can we fulfill this obligation if we are not **IN** the world and **OF** the world?

For this reason, Adonai needs our comfort.

A complicated issue. At times it is hard to wrap our minds around this great and massive responsibility. And yet we are partners with Adonai. As we look to Elohim - our God - for comfort, so must we reach out to God with our comfort, our assurance that we too are still here. That we too are committed to keeping our part of the covenant: We will hold on to Adonai, we will be in the **land**, and we will be in the **world**, in order to continue our partnership with Adonai toward our shared goal of *tikkun olam*.

Shabbat Shalom.