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**The Lower East Side
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

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from around the Internet*

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Parshat V'etchanan

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Latest time for Kriyat Shma – 9:30

A DIFFERENT LIGHT

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week the Jewish nation is told that they are held to a higher standard. The Torah commands us to heed its words and follow the *Chukim* (decrees), "for (those laws) are your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these decrees and declare, 'surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation.'"

The Jewish People were the founders of moral civilization. The famed apostate Benjamin Disraeli once retorted to an anti-Semitic invective by parliamentarian Daniel O'Connell, "when the ancestors of the right honorable gentlemen were brutal savages on an unknown island mine were priests in Solomon's Temple."

This is easily understood in the context of *Mishpatim*, or laws that have seemingly clear reasons. The Torah's judicial system and codification of tort law is the blueprint for common law the world over. Yet the Torah does not emphasize observance of *Mishpatim* as such. It tells us that in order to be an example of wisdom and clarity unto the nations, we must observe the *Chukim*, laws that are difficult to comprehend even for those born as Jews.

The question is obvious: wouldn't the open observance of the esoteric laws of Judaism bring question if not contempt to the eyes of the nations? Why are *Chukim* specifically rendered as the acts that will have the world look at us and say, "surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation."

In 1993, six years after the death of my revered grandfather, a biography, "Reb Yaakov, the Life and Times of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky," was printed by Mesorah Publications. Based on years of my uncle, Rabbi Nosson Kamenetzky's research and the fine writing of Yonason Rosenbloom, it was an instant success. The book shed unseen light on a Torah giant, perhaps never known by the masses. In addition to the splendid biographical research, the book is filled with hundreds of encounters with myriad personalities who were touched by the brilliant sage. From young children to Prime ministers and United States Senators, Reb Yaakov was able to relate to each of them on their level. The book also relates how Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan revealed to an Orthodox publication how surprised he had been when Reb Yaakov made a prescient prediction that the Soviet Union would cease to exist.

Our Yeshiva had purchased 10,000 volumes of the book as a fundraising -educational mailer. I did not realize that the Senator's name happened to be on our mailing list until I received a beautiful letter on United States Senate stationery. After thanking me for sending the "wonderful book," the writer said, "If I may quibble with one small point in an otherwise brilliant volume, the author reports that I was surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's prediction of the fall of the Soviet Union. "Truth be told, I was never surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's insights. They only reaffirmed to me the age-old biblical promise that Torah knowledge is your wisdom and understanding before the nations of the world." It was signed Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

We tend to flaunt Judaism with the reasonable laws: honoring parents, charity, and all of the basic tenets of moral life. To the outside world, however, we tend not to display the more difficult issues: *Kashruth*, *Shatnez* and the like. We are afraid that they are too bold and incomprehensible; surely they cannot designate us as a light unto the nations.

This week, the Torah tells us that there is nothing farther from the truth. It specifically exhorts us that through our *Chukim* we will be considered as a "light unto the nations." After we have set standards of morality and honesty we earn esteem in the eyes of the world. Then no Torah law or vision will be viewed archaic or inconceivable. We can predict the collapse of the second-most powerful nation on earth in its prime. Foreign relation experts may react with shock and surprise, but deep down they will wait for the prediction to materialize.

The Torah chides us this week that there is nothing in its writings that will embarrass us. Any command, even the most complex and difficult to comprehend, when performed with faith, honesty, and commitment, will cast us as a light unto the nations.

The Mezuzah and the Home

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

One of the many fundamental mitzvot that are taught in this week's Torah portion is the mezuzah. We are commanded to put up a mezuzah that contains section of the Shema on the doorposts of our homes. The Sefer HaChinuch¹ writes that the basic reason given for this mitzvah is that we should think of God every time we enter our homes. The Sefer HaChinuch also brings the Talmud² that cites Rabbah saying that it is mitzvah to put the Mezuzah in area facing the *reshus harabim* (public space) so that a person entering the house will be immediately met by a Mitzva.

These ideas teach that the mitzvah of Mezuzah teaches us that home must be a place that is infused with G-d awareness as much as any other place, including places of prayer and study. It is possible to expand on this concept through a number of fascinating observations on the Torah.

In the Torah portion of Balak, Bilaam unwillingly blesses the Jewish people with beautiful blessings and words of praise. One of the most famous of these are the words: “*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha, Yisrael*”³ – “How goodly are your tents, Yaakov, your sanctuaries, Israel”. In the first part of this verse, Bilaam praises the homes of the Jewish people. Rashi elaborates on the nature of this praise: Bilaam saw that the openings of each tent were not facing each-other in order to maintain the privacy of each tent. However, it is not immediately clear what the word ‘*Mishkenotecha*’ (which normally denotes a holy sanctuary) refers to at the end of the verse. Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky explains that this also refers to the homes of the Jewish people. Bilaam was saying that they treat their homes with such holiness, that their home is transformed into a Mishkan in its own right. Bilaam was conveying that by acting with modesty in one’s home, is home becomes elevated from being simply the mundane location where one eats and sleeps, to being a place of great holiness.

The person who is perhaps most associated with elevating the mundane aspects of life, including in the home, is Yaakov.⁴ The Sages tell us that the Patriarchs described the Temple, (and service of God by extension), in different ways. Avraham described the Temple as a mountain, Yitzchak termed it as a field, and Yaakov referred to it as a house. It seems that these various descriptions represent the different ways that the Patriarchs related to serving God.

Why does Yaakov describe it as a house? A house is the location of all the mundane activities that a person performs throughout his daily life, including eating, sleeping, and forms of work. Of all the Patriarchs, Yaakov was the one who was most required to be deeply involved in the daily vicissitudes of life such as dealing with dishonest people, spending long hours at work, and bringing up a large family. For many years he was forced to deal with mundane areas that are not in and of themselves Mitzvot and he was unable to devote all his time to learning and prayer. One aspect of Yaakov's greatness is that he was able to live in such an environment and elevate his daily activities into acts of holiness. This is what he declares to his brother, Esav, when he returns from his long years in exile. "I lived (*garti*) with Lavan". The Rabbis tell us that the word, *garti*, spells, *taryag*, which represents the 613 mitzvot. Yaakov was alluding to the fact that he had remained steadfast in his service of God, despite living in conditions that were not conducive to spirituality.⁵ Thus, Yaakov elevated all such activities because he saw them all as opportunities for holiness. Accordingly, he viewed the seemingly mundane home as a vehicle for Divine service.

We have seen the importance of elevating the home. This has been very pertinent over the past year and a half when many people throughout the world were confined to their homes, and the shuls and study halls were. During this time, an astonishing statement of a Rabbi who lived in the 19th century was publicized. This Rabbi said that if it was up to him, he would close the shuls for one hundred years. One would assume that the author of such a statement would not be well-accepted in Torah circles. Yet, it was revealed that its author was none other than Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the great Torah leader in Germany who played a massive role in saving Orthodox Jewry in Germany, and whose influence on the Torah world is still widely felt. So, how could he make such a seemingly controversial statement? He was talking in the context of his times where there was a very strong movement that broke away from the fundamental beliefs of Judaism and preached a new ‘Jewish lifestyle’. One important aspect of their belief was that religion should be confined to the synagogue, but in the home and other ‘mundane’ areas, a Jew should strive as much as possible to be no different from his non-Jewish neighbors. In this view, the home was to be a place devoid of holiness. It seems that Rabbi Hirsch’s seemingly outrageous assertion was said in reaction to this viewpoint. He was conveying that by closing the synagogues, then one would have to pray in his home, learn Torah in his home and so on, and thereby he would renew his focus on elevating the home.

The situation has changed drastically since the time of Rabbi Hirsch and he may well have not made the same point in such a strong manner in a different context, but nonetheless his point remains salient. There can still be the attitude that one learns and prays in shul and in the study hall, but when he gets home, he can relax and be generally involved in mundane activities. Rabbi Hirsch’s message reminds us that this viewpoint is against the Torah outlook that every aspect of one’s life must be infused with holiness. This is the lesson of the Mezuzah – it reminds us that God is not just in shul, He is everywhere and we are required to bring Him into our lives in every domain.

Prayer Can Be Created But Not Destroyed

By Sheldon Stern

Zev Brenner begins each Motzi Shabbos program by imploring, beseeching, urging, well you get the point, his followers to catch the show on YouTube. Synonyms bring out nuances but in Loshon Hakodesh brevity is the soul of wit and so for the Torah concise is nice. This said, Vaeschanan would not seem like the ideal choice to convey Moshe's entreaties to Hashem to be allowed entry into the Holy Land. He could have simply said, Shoalti (I asked) or Pilalti (I prayed) i.e. each one has only five letters and 3 syllables to Vaeschanan's six and 4. So Rashi explains that this word alludes to the 515 prayers uttered by our leader in the hope of "changing G-d's mind." When Rashi offers a Pshat it's not necessarily the last word. A great teacher, and he's the Rabban Shel Yisroel, desires that others take what he said and build on it. To that point let's suggest another possible intent of the title of this week's Parsha.

For several decades (he moved to Lakewood about a year ago), my next door neighbor on the Lower East Side was Rabbi Dov Tropper. I don't dole out praise easily, but in my mind, he's a potential Lamed Vavnik. What stands out is his Tefillah. Every Shemoneh Esreh, Shabbos and Chol, takes at least twenty minutes. I once asked Dov (that's how he's known he's a total Anav) how he maintains such concentration and he told me that he has no Kabbalistic insights, it's just Peirush Hamilos. (Translating the words.) But it's more than that. Growing up in the hood it was de rigeur to hear that Rav Moshe learned 18 hours a day. So, what did this semi-Orthodox teenager think when I heard it? There must be something to learning that I'm missing. No one can follow such a regimen simply to serve Hashem. Similarly, there had to be a method to Rabbi Tropper's "madness." Yeshaya 65:24 states, "Before they call, I will answer, and while they're yet speaking, I will hear." This teaches that Hashem hears and answers all prayers. Fine but do we believe it? That's a horse of a different color but Dov does, and Moshe Rabbeinu most certainly did. But how can we say this? Five hundred and fifteen times his pleas were dismissed. So, the answer often given to those who say that they see no point in Davening because nothing ever changes in their lives is to say, "Hashem listens but many times the answer is no." The implication is that one should keep importuning because the next time could be the charm. The NY lottery borrowed this rationale for its approach, "Hey you never know." While this is certainly a valid modus operandi I'd like to suggest a different Mehalach. The Gemara (Berachos 10a,b) relates that the Novi Yeshaya came to Chizkiyahu when he was in the throes and death and basically told the King, "I have some bad news and some really worse news for you." The bad news is that you're going to die. But the really bad news is that you will not live in the World to Come. Chizkiyahu was nonplussed, but Yeshaya explained, "This is your punishment for not having been engaged in procreation." The king spoke up in his defense, "But it was my destiny to have a wicked son." As the Gemara related, Chizkiyahu defended himself by arguing that he had seen this through a Divine vision. The prophet was anything but sympathetic as he retorted, "Who are you to play with G-d's secrets?" In other words there's a Mitzvah in the Torah to have children and you shirked that duty, case closed. Let's try to explain this exchange. This past Motzi Shabbos (the night of Tisha B'Av) Zev Brenner had a guest who was an expert in the so-called Bible codes. I got the sense that the host was somewhat skeptical as he asked his guest, "Can the Torah codes tell us if Mandani will win the election?" The answer is that it can't, but that's not a reason to dismiss the Codes. When Mordechai asked Esther to intercede on behalf of the people, he explained to her in no uncertain terms that if she refuses then she'll be nothing more than a blip in history because Hashem will find other ways to save His eternal nation. The point is that built into the Torah is an endless supply of possible outcomes based on the fact that man has free-will. Does G-d push His agenda when need be? That's beyond my pay grade. So now we can take another look at the conversation mentioned above. Yeshaya scolded Chizkiyahu because he was expected to provide a link to the chain of Moshiach, ie the rapacious Menashe, but the monarch wanted that piece of the puzzle to come about in a less unsavory way. When Chizkiyahu realized that Yeshaya, and by extension Hashem, wasn't kidding, he took the bull by the horns and married Yeshaya's daughter, and the rest as they say, is history.

We see then that praying is not a simple matter and of course, the greater the person the more complicated it gets. And we can understand that by looking at little children who simply want their needs to be met. Moshe Rabbeinu, was anything but simple. Yes, he wanted to enter the land. And we can even say he had "selfish" reasons, i.e. he wanted to fulfill all 613 Mitzvos, but Hashem had His own Cheshbonos. Had our incomparable leader led the conquest of the Canaanite nations and then built the Mishkan or the Bes Hamikdash it could never be destroyed, because Moshe was a carbon copy (showing my age) okay an exact facsimile of Hashem and therefore when the Creator would get angry at us, He'd have no choice but to vent His frustration at the people. Moshe understood this and this was the last thing he wanted to occur and so what was his solution? When Moshe's request was rebuffed for the last time in Parshas Pinchas he pivoted to ensure that his replacement was up to the task. Our Sages teach, "Who is wise? He who sees the future." What does that mean? One of the Beatles' most popular songs is "Hey Jude" and it has the line, "Don't carry the world upon your shoulders." But that's exactly what Moshe did for the 40 years in which he led our nation in the Wilderness. In 1985 Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie co-wrote "We are the World." Let's borrow from it. "We (Jewish people) are the world, we are G-d's children." But here's the Chiddush, Moshe's allegiance to his people never ended and so he wanted to leave a calling card for all eternity. Chazal also teach, "Who is wise? He who learns from everyone." So, from whom did Moshe take his cues? The villainous Bilaam. When that reprobate realized that his efforts to undermine the Jewish nation had been stymied, he gave the Midianites a suggestion, lead the Jews into debauchery, and this led to a terrible plague. Moshe understood that Bilaam recognized the gravity of sexual sin and he tried to prevent it from becoming a scourge for our nation. And now we can explain why Moshe used the word Vaeschanan. In verse 7:2 Moshe tells the people that when they enter the Land of Canaanites they shouldn't enter into a treaty with them and don't show them favor (Lo Tichaneim.) The next verse adds, "Don't intermarry with them." (Lo Titchaten). So let's first understand what Moshe was saying. If you show them favor you'll end up marrying them. I remember a discussion I heard in college, "Why did I have to be born Jewish? Shiksas are so gorgeous. A female friend who had recently become observant chimed in, "And don't you think that male goyim are better looking than Jewish men?" Today, few look askance at intermarriage, but starting in the

70's and continuing it was a major theme on TV, "Bridget loves Bernie" "Friends" and the "Nanny" are three examples. Invariably the shows feature a Jewish nebbish who hooks an uber classy gentile. Moshe saw all this, and he recognized that it would be our ruination and so he tried to do what he could to prevent it. Lo Tichaneim and Lo Titchatein are cognates of Vaeschanan. The theory of Conservation of Mass states that matter cannot be created nor destroyed. Einstein added that while it can't be destroyed it can be changed into energy. We now apply this to prayer. So Moshe's plea to enter the Holy Land was rebuffed but it was then refashioned and it became his entry into the Torah as our protector against fraternization with the nations.

And of course this has dramatic implications. Let's imagine the childless couple who cry their hearts out for decades. We know what they endure. But Hashem hears their prayers, and somewhere, perhaps in some remote part of the world, those prayers will be answered. Think how they'll feel when they come to the next world and see the products of their efforts. Is it their own? No, but it's pretty good. Let's offer a more tangible example. About a year ago, Rabbi Akiva Eisenstadt, Mora Dasra of MBJC told an incredible story. Decades ago some fellow walked into a fledgling synagogue in Dallas Texas and presented the Rabbi with an enormous check. As you can imagine the Rabbi was taken aback and so he was told, "I'm not the most religious person but I visited Israel and went to the Kotel." I saw a man davening with incredible fervor (Dov Tropper?) I was so moved that I decided I wanted to pray in such a shul in Dallas and so I'm giving you this check to make that dream a reality." And, in fact, that's what happened. So think about that Yerushalmi. He'll come to the next world and when they read off his Zchusim they'll come to, "Built shul in Dallas." As Gary Coleman said on Diffrent Strokes, he'll say, "What you talking about?" I never heard of Dallas." And the Heavenly Curator will explain it to him. About a week ago I took the train to work. About 15 minutes in some guy sitting opposite me started up a conversation, " I see you learning all the time but I never approached you." He told me he's Jewish and he's going to think about starting. Hey you never know. Let me end with some lines of a song I wrote many years ago.

I see that you're always praying
But do you believe in G-d?
Are they just words you're saying?
Do you believe in G-d?
It's really a simple thing to do
Just open your heart
You'll see the light
Come shining through
Do you believe?

The Jealousy Antidote

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

"And you shall not covet your fellow's wife, you shall not desire your fellow's house, his field, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow" (5:18)

Perhaps one of the hardest commandments to understand — let alone fulfill — is Lo Sachmod, not to be jealous. As Ibn Ezra asks (Shemos 20:14), how can the Torah command us not to feel an emotion that comes naturally when someone has something that we would like to have? When the neighbor redoes his house and builds a pool, how can a person be expected not to want to have a pool as well?

Ibn Ezra answers this question through a parable. Imagine a commoner who visits the royal palace. As he is viewing the beautiful grounds, he sees the princess step outside in her royal garments. Though struck by her beauty, does he think for a moment, I want to marry her? Most people wouldn't entertain that thought for a second. They realize that the king's daughter is out of their league. People desire something that they can conceivably have, not something that is totally out of reach. The same should hold true for someone else's possessions, says Ibn Ezra. We should train ourselves to realize that since Hashem gave the pool to the neighbor, it is something that He wants the neighbor to have, not us. As such, it should not be within the realm of our desires. The Ibn Ezra's approach has become the classical answer to this question, but Rav Simchah Zissel Brodie derives another explanation from a Ramban. The Ramban cites the following Midrash: The Ten Commandments are all repeated in Parashas Kedoshim in some form or another. For instance, the verse, "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" (Vayikra 19:3) corresponds to the first commandment, and "Veilokei maseichah lo sa'asu lachem — and molten gods shall you not make for yourself" (ibid. v. 4) corresponds to the second commandment. The parallel to Lo Sachmod, says Ramban cryptically, is "Ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocha — Love your fellow as yourself" (ibid. v.18).

Rav Simchah Zissel explains the correlation between the two. Did you ever hear a father or mother wish that their children would have less material possessions just because they had less when they were at the same stage in life? No. Parents are thrilled when their children have more than they did. Why? Because they love their children as much as they love themselves — if not more — so they are happy when their children can afford anything they want. If we would truly fulfill ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocha and love every Jew as we love ourselves, says Rav Simchah Zissel, we wouldn't feel jealous of them for owning possessions that we cannot afford. We would be happy for them, just as we are happy when our own children have more than we do.

“You shall guard and you shall fulfill, for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations that hear these laws and say: How wise and understanding is this great nation” (4:6)

Rashi says that guarding means to learn Torah. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is guarding called learning? Why doesn't the Torah just command us to learn? He answers that the only way through which a person can keep the Torah properly is to learn Torah and study the mitzvos. Without knowing the laws and studying them, one cannot have a proper understanding of halacha. One guards the Torah and ensures its proper fulfillment by learning.

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day” (5:15)

Why are we required to refrain from work on Shabbos? The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 32) writes that refraining from work is a reminder of Yetzias Mitzrayim. As slaves in Egypt, we were unable to rest whenever we wanted. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He commanded us to rest on Shabbos to remind us how he took us out of slavery. When we refrain from work on Shabbos, we are reminded of the kindness that Hashem did for us and that we owe everything to Him. Another reason given by the Chinuch is that Hashem wants us to refrain from work and all other activities so that we can focus on the fact that Hashem created the world. Because this principle is so important and so basic, it is important to remind ourselves once a week that Hashem created the world in six days and stopped on the seventh day. By mimicking the actions of Hashem in resting on the seventh day, we remember and internalize the fact that Hashem created the world from nothing.

“Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only” (6:4)

The recitation of Shema every morning and evening in its proper time is of utmost importance. The gemara on Sotah 42b quotes a posuk in Shmuel I (17:16) which says that Goliath would approach the camp of the Jewish army every morning and evening in order to intimidate the soldiers. The gemara asks: Why did Goliath specifically come out at those times? The answer given is that he wanted to prevent them from reciting the Shema. He understood the power of Shema and he thought that if he could prevent them from saying Shema, he would be able to defeat them. The Chofetz Chaim laments that today many people do not even understand what this Philistine knew. We should understand how important it is and be sure to say Shema before the end of the time for its recitation every morning and after nightfall every evening. If one davens Shacharis with a minyan that davens after the time limit, he should be sure to say it on his own beforehand within the prescribed time. If one davens Maariv before nightfall, he should be sure to repeat Shema after night has begun. This is especially important to remember on Friday nights, when most people daven before nightfall. One should be sure not to take the mitzvah of Shema lightly.

“You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise” (6:7)

The Torah obligates a person to learn when sitting at home and when walking on the road. The Chofetz Chaim writes that this was easy to do before the Oral Law was written down because Torah was taught orally and one had to memorize Torah every time that he learned. Therefore, when one was home or on the road, he had Torah memorized in his head that he could review. Today, when our learning is done from sefarim and we no longer memorize Torah, it has become more difficult to fulfill this obligation. Therefore, he recommends that a person have sefarim with him at work to learn from when he has down time and that he memorizes a few perakim of mishnayos so that he can learn anytime. Today, it is much easier to do this. Anyone can have shiurim on the go with audio shiurim on tapes, CDs or iPods that one can listen to in the car, on the subway or while walking down the street. We also have small printed sefarim (and Parsha Sheets!) that one can easily take on the road. There is always something to learn. Each person can find some area of learning on which he can focus that piques his interest. The Torah is so vast and covers such a wide range of topics that one's work in the study of Torah is never complete.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

The Consolation of *Shabbos Nachamu*

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Shabbos Nachamu is an enigma. The theme of the *Shabbos*, as indicated by its *haftorah* and nomenclature, is consolation. But what is the source of our consolation? The *Beis Hamikodsh* has not been rebuilt; things have not changed.

In the case of mourning the death of one of the seven immediate relatives, time alleviates grief, as the mourner becomes reconciled to his lot. The pain of his loss diminishes as time elapses. But with regard to our mourning for the *Beis Hamikodsh*, the lapse of time is not supposed to have a consoling, ameliorating effect. On the contrary, our obligation during the three weeks is to overcome the passage of time and acutely experience the anguish of *churban*. Why then do we feel consoled on *Shabbos Nachamu*?

Mourning for the *Beis Hamikodsh* is redemptive rather than cathartic. The *aveilus* of the three weeks is designed to awaken our emotions and sensitize our hearts to the tragic reality of *churban* and its insidious causes. Accordingly, the *aveilus* of the three weeks is a period of repentance and yearning - repentance for the sins which caused *churban*, yearning for the *Beis Hamikodsh* in its full glory.

Repentance and yearning are also the keys to the restoration of the *Beis Hamikodsh*, to *geulah*. This idea underlies the Gemora in Ta'anis 30b which teaches that one who mourns for Yerushalayim will merit and participate in its future joy. Thus the *aveilus* of the three weeks, properly observed, brings us closer to the *geulah*. And this provides the consolation that we experience on *Shabbos Nachamu*.

Double Consolation

by Rabbi Mordechai Willig

“*Nachamu Nachamu Ami*” (Yeshayahu 40:1). *Am Yisroel* sinned doubly (*Eicah* 1:8), was punished doubly, and is consoled doubly (*Psikta, Nachamu*). What is the nature of the double sin and consolation? Yeshayahu said “for she has received double [punishment] for all her sins from the hand of Hashem (Yeshayahu 40:2)” - what is the justification for *Am Yisroel* being punished doubly for its sins?

Am Yisroel is fortunate! When we comply with Hashem's will, no nation can rule over us; when we don't comply, He places us in the hands of “lowly nations and even its animals” (*Kesubos* 66b). The Maharal explains that our lowliness when we sin is also part of our being fortunate, in that it emphasizes that we cannot be average - either we rise above others, or we sink beneath them (*Netzach Yisroel* ch. 14). If our descent starting at the *churban Beis Hamikdosh* merely equated us with other nations, this would indicate that our status in Hashem's eyes is no different than theirs, and that the Torah is merely a tangential, not fundamental, dimension of our existence. Our inability to be on par with other nations indicates that Torah is an intrinsic, indispensable part of our very existence. Torah and Yisroel are one, and thus we are very fortunate (Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht *zt”l*).

Perhaps, then, the double sin is that we sank two levels: from above the other nations, to below them; from a lofty roof to a deep pit (*Chagiga* 5b, based on *Eicha* 2:1). While the inability of *Am Yisroel* to be on the level of other nations is in fact a sign of Hashem's love, it also results in our sins being doubled, as we sink two levels, not just one, when we falter. We are thus punished doubly, for the two descents, but we are also consoled because Hashem created us uniquely, and the double punishment is a sign of His love.

This lesson provides a measure of consolation even when we are in *galus*. One who mourns over *Yerushalayim* is privileged to see its joy (*Ta'anis* 30b). Mourning over our double descent reminds us that we can and will rise from the pit to great heights and this consoles us with a vision of a joyous future. When that future arrives, there will be a double consolation, “*nachamu nachamu*”.

Yirmiyahu foresaw the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdosh* (Rashi, *Eicha* 4:21), and declared: “Hashem will not exile you again” (4:22) after the *galus* of Edom (Rashi). The cities of *Eretz Yisroel* are in a state of destruction when other nations rule over them (Magen Avraham 561:1). Today, when *Am Yisroel* rules over the *Eretz Yisroel*, we are promised that there will be no future exiles (*B'ikvei Hatzon*, p. 214, 215, based on Ramban *Vayikra* 26:16).

The promise that we will not have any more exiles enhances for us the consolation that mourners over *Yerushalayim* experienced throughout the generations. May this consolation give us strength to endure the difficult situation of the *galus*, and may it soon be joined by the consolation of the ultimate redemption, when the navi's double expression, “*nachamu nachamu ami*”, will be fulfilled.