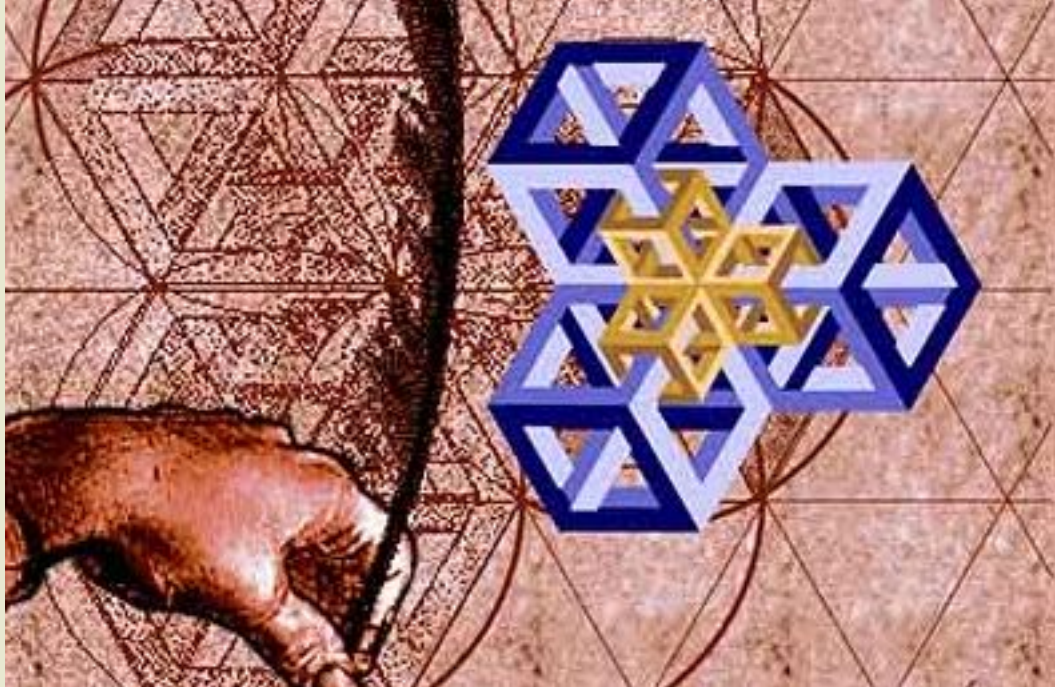


FrameWorks SpiralNotes Series
Nechama



Tu b' Av

transcribed and edited by Geoffrey Dworkin
based on undergraduate shiur, 2001

In this essay, we examine the flow of time from the beginning of the Churban period, 17 Tammuz, through the 15th of Av and beyond...

- Tu b'Av -

The Fifteenth of Av

From Mourning to נחמה

י"ז תמוז begins the period of משה going up to הר סיני in order to ask for forgiveness for the טטא of the עגל. It is a period that extends and stretches to יום הכיפורים. Within this period, there is a time of mourning and a time of comfort, culminating at ט"ו באב, and similarly, a time of תשובה and כפרה for the breaking of the לוחות on בתמוז י"ז culminating with יום הכיפורים (with the period of כפרה subsuming the period of mourning.) Though they initially were two separate occurrences, they have since merged into one period: the יום המצרים, the Three Weeks. And both days, as told in the last משנה of תענית, are celebrated with the same bizarre holiday: the dancing girls and the choice of a future...

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל, לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וימים הנפורים, שבהן בנות ירושלים יוצאות בכלי לבן שאולין, של'א לביש את מי שאין לו... ובנות ירושלים יוצאות וחולות בכרמים. ומה היו אומרות, בחור, שא נא עיניך וראה, מה אתה בורר לך. אל תתן עיניך בנוי, תן עיניך במשפחה. (משלי לא) שקר החן והבל הי'פי, אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל...

וכן הוא אומר, (שיר השירים ג) צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך של'מה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו. ביום חתנתו, זו מתן תורה. וביום שמחת לבו, זה בנין בית המקדש, שיבנה במהרה בימינו. אמן:

משנה מסכת תענית פרק ד:ח

תנו רבנן, יפפיות שבהן אומרות, תנו עיניכם ביזפי, שאין אשה אלא ליזפי. מיוחסות שבהן אומרות, תנו עיניכם במשפחה, [לפי] שאין אשה אלא לבנים. (עשירות שבהן אומרות, תנו עיניכם בבעלי ממון. בינוניות ועניות) [מכוערות] שבהן אומרות, קחו מקחכם לשם שמים, ובלבד שתעטרונו בזהובים:

תענית, לא.

What is the connection between ט"ו באב and יום הכיפורים and why are they celebrated in what seems to be an odd and frivolous way? Indeed, the two days do not seem to be related at their source, yet even the פסוק finds a relationship, as רש"י points out that the יום on לחת בני" received the second יום הכיפורים as יום הכיפורים. For some reason, the בנות ציון dance about and as they offer their individualized messages (beauty, family, sake of heaven), we should understand something integral about both of these days. What is the message of this celebration and what is it that occurs during this transition from נחמה to תשובה that allows for such a celebration?

Understanding נחמה

שמעו אלי ר'דפי צדק, מבקשי ה'; הביטו אל-צור חצבתם, ואל-מקבת בור נקרתם. הביטו אל-אברהם אביכם, ואל-שרה תחוללכם: כי-אחד קראתי, ואברהם וארבהו. כי-נחם ה' ציון, נחם כל-חבר תיה, וישם מדברה כעדן, וערבתה כגן-ה'; ששון ושמחה ימצא בה, תודה וקול זמרה. (ישעיהו נא:א-ג)

These פסוקים are recited as part of the הפטרה for עקב (one of the נחמתא), and therefore are intended to offer נחמה to בני"ו. The simple פשט is that this is a message for people who are hopeless, for those who are alone and see the world as antagonistic, feeling that they don't have the ability to rebuild, move on. So the נביא reassures that just as שרה and אברהם, who seemingly had nothing and had to face the challenges of an

antagonistic environment, were able to succeed, so too shall you. Yet, why do we address this to ר'דפי צדק, why not to all Jews – don't all Jews need נחמה? Moreover, the פסוק uses future tense, saying "וְאַבְרָהָם וְאַרְבֵּהוּ" and I will bless him and make him plenty, as opposed to the past tense, "and I blessed him" (as pointed out by רד"ק and others). Also, the פסוק seems to be giving an image of comfort by encouraging us הַבִּיטוּ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיכֶם, וְאֶל-שָׂרָה תְּחוּלְלֶכֶם. But traditionally, נח is the one who is the paradigm of נחמה, of comfort, because even after destruction, even after the מבול, he nevertheless invested in the earth and became an אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה which is why he is named for comfort:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לְאֹמֶר זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמֵעֲצוֹנוּ יְדִינוּ מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אֲכָרָה ה'. בראשית פרק ה:כט

Why, then, is the פסוק in the context of אברהם and not נח?

The נביא is very deliberate in its phraseology. It is indeed speaking to ר'דפי צדק מְבַקְשֵׁי ה' people who see themselves on the cutting edge, the pursuers of justice, people who look for truth. The answer or response of כִּי-נַחֵם will not come from comfort, that is, the notion that somehow we can just "manage" without the thing that was lost, just sort of pick up the pieces and continue on with the new situation. נחמה does not mean this. נחמה is not feeling sorry, rather it is a changing one's mind.¹ נחמה רש"י says נחמה means looking at things in a completely different way. There are those who deal with loss by pretending that nothing has changed, by going on – "managing." Yet, the real way to deal with loss is by redefining one's life, accepting the loss and being able to live with new definitions. It is recognizing that something has changed and now demands reorienting oneself to a new definition of life. Not "comforting" in the English sense, but it is the meaning of נחמה and certainly is the issue of ט"ו באב, as can be seen in the Talmud's list of the events commemorated by 15 Av:

רב מתנה אמר יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה ואמר רב מתנה אותו יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה תקנו ביבנה הטוב והמטיב הטוב שלא הסריחו והמטיב שנתנו לקבורה רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו יום שפסקו מלכרות עצים למערכה תניא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר מחמשה עשר באב ואילך תשש כחה של חמה ולא היו כורתין עצים למערכה לפי שאין יבשין אמר רב מנשיא וקרו ליה יום תבר מגל מכאן ואילך דמוסיף יוסיף ודלא מוסיף יאסף. מאי יאסף? אמר רב יוסף תקבריה אימיה: (תענית דף לא,א)

The גמרא tells of many events that occurred on ט"ו באב which ultimately transformed it into a day of national celebration. First, ט"ו באב was the day when בני in the desert determined that the decree of death in the מדבר had ceased. Every year on ט"ו באב, they would climb into graves and wait to see if they would die. Those who survived went on until the next year, those who died were buried. In the fortieth year, when they went into their graves, no one died. At first בני thought they may have miscalculated the day, but by ט"ו באב, when the moon was full, and hence, could no longer potentially be ט"ו באב, they were certain the decree had finally ended. Until there was a complete closure of the past, as long as there were people who believed that the גזרה was still in effect, בני could not move on and celebrate. The same thing happened with the הרוגי ביתר. The bodies were finally buried on ט"ו באב, thereby accepting the defeat, and so a day of commemoration was made. The revolution was over on ט"ו באב, but as long as there was a responsibility to deal with the past, it was impossible to move on to something new. Until the casualties were buried, the nation could not move on. Lastly, ט"ו באב was the final day that בני collected the wood for the מערכה, so the culmination of this activity meant that everyone could get on with

¹ Indeed, this term, נחמה, also appears in נח (the story of a man who will bring us comfort), conveying the same meaning. When ה' announces that there will be a flood, the פסוק says וַיִּנְחַם ה' כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-פְּסוּקוֹ "וינחם ה' כי עשה את-פסוקו" ה' changed his mind about creating man, he had second thoughts.

using the nights and days for themselves. As long as one is bound up with the past one cannot move on to the future. The end of the past's potential is also the end of the past's limitations. As long as one harbors hope for what visions and dreams the past offered, he cannot move on. Only by reorienting himself can such a person, in the face of destruction, achieve נחמה.

This idea of נחמה is the notion that you have to start things over again. When you are a רִדְפֵי ה' מְבַקְשֵׁי הַצְדִּיק, searching for justice and ה', you can look backward and you can look forward. One cannot continue a life that is essentially over and actually continue and move on. False comfort comes from pretending and ultimately, that leads to nothing. אברהם and שרה, what did they do? They were engaged in constant, continuous movement – אברהם will be blessed, in you, שרה will be blessed in you. Continuing the development started with אברהם, will be the key to success. Always afraid, willing to consider what might happen, a harden heart, such thoughts or perspectives will keep one in a mode of destruction. ט' באב is day of national disillusionment. As soon as you can drop your absurd beliefs and illusions about reality, then you can begin the comfort.

אמר רבי יוחנן מאי דכתיב (משלי כח) אשרי אדם מפחד תמיד ומקשה לבו יפול ברעה אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים אתרנגולא ותרנגולתא חרוב טור מלכא אשקא דריספק חרוב ביתר... סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבוקולס יאמרו בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מזבח סבור למיקטליה דלא ליזיל ולימא אמר להו רבי זכריה יאמרו מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג אמר רבי יוחנן ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבוקולס החריבה את ביתנו ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו מארצנו (גיטין נה:)

The common denominator with all three incidents identified here is that they were מקשה לבו and unable to think out of the box. מום, he didn't worry even further of perhaps there might not even be a מקדש (מקדש). נחמה is getting away from illusions.

אלול and Transition

אלול is also a time of transition. אלול represents the month's time spent by משה on הר סיני when he went up again for another forty days until יום הכיפורים, when he received the second לחת. אלול is not a time of fixating on sin necessarily. Why was משה up there for forty days, what was he doing. Praying? During the first forty days, משה was learning, so he needed that time, because he was learning all new things. The second forty days he was also learning. But from a new perspective.² The way to start again is to get a new לחת. We didn't collect the pieces of old לחת and start from there. Rather, משה had to start all over again, no re-learning, but learning, not recreating, but creating. This is what ultimately brings us to יום הכיפורים. אלול is a time to begin life anew. ראש השנה is the time when ה' turns us into a חדשה.³

תשובה isn't feeling bad about sin. People only feel bad that they're in trouble, or feel guilty. People think, if ה' could see things my way, then what I do is justified. רמב"ם says feeling bad genuinely, חרטה, can happen *after* תשובה, not before.

(ב) ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשה עוד שנאמר יעזוב רשע דרכו וגו' וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי ויעיד עלי

² Similarly, we have a story of רי זירא who learned all of בבלי in בבלי. Then spent forty days fasting so he could forget all of בבלי on his way to Israel, so he wouldn't be prejudiced. (Bava Metsia 85)

³ We built the משכן the day immediately after משה came down again, an expression of this concept of נחמה.

ידוע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שנאמר ולא נאמר עוד אלהינו למעשה ידינו וגו'
וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלב:

רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות תשובה פרק ב

Real תשובה means that the person refuses to accept his reality as it is, and desires to and actually changes it. תשובה comes from the ability to see things in a new way, just like נחמה. One can say I am indeed sorry and upset, but only after תשובה.

נחמה → תשובה → נחמה

The process of mourning leads to the recognition of what we have lost. But out of loss comes a disillusionment that restores hope, the ability to move on and see things afresh. As the word for mourner suggests: אבל means "but" – the absolute truth – to see something as it is, without any illusions. Death is unchangeable – a person will not return, no matter our attempts to immortalize or bring back to life. And as such, death forces a complete rethinking, a reformulation of one's life and goals of one's dreams and visions. With every other situation, we think, or hope, that it'll be ok, that somehow we can fix it. So death is the ultimate experience, the paradigm, which jars within us that need, that recognition to reorient and revamp ourselves.

During אלו, we prepare ourselves to be able to receive and accept the offering of the girls, so to speak. They were offering truly different and equally valid paradigms from which to choose from. What do you choose? You're day is starting again, your life has begun anew. What do you think marriage is for? Beauty and love? Commitment to future? Building a home and children? Investing in relationship? All are valid possibilities and available. But the dancing girls can only offer paradigms on days when a person is big enough to really make the choice. Future is not made of comfort, it's made of choices and changes. The women, as they dance and proffer themselves to the men represent real, meaningful alternatives where one can direct his life. יום הכיפורים and ט"ו באב are times of recognizing the new, a recognition that life will make all new demands on you, things you can't expect, and they are times for preparing one's self for such challenges. And with that preparation, one can indeed make the choices necessary for a meaningful and significant life.