

# ***NACHAMU NACHAMU AMI Yeshayahu 40:1-2***

**Sermon Notes Of Rabbi/Brother Moshe Yoseph Koniuchowsky From Shabbat  
Month 5 Day 27**

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Assistance from Rabbi Gideon Weitzman the Puah Institute for Fertility and Medicine

**Yeshayahu 40:1-2-A 2 house proclamation which is why there are 2 comforts.  
Divine repitition.**

## **After the Storm**

The fast of the ninth of Av is a time of tragedy and destruction. It leaves us depressed and broken-hearted. These are difficult emotions to live with, and so the rabbis ensured that we would not remain in this state for too long.

The prophet Yeshayahu calls to the people of Israel and to the city of Jerusalem and comforts them, saying YHWH has punished you enough, He will redeem you.

The first Shabbat after Tisha B'AV is the first of seven weeks of comfort, seven weeks of consolation. These weeks begin on Shabbat after Tishah B'Av and conclude the week before Yom Teruah. Each week we read a Haftarah taken from the Book of Yeshayahu that contains words of consolation, messages from the prophet promising that the redemption will surely come.

These weeks boost our morale and ensure us that even though we may have sunk to the depths of despair, Elohim will draw us up. He will bring us close to Him, and we will rise again. This time is called the **Shivah DeNechamta**, the Seven [Weeks] of Consolation.

Each week that we read the consoling words we feel our spirit return to us. We feel that there is hope, we see the light at the end of the tunnel, and are comforted. We are consoled.

## **How Can I Be Comforted?**

On Tishah B'Av we spend half of the day reciting lamentations and sad prayers that were composed throughout the generations and the long exile. These prayers are called Kinot and deal with the destruction of the Temple, the exile, and many of the tragedies that befell the Jewish people.

In one of the Kinot, written by the poet Rabbi Elazar Khalir, the refrain asks, "How can I be comforted?"

Our long history of suffering pogroms and attacks against us teaches us that we are in exile, helpless, with no hope for a change in our situation. The Temple was destroyed and has not been rebuilt. Every year we cry on Tishah B'Av, every year hoping that this will be the last. Yet every year Tishah B'Av comes around again, and we see that our situation has not improved. Sometimes, in fact, the opposite is true.

## **Rabbi Akiva and the Rabbis Visit Jerusalem**

The classic text that deals with this question involves a visit of Rabbi Akiva and a number of other rabbis to Jerusalem. This event must have occurred very soon after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.

Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were once walking along the road when they heard a great cry of joy coming from the Roman camp 120 miles away. They all cried and Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They asked him, "Why are you laughing?" "And you," he said. "Why are you crying?"

"These heathens who bow down to idols, they sit safely and comfortably, and as for us, the house of YHWH is burnt; should we not cry?" [answered the rabbis]. [Rabbi Akiva] said, "For that reason I am laughing. If for those that go against **His** will it is so, how much more so for those that abide by His will."

On another occasion they went up to Jerusalem. When they got to Mount Scopus they tore their clothes and when they got to **Mount Moriah**, they saw a fox coming out of the Holy of Holies. They all cried, and Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They asked him, "Why are you laughing?" He responded, "Why are you crying?"

They said, "Foxes are now walking in the place about which it says, 'the stranger that comes close shall die' (BeMidbar 1:51), shall we not cry?"

"For that reason I am laughing," he said. "There is a verse that states, 'I brought faithful witnesses, Uriah the Cohen, and Zechariah ben Berachiyah' (Yeshayahu 8:2). What is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah lived during the first Temple and Zechariah during the second, but the verse implies that the prophecy of Zechariah is dependent on the prophecy of Uriah. Uriah says, 'Because of you, Zion will be plowed over like a field' (Michah 3:12). Zechariah says, 'Once again old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem' (Zechariah 8:4). Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I was worried that the prophecy of Zechariah will never happen. Now that the prophecy of Uriah has been fulfilled it is certain that the prophecy of Zechariah will surely be." They said to him, "Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us" (Makkot 24a-24b).

This is a well known story and it closes the tractate of Makkot, providing a beautiful ending. However, the story contains a number of unusual elements and statements. If we can analyze and understand them, then we will be in a good position to answer the major question. What was the source of Rabbi Akiva's comforting statements? How was he so certain that the redemption of both houses would come? Rabbi Akiva lived through the destruction of the Temple and witnessed pain and suffering all around him. Did this not affect him? Did he not realize that he was living in tragic times?

## The Spirit of History

Rabbi Akiva rebuilt his professional life after all his students died of a terrible plague. He went south, found five new students, and taught them the entire Torah, thus ensuring that the tradition continued (Yevamot 62b.3) Rabbi Akiva actively fought the Romans in the way that he knew best, by teaching Torah publicly in direct protest against an explicit ban on doing so. Eventually he was caught and sentenced to death for this "crime." He was flayed alive with a metal comb used for grooming horses, and so became a martyr in his fight against the Romans (Berachot 61b).

If so, how could Rabbi Akiva laugh when the rabbis came close to Jerusalem and witnessed the degradation of the Temple and the people? How could he laugh? He should have broken down and cried like the others who were with him.

Rabbi Akiva gave an answer that convinced them that he was right and provided them with a source of comfort. He explained that he was waiting for a visible sign that the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled and now he knew that the prophecy of Zechariah would also be fulfilled. In his words, "Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I was worried that the prophecy of Zechariah will never happen. Now that the prophecy of Uriah has been fulfilled it is certain that the prophecy of Zechariah will surely be."

## **IF THE HOUSE OF JUDAH HAS BEGUN TO RETURN IT IS ALSO A CERTAINTY THAT THE HOUSE OF EPHRAIM WILL ALSO RETURN!**

Rabbi Akiva is teaching us an important lesson about history in general and Yisrael's history in particular. There are historical events, but they cannot be viewed in isolation. To appreciate world events and history, one must view historical processes. When we are capable of stepping back and scanning the entire process we can begin to understand the Divine process that exists behind the historical one.

After all, history is a process of Divine revelation. Rav Kook's son, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, was fond of saying that the Hebrew word for history "historiah" sounds like the words "**hester yah**," meaning the **covering of YHWH's face. YHWH hides in historical events and is slowly revealed through the process of history.**

What Rabbi Akiva said to the rabbis that comforted them was that he was waiting for this moment, for the destruction

of the Temple and of Jerusalem. Because when he witnessed this, when he saw the Temple destroyed and overrun, he knew that a historical process had been initiated. The prophet had already linked Uriah and Zechariah's prophecies. When Rabbi Akiva saw evidence of Uriah's prophecy, it was clear as day to him that Zechariah's prophecy would definitely follow.

The reason that things did not occur that way, however, is not that Rabbi Akiva was unaware of his real situation. After all, he ripped his clothing on seeing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash together with the other rabbis. Rabbi Akiva lived on a different plane and had a totally different perspective. He did not view the events as separate entities. Rather, he always tried to view the process. When one does so, the events seem less urgent, less catastrophic. The events, individual parts of a whole, become notes on the page, that fuse together to form a beautiful melody. The notes may be dull and unimpressive taken singularly and out of context. But when heard together the sound is pleasant and uplifting.

### **RABBI AKIVA HAD AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THE END OF THE EXILE! HE KNEW ALL YISRAEL WOULD RETURN BY THE DESTRUCTION HE SAW!**

The process of the redemption of Yisrael started in Rabbi Akiva's time. He was perceptive enough to recognize this and to teach the other rabbis the message as well. He knew that once the process started there was no stopping it. It had to happen, sooner or later, that Yisrael would return to the holy city and inhabit her. The streets would again be filled with old men and women, and with children playing. When would it happen? No one could say, but Rabbi Akiva knew that it would surely happen. He did not just believe with a true faith that it would happen; he knew. Because he had witnessed the beginning of the process, it was only a matter of time until the entire process would be complete. It might take a decade, a century, or two thousand years, but it would happen.

That was the message that Rabbi Akiva taught the rabbis on a desolate hill overlooking the Temple Mount almost 2000 years ago.

### **IN LIKE MANNER YAHSHUA MUST AND IS GUARANTEED TO RETURN AS HE SAID IN MATTHEW 23:37-39 BASED ON THE FIRST TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION JUST AFTER HIS FIRST COMING**

We are witnesses to the fact that Rabbi Akiva was right. Many Jews did return to the Land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem is once again filled with young and old Jews living and visiting there. Rabbi Akiva told the rabbis it would happen, and indeed it did.

When Rabbi Akiva said these words it must have seemed like a fantasy. If one had told the Romans that Rabbi Akiva thought that his people will return to Jerusalem, they would have considered him to be mad. If he would have told the Romans that the defeated Jews will still be in existence two millennia later, they would have laughed. If the Romans had heard that the Jews will outlive the mighty Roman Empire, they would have found it impossible and comical. Yet the Jews are still here. We defeated the other nations with quiet and persistent determination. Am Yisrael Chai!

This is the message of the seven weeks of comfort. Live in the present but look to the future. Do not become embroiled in historical events but seek to comprehend the historical processes. If we do that, then we will find comfort, even when it seems to be elusive, and we will rise again, ready for anything and prepared to succeed.

### **Close-Read Micha 4:1-7**