

## Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good ... Thus he comforted them and spoke to their heart. (50:20,21)

*Sefer Bereishis* ends on a note of consolation, as Yosef intimates to his brothers that they had all been part of a larger Divine Plan. It began with the creation of the world, followed by: the sin of Adam *HaRishon*; the Great Flood; the Dispersal; Avraham *Avinu* and *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the birth of the prodigal twins, Yaakov and Eisav; the twelve *Shevatim*, tribes, and their role in the *mechiras*, sale, of Yosef. It concluded with Yosef, who was the subject of much suffering, forgiving and comforting his brothers. In this episode, the individuals were neither winners nor losers, just *Shivtei Kah* executing the will of Hashem. *Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl*, observes that *Sefer Bereishis* concludes with the knowledge that Yosef's coffin remained in Egypt. His spirit would dwell among *Klal Yisrael* during their upcoming long and difficult ordeal. The end of the Patriarchal epoch of *Sefer Bereishis* is not a conclusion, but rather, a commencement. It is the precursor and foundation upon which our nation – *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, kingdom of Priests and a holy nation – was firmly founded and concretized. It would emerge from the impending period of suffering and tribulation with its spiritual durability resolutely entrenched, and with the necessary fortitude to withstand the challenges of the future.

As we see a comforting conclusion to one of the most troubling episodes in our history, I use my writer's license to recall an article I wrote in tribute to my *mechutin*, *Reb Eli HaKohen Botknecht, zl*, whose all too short life impacted many through his overriding love of his fellow and his extraordinary commitment to acts of *chesed*.

Pandemic, Meron, Stolin, Surfside – thousands of *Yidden* are grieving, each one seeking a meaningful *nechamah*, consolation, knowing that comforting words are just that: words. The *Navi* encourages the mourners of Tzion: *Anochi, Anochi, Hu menachemchem*, "It is I, It is I, Who consoles you" (*Yeshayah* 51:12). We yearn for Hashem's *nechamah*. How is His *nechamah* different? The *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Yeshayah* 40:443) relates that in the *Keitz HaYamim*, End of Days, Hashem will say to the *Neviim*, "Go and console the People." The prophets will gather and attempt to carry out Hashem's command, but the people will respond, *V'eich tenachamuni hevel, u'seshuvoseichem nishaar moal*, "How can you console me with meaningless words? Only betrayal remains of your lies" (*Iyov* 21:34). The *Neviim* were saying to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, we have made an attempt to console Your people, but they have refused to accept our words." Hashem will respond, "Come with Me. I and you together will go and console her, as it says, '*Nachamu, nachamu Ami; yomar Elokeichem*;' "Be comforted, be comforted, My People," says Hashem (*Yeshayah* 40:1).

What was deficient about the words of consolation that the *Neviim* addressed to *Klal Yisrael*? Why were the people unmoved? Why did they not accept their *nechamah*? *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl* (*Rav Schwab on Chumash*), offers an illuminating explanation which is both inspiring and insightful. *Nechamah* is not merely choosing the right words, kind words, that are soothing to the mourner.

The word *nechamah* is related to *Vayinachem* Hashem, "Hashem reconsidered" (*Bereishis* 6:6), which means to have a change of heart. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, writes: "The basic underlying meaning is: to change one's mind... altering one's decision... consolation is also a complete reversal of the previous feeling regarding an occurrence... a painful loss sets us in motion internally. Consolation brings us to rest; it closes the gap and halts the motion."

When Yosef *HaTzaddik* comforted his brothers, the Torah writes: *Vayinachem osam, va'yidaber al libam*; "He comforted them and spoke to their hearts" (*Bereishis* 50:20). He assuaged their feelings of guilt, saying that Hashem had intended their actions for good. This statement was meant to comfort them. They thought they had harmed him. This was not the case, for, as a result of their actions, Yosef ascended to the position of viceroy of Egypt. This was the *nechamah*, as it provided his brothers with a new perspective, a deeper understanding of the events which heretofore had been beyond them. Yosef soothed his brothers with words of reassurance and support, and comforted them with insight and explanation regarding their actions.

At the end of time, *Klal Yisrael* will not be mollified with the consolation of the Prophets, because Prophets will be ineffective in providing them with a true *nechamah*. The nation will want a reason, an explanation, a rationale. The *Neviim* will be shortcoming in explaining the "why," the purpose of all the suffering that *Klal Yisrael* has endured throughout the millennia. Only Hashem *Yisborach* Himself can provide us with the true *nechamah*, by showing us how the suffering of *galus* that we have experienced has all been for our good. This is *nechamah*: the recognition of the good in tragedy; the realization that not only will good result from our suffering, but that what we thought was evil is truly good. Only Hashem can provide this *nechamah*.

The *Navi Yeshayah* (*Yeshayah* 61:13) declares: *K'ish asher imo tenachamenu, kein Anochi Anochemchem*; "Like a man whose mother consoled him, so will I console you." How is a mother's consolation different? Why does the *Navi* use the term, "mother," as opposed to "woman"? The *Metzudas David* writes that it is the way of a mother to comfort her son, more so than the father. A mother's words exude love and sensitivity, warmth and comfort. This may be true of womanhood, whose tendencies seem to be more compassionate, nurturing, kind. The *Navi* seems to equate consoling with motherhood, as if motherhood is the paradigm for consolation. I think it is. Motherhood represents rejuvenation, future growth. Motherhood represents carrying the "echoes of the past and the song of the future." A mother characterizes resilience, building, moving on, not allowing fear to overcome dreams, putting the needs of her child and future children above and before her own. Motherhood is the right words, kind words, that are soothing to the mourner. The word *nechamah* is related to *Vayinachem* Hashem, "Hashem reconsidered" (*Bereishis* 6:6), which means to have a change of heart. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, writes: "The basic underlying meaning is: to change one's mind... altering one's decision... consolation is also a complete reversal of the previous feeling regarding an occurrence... a painful loss sets us in motion internally. Consolation brings us to rest; it closes the gap and halts the motion."

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Hashem will console us like a mother consoles her child. He will encourage as He comforts, empower as He consoles, enable as He soothes, but, above all, He will pick us up and inspire us to build the future.