

UNITY AND TORAH STUDY IN HUMILITY WILL BRING ABOUT THE COMING DELIVERANCE (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “Comfort, comfort My people, says your G-d” (Isaiah 40:1). Concerning this double expression, the Sages have said: “They sinned doubly... were punished doubly – as it is written: ‘She has received double for all her sins from the hand of the L-RD’ [Isaiah 40:2] – and are comforted doubly” (Eicha Rabba 1:57). We also note that this haftorah is read on the Shabbat following Tisha B’Av (Rambam, Hilchot Tefilah 13:19) in order to remind the Jewish people that destruction came upon the land due to the baseless hatred they felt for one another (Yoma 9b). Hence they must live together in unity in order to rectify this sin, thereby ending our exile and leading to the Final Redemption.

We realize just how important unity is, for the Torah would not have been given to the Jewish people without it. As Rashi cites the Sages on the verse, “Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain” (Exodus 19:2), the Children of Israel acted “as a single person with a single heart.” In fact a substantial portion of the Torah’s mitzvot deal with a person’s relationship to his fellow, meaning that a lack of unity among Jews contravenes the Torah.

We can only achieve true unity through humility, as it is written: “They stood at the bottom of the mountain” (Exodus 19:17). This alludes to humility, a trait that Mount Sinai exhibited, as the Sages have said: “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘Why do you prance [teratzedun], O you mountains of majestic peaks?’ [Psalms 68:17]. A Heavenly voice went out and said to them, ‘Why do you seek judgment [tirtzu din] against Sinai? You are all full of blemishes in comparison to Sinai!’ ” (Megillah 29a). The Sages have also said, “A man should always learn from the mind of his Creator. For behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His Shechinah to abide upon Mount Sinai” (Sotah 5a). The Children of Israel stood at the base of Mount Sinai, meaning that they were more humble than it. This is what the prophet Isaiah alludes to by saying, “Comfort, comfort My people.” That is, since the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred and a negligence in Torah study, it can only be rectified by unity, otherwise it would be useless for Jews to study the holy Torah that was given in 40 days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; Menachot 99b). We find this idea alluded to in the word nachamu (“comfort”), a word formed from chanu mem, meaning that this sin can only be rectified through unity, as at the giving of the Torah, and by a desire to study Torah, which was given in 40 days. Hence the prophet Isaiah said “comfort” twice, meaning that Hashem consoles the Children of Israel for the destruction of the Temple, be it the First Temple, which was destroyed by a negligence in Torah study, or the Second Temple, which was destroyed by the sin of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). The fact that they have a way to rectify this sin constitutes the tremendous consolation that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to the Children of Israel after all the suffering caused by such destruction. This tells us that our deliverance is truly standing at the door, and that just a small act of baseless love on our part, as well as the study of Torah, will lead to our swift deliverance.

On this subject the Sages have said that the Holy One,

blessed be He, combines good intentions with deeds (Kiddushin 40a; Zohar I:28b). If He sees that a person has the desire and will to study Torah, and that he yearns to become an expert in all its fields – yet cannot reach the level that his heart desires because of limited intelligence – then the Creator will consider him as the greatest in his generation.

Yet because of our many sins, we see just how the Satan defeats us. Immediately after Tisha B’Av, everyone leaves on vacation, and instead of repenting on Shabbat Nachamu, we commit yet another sin. Instead of augmenting our Torah learning and performance of mitzvot, we neglect the Torah even more than during the rest of the year. Not only that, but we also engage in sexual immorality, an extremely grave sin, since Israel went into exile and Jerusalem was destroyed on account of it (Zohar III:77b). It is said that a person’s brain is so affected by debauchery that a barrier is created between the sinner and Hashem, a barrier that makes repentance impossible (ibid. 44b). Similarly, a vacation in the month of Av leads to such spiritual slacking that a person no longer fears the month of Elul. In fact during the Days of Awe, he will still be under the influence of his vacation and all that accompanied it because of the harmful effects it had on him. It will also be difficult for him to get up early and recite selichot, or to implore Hashem to pardon his sins. Even if he actually goes to synagogue, it may prove detrimental to him, for the evil inclination will lead him to think that the Holy One, blessed be He, has truly forgiven all his sins and that he has nothing to fear. The evil inclination will tell such a person, “Just give tzeddakah and do kaparot, and you’ll be inscribed for a good life!”

Thus we see just how cunning the Satan is, and how it can toy with a person, who by comparison is foolish and possesses little intelligence. He follows everything the evil inclination entices him with, as it convinces him to relax and take advantage of this world. The only way to be saved from its trickery is to study the holy Torah, as it is written: “If this wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit Midrash” (Kiddushin 30b). The Sages have also said, “I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote” (ibid.). Thus a person is forbidden to think that he loves Hashem with his entire heart simply because he rises early every morning, gives a great deal of tzeddakah, and has faith in the Sages. In fact someone who does not learn Torah and does not fix regular times for its study is liable to commit numerous sins – even serious ones that the Torah explicitly mentions – without even noticing it.

May Hashem help us to achieve unity and study the Torah in humility. As such we will merit the fulfillment of the verse Ga’al Hashem avdi Ya’akov (“The L-RD has redeemed His servant Jacob”), which has the same numerical value (328) as Nachamu, nachamu ami (“Comfort, comfort My people”), signifying the coming of our deliverer, speedily and in our days, amen.



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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Each Word is Costly

The Chafetz Chaim and his son-in-law, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Levinson, were once in Moscow when a well-known millionaire, a man who supported the Radin yeshiva, came to visit them at their hotel. During their conversation, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch went into the next room to compose an urgent telegram. The Chafetz Chaim, who was afraid that some Lashon Harah might slip into his conversation with the millionaire, turned to him and said: “In the next room a telegram is being composed, and each word is carefully considered. Do you know why? It is because we have to pay for a telegram, and each word costs money.”

He would say, “When you are ready to open your mouth, first consider whether something useful will come from your words. Will they be useful for the soul? If so, then it is certainly good. Will they be useful for sustenance or health? If so, then this too is good. If they serve no usefulness for body or soul, then why do you need to say them?”

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Better to be Rewarded Later

It is written, “You shall observe the commandment and the decrees and the ordinances that I command you today, to perform them” (Deuteronomy 7:11).

Our Sages have said, “Today, to perform them – but you cannot postpone doing them for tomorrow. Today, to perform them – today is for performing them, while tomorrow is for being rewarded for them” (Eruvin 22a). Rashi explains: “ ‘[Y]ou cannot postpone doing them for tomorrow’ – for after we die, in the future, wanting to perform mitzvot will be useless. One who toils on the eve of Shabbat will eat on Shabbat.”

In his book *Birkat Peretz*, Rabbi Yaakov Israel Kanievsky Zatzal explains the difference between performing mitzvot, which have no place but in this world, and being rewarded for performing mitzvot, whose place is solely in the World to Come. He states that if a person were to be rewarded in this world for a mitzvah he performs, and if a sinner were to receive punishment while still alive, there would be no place for free choice in this world, nor for the unselfish performance of mitzvot. Performing mitzvot and doing good deeds would be similar to how merchants or craftsmen operate. A person would not deserve a reward in that case, since he would be doing mitzvot to help himself, not to serve Hashem. This is precisely why we must do them today and be rewarded for them tomorrow.

There is another reason for this, namely that the reward we receive in the World to Come is enormous. The Mishnah states, “One hour of bliss in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world” (Perkei Avoth 4:17). We also read, “In the World to Come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make each righteous person inherit 310 worlds” (Uktzin 3:12). The Rambam and the Rosh, in commenting on the mishnayot, have described the magnitude of our reward in the World to Come. Reward is given for thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads of years – for all eternity – in the World to Come. However if we were to be rewarded for mitzvot in this world, we would calculate it according to the limited and narrow concepts of this world, as well as in function to the limited number of years that man has been allotted. This concept is explained in the Gemara: “When Rabbi Eliezer fell ill, his disciples came to visit him. ... They broke into tears, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. ... [Rabbi Akiva explained] ‘As long as I saw that my master’s wine did not turn sour, nor was his flax smitten, nor his oil putrefied, nor his honey rancid, I thought: ‘G-d forbid that he has received all his reward in this world.’ Yet now that I see him lying in pain, I rejoice’ ” (Sanhedrin 101a). We note that even for a man as righteous and holy as Rabbi Eliezer, if he had been rewarded with success in this world, all his reward in the World to Come would have been paid. Hence if we were to be rewarded for mitzvot in this world, the meager pleasures of this world – as fleeting as a passing shadow – would cause us to lose out on the unlimited good reserved for the righteous in the World to Come for all time. The goodness of Hashem extends to all eternity for those who fear Him, the reward of which is reserved in a world that is entirely good.

– Lekach Tov

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “I implored the L-RD at that time” (Deuteronomy 3:23).

The commentators have questioned the meaning of the words “at that time.” What time was it? They have said that it refers to the time mentioned by the passage: “As for me, may my prayer to You, O L-RD, be at an opportune time” (Psalms 69:14). Moses asked that this moment

be favorable to Hashem for accepting his prayer. Nevertheless it was not, for Hashem in His wisdom decreed that Moses was not to enter the Holy Land.

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita writes: “Another explanation for the words ‘at that time,’ according to the Noam Elimelech, is that we must repent before performing each mitzvah. Otherwise we will have accusers who prevent our mitzvah from ascending before Hashem, and they will nourish themselves from its power and become stronger. It is only through teshuvah that we can annul all this, and therefore we must repent even before praying, in which case our prayers will be accepted. Moses reprimanded the Children of Israel (Parsha Devarim) at the same time as repenting, after which he began praying to Hashem. At that point he saw that there were no accusations against him, and his prayer came to him easily, though it was not accepted.”

No Bribes Before Hashem

It is written, “Do not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

We need to understand this verse in light of what the Rambam wrote in his commentary on the Mishnah: “ ‘Blessed is He, before Whom there is no iniquity...nor bribe-taking’ [Perkei Avoth 4:22]. This means that He does not take a mitzvah as a bribe against a sin. He rewards a mitzvah and punishes a sin.”

Some people allow themselves to commit certain sins by thinking that they can perform certain mitzvot in parallel to these sins. Yet this is a horrendous attitude to have, for the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept a mitzvah in exchange for a sin, which would be like taking a bribe. Hence the verse states, “Do not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it,” meaning that we must not add on one side by observing certain mitzvot, while intending to subtract on the other side by not observing difficult mitzvot. We must observe all the mitzvot of Hashem our G-d without change, as He commanded us.

– Torat HaParasha

No Bowing Before Hashem’s Servants

It is written, “Lest you raise your eyes to the heavens and you see the sun and the moon and the stars...and you are drawn astray and bow to them” (Deuteronomy 4:19).

Rabbi Moshe Alsheich asks, “Why does the Torah forbid us from bowing before the legions of heaven? Is it not to the king’s honor for his servants to be respected as well?” He replies, “True, it is to the king’s honor for his servants to be respected. Yet his honor is limited to that; the king himself is not forced to bow before one of his servants. Now since every Jew has a spark of Divinity within him, it follows that one who bows before the legions of heaven forces the king himself to bow before his own servants.”

– Ma’ayanot HaNetzach

Settling our Accounts

It is written, “When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you at the end of days, you will return to the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 4:30).

Changes that would have taken hundreds of years in previous times now take place quickly. In fact it is easy to see the breathtaking speed at which the wheel of time is now spinning. Why has Hashem done this to us, and why do conditions change so quickly in our days?

To answer this question, the Chafetz Chaim said that in Heaven a vast number of accounts have accumulated since the beginning. Before the arrival of Mashiach, we need to settle these accounts, for the coming deliverance will annul the evil inclination to such an extent that all the affairs of this world, which are based on the war against the evil inclination, will disappear. Hence everyone must settle what remains for

him to pay in Heaven, for the days of Mashiach are soon approaching, and it is critical to accelerate the process.

– Yalkut Chamishai, Citing the Kovetz Ma'amarim

A Mixture of Fruit

It is written, “When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you at the end of days, you will return to the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 4:30).

The Maggid of Dubno explained this verse with a parable: Merchants at a market have a set price for the various kinds of fruits and vegetables they sell. Yet near the end of the day, when they want to liquidate what little products they have left, they put everything together and sell it at a low price. Similarly, we know that Hashem knows the future and every instant in it, meaning that everything has its own time, as it is written: “Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under Heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Hence Moses is telling us: “When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you at the end of days” – when you see that calamities are coming upon you mixed together, then realize that “you will return to the L-RD your G-d” – for at the end of days Hashem will empty out, as it were, every container.

– Torat HaParasha

May You Transform His Heart

It is written, “You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 4:30).

Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, the author of Chazon Ish, recounted that a Jew came to see the Chafetz Chaim in order to receive a blessing for educating his children. The tzaddik told him, “You want to educate your children with a single blessing? Sell everything up to the pillow under your head, and use the money to hire a G-d-fearing teaching. In this way you will succeed in their education.”

The mother of an unruly child, a boy who refused to study Torah, went to the Chazon Ish to explain her distress. The tzaddik immediately took out a pen that was in his suit, along with a piece of paper, and wrote out a special prayer that she was to recite for her son:

“May it be Your will, O G-d and G-d of my fathers, for You to have compassion on my son.... May You transform his heart to love and fear Your Name, and may he study the holy Torah. Remove from him everything that can prevent him from studying Your holy Torah, and arrange all the conditions that lead to Your holy Torah.”

– Ma'ayanot HaNetzach

Overview of the Parsha

Contrary to Parsha Devarim, in which Moses pieces together the events from the outset of the people's journey from Horev until the conquest of the land, Parsha Va'etchanan deals with the events that took place at the beginning and end of this account – not as part of their journeys and conquest – adding words of Mussar that we can learn from these events, especially a warning against idolatry. It recounts Moses' pleas at that time, when they arrived at the Jordan, and recalls the giving of the Torah at Horev to the chosen people who had emerged from Egypt, before they began the journeys described in Parsha Devarim. From there it details the choice of the cities of refuge on the other side of the Jordan, cities chosen by Moses at the end of their journey, as well as everything that he told them there. It then returns to the subject of the Ten Commandments given at Horev, as well as describing the wonders of the giving of the Torah and Hashem's words to His people. Moses recites the passage of Shema Israel and warns the people to observe mitzvot, including words of Mussar.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

A Ray of Hope in Mourning

The first Shabbat following Tisha B'Av is filled with joy for the consolation that we hope for.

It is called Shabbat Nachamu, from the first verse of the haftorah: Nachamu, nachamu ami (“Comfort, comfort My people” [Isaiah 40:1]). This haftorah is the first of the Sheva deNechamata, the seven haftorot of consolation that we read from the book of Isaiah during the seven Sabbaths following Tisha B'Av. These haftorot contain a total of 144 verses, whereas there are 143 verses of admonition recorded in the Torah in Parshiot Bechukotai, Ki Tavo, Nitzavim, and Haazinu, meaning that our consolation exceeds our admonition by one verse.

The Gemara states, “Be glad with Jerusalem and rejoice in her, all you who love her. Exult with her in exultation, all you who mourned for her” [Isaiah 66:10]. From this originates what [the Sages] have said: ‘Everyone who mourns for Jerusalem merits to share in her joy’ (Taanith 30b). These things are said in the present tense (“merits”), not in the future tense. Therefore what happened to the joy that was promised to all the former generations, since they shed rivers of tears over the destruction of Jerusalem? The answer is that the very act of mourning is itself a consolation. How so? Our Sages have said that there is a decree that the dead are eventually forgotten. In ancient writings, we read that the some peoples mourned for a certain period of time because they had lost their independence. Yet over the years their mourning was tempered, and the descendants of these peoples dispersed and melted among other groups who settled in their land. Hence the decree of death was carried out with regards to these people, who were eventually forgotten. Yet the Jewish people, who have been mourning for close to 2,000 years over the destruction of its land and its Temple – a people who continue to mourn and refuse to be consoled – are not grieving over something that has died and been forgotten. The Jewish people have never been resigned to their fate. We have never given up hope, for we know that our redeemer will certainly arrive.

We now understand what the Gemara means by stating that everyone who mourns for Jerusalem “merits to share in her joy.” The very fact that the Jewish people continue to mourn is a sign that the Temple is not dead, for if it were, it would have eventually been forgotten, in accordance with the statement of the Sages. Yet the Jewish people now merit “to share in her joy” – a joy that hope is not lost. The Temple will descend in fire already built, for the Jewish people have never given up hope. In fact after fasting on Tisha B'Av, we celebrate Shabbat Nachamu with joy and cheer, even in years when nothing has happened, when the Temple was not rebuilt and our redeemer did not come. We have remained in constant mourning over Jerusalem, which is why we are certain that it will be rebuilt.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Container for Peace

The Talmud states that an Amora by the name of Rava told the residents of his city: “Honor your wives, that you may be enriched” (Bava Metzia 59a). The blessing that results from honoring one's wife (“that you may be enriched”) need not come in the form of money or possessions. The Holy One, blessed be He, has many ways of blessing a person who honors his wife, such as through good health, the joy of children, and long life. In fact such things are preferable to money or possessions. Blessings of this kind – children and health, and the satisfaction that they bring to us – are obviously a great gift from Heaven. However these blessings, given by Hashem to those who follow His ways, are not exclusively miraculous in nature. They also result directly from an upright way of life and mutual respect among parents, who ensure that an atmosphere of peace – a good and pleasant environment – reigns in the home. This is a crucial element for the education of children, both for good health and long life. Why do all these blessings depend precisely on peace in the home? It is because in order to receive an abundance of blessings from Hashem, we need the right container to receive them. Now the best container to receive Hashem blessings is peace, as the Sages have said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, found no container that could hold blessings for Israel except that of peace, as it is written: ‘The L-RD will give strength to His people; the L-RD will bless His people with peace’ [Psalms 29:11]” (Uktzin 3:12).

– Shiurim BeAggadot Chazal

A TRUE STORIE PAYING AHEAD OF TIME

It is written, “Keep all His decrees and commandments, which I command you – you, your son, and your grandson – all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 6:2).

A man was worried about the education of his grandchildren. He didn’t know what education they would receive from their parents, whether they would teach them Torah and the fear of Heaven, or even if they wanted to send them to yeshiva. What did this man do? He went into a yeshiva ketanah and asked how much it would cost to educate his grandchildren throughout their time in yeshiva. When he was given a price, he told the Rosh Yeshiva: “Here is the amount that you mentioned. Now give me a receipt and a statement from the management of the yeshiva that my grandchildren can study here without further cost.”

The man didn’t live long after this, and in his will he stressed that any of his grandchildren who wanted to study in this yeshiva could do so without cost. He added that if his grandchildren decided to study in yeshiva, he would bequeath them a large sum of money on which they could live.

When the parents of these children learned just how great the man really was, they immediately agreed to take upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and they became true bnei Torah.

– Alenu Lishabayach, part III, p.457

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Rising Towards Consolation

It is written, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that her fighting is ended” (Isaiah 40:2).

Rabbi Avraham Bornstein, the Rebbe of Sochatchov and author of Avnei Nezer, explained the difference between Hashem’s word to Moses (“And He called [Vayikra] Moses”) and His word to Bilam (“And He met [Vayeker] Bilam”).

The term vayikra means that a person must approach the speaker, whereas vayeker means that the speaker’s words come to him. This is the difference between Moses and Bilam, for whereas Moses elevated himself towards the words he heard, Bilam remained in his uncleanness, exhibiting neither growth nor change. Like a leper who comes knocking, we open the door and give him what he requests outside, meaning that he remains where he is. According to this explanation, we may say that the hearts of the Children of Israel in exile are so closed and blocked that they do not have the strength to hear or accept words of consolation, as was the case during their exile in Egypt: “They did not heed Moses due to shortness of breath and hard work” (Exodus 6:9). This is why the prophet Isaiah uses the term vekir’u (“and call”), for they were to approach the speaker and rise above their condition in order to become worthy of accepting consolation. This is the main thrust of the prophet’s message: “Comfort, comfort My people” – consolation must be conveyed in such a way that it motivates the Children of Israel to save themselves from their lowly state and rise towards these words, enabling them to be consoled.

– Talalei Orot

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Nathan Neta Shapira of Krakow – The Author of Megale Amukot

The gaon Rabbi Nathan Neta Shapira Zatzal was born in 5345 to Rabbi Shlomo, the son of Nathan Shapira of Horodna (the author of Mavo Shearim on Shaarei Dora). The name of the Shapira family comes from the German town of Speyer, which is mentioned in the kinot of Tisha B’Av as a city which experienced numerous pogroms, and where many in the community were murdered or died for the sanctification of the Divine Name.

From his youth, Rabbi Nathan Neta was known as being holy and pure, a person who knew how to unlock what was hidden. He led a yeshiva in Krakow, where thousands of students flocked to him in order to partake of his brilliant Torah. His life was marked by tremendous holiness and asceticism. He mortified himself in all kinds of ways, and every evening at midnight he would arise to recite tikkun chatzot and kinot in order to weep over the exile of the Shechinah.

Rabbi Nathan Neta had such power that the Divrei Chaim of Sanz testified that from the moment a sick person’s name was mentioned to him, he was immediately healed – even before Rabbi Nathan Neta actually prayed for him!

His book Megale Amukot contains 252 explanations on Moses’ prayer to be allowed to enter the land of Israel. It also contains 1,000 explanations on the small aleph in the word vayikra (Leviticus 1:1). Rabbi Nathan Neta Shapira departed for the celestial academy on Av 13, 5393 at the age of only 48. He was buried in the Krakow cemetery beneath the courtyard of the synagogue that carries the Rema’s name. Inscribed on his tombstone are the words: “His G-d spoke to him face to face.” Even today, his tomb remains a place of pilgrimage for many Jews who journey there to pray. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Four Hundred Times Twice Over!

Rabbi Pereda had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could learn it. On a certain day, having been requested to attend to a religious matter, he taught him as usual, but the pupil could not learn the subject.

“What?” the master asked. “Is the matter today?”

“From the moment the master was told that there was a religious matter he had to attend to, I could not concentrate my thoughts, for at every moment I imagined: Now the master will get up, or now the master will get up,” replied the other.

“Give me your attention,” the master said, “and I will teach you again.” Thus he taught him another four hundred times.

A Heavenly voice went out and asked him, “Do you prefer that four hundred years be added to your life, or that you and your generation shall be privileged to have a share in the World to Come?”

“That I and my generation shall be privileged to have a share in the World to Come,” he replied.

“Give him both,” said the Holy One, blessed be He.

– Eruvin 54b