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### Getting Ready

By Rabbi Joshua (consolingly known as The Hoffer)  
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Parsahs Va'eschanan is read every year on the Shabbos following Tisha B'Av, or Shabbos Nachamu. That Shabbos, as its special name indicates, is dedicated to the concept of nechama, or consolation, over the destruction that we mourned for during Tisha B'Av and the three week period preceding it. This aspect of consolation is readily apparent in the haftarah reading for this Shabbos, taken from the book of Yeshayah and beginning with the words "nachamu, nachamu ami" - comfort, comfort my people (Yeshayah 40 : 1). It is, in fact, the haftarah reading that has given this Shabbos its name of Shabbos Nachamu. However, the Torah reading itself also has elements of nechama in it. It is often pointed out that the Torah reading for the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av, parshas Devarim, is very appropriate, because it contains within it an account relating to the mission of the spies. The spies returned from their mission on the night of Tisha B'Av, and it was the reaction of the people to this mission that was behind the later destruction of the Temple and other tragic events that occurred on Tisha B'Av. Similarly, as we will demonstrate, parshas Va'eschanan is a very appropriate reading for the Shabbos following Tisha B'Av.

Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, interestingly, pointed out that the Rambam, in his Laws of Prayer, writes that the widespread custom is to read Va'eschanan on the Shabbos after Tisha B'Av. He does not mention that parshas Devorim should be read on the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av. The main goal, thus, is the reading of parshas Va'Eschanan after Tisha B'Av, and the reading of Devorim on the previous Shabbos comes as a natural result. Rabbi Soloveitchik explained that it is important to read Va'eschanan on Shabbos Nachamu because the parsha contains elements of nechama, and we need to emphasize nechamah so that our nation can continue, with a sense of confidence, its spiritual work after the mourning period that ended with Tisha B'Av. The entire process of mourning on Tisha B'Av, Rabbi Soloveitchik said, can only be prayed out because it ends with a note of consolation, as reflected in the prayer 'nacheim' - comfort- that we include in the mincha service that day.

What, then, are the elements of nechama that can be found in parshas Va'eschanan? I believe that one element can be found in the every beginning of the parsha. We are told that Moshe persisted in praying to God to allow him to enter the Holy Land, until God finally told him not to pray anymore. The midrash derives from here that one should pray to God in a time of distress. Rabbi Reuven Katz, who served as rabbi of Petach Tikvah for many years, explained in his commentary Dudaai Reueven that the only reason Moshe was not able to enter the land, in the end, was that God told him to stop praying. Had he been allowed to continue, God would have relented and abolished his decree. We thus see the power of prayer even in the face of the

most stringent decree from God. This message is certainly a consolation to us, after spending the entire day of Tisha B'Av praying to God and lamenting over the tragedies that have occurred throughout our history, and that, unfortunately, continue to occur. The Torah is telling us that we should never give up on praying to God, no matter how bad the situation may appear, because a positive divine response is always possible.

A second aspect of consolation comes a little later in the parsha, when the Torah tells us that God will send us into exile if we persist in our sins, but within that exile we can return to God if we seek him with all our heart. This, then, is a parsha of repentance. Rabbi Soloveitchik pointed out that it was for this reason that this part of the parsha was chosen to be read on Tisha B'Av itself. One method of attaining repentance, is spelled out, I believe, in the section immediately following the section that is read on Tisha B'Av. The Torah goes on to relate that Moshe set aside three cities of refuge, each designated as a kind of sanctuary for the inadvertent murderer, to save him from the hands of the blood avenger. The rabbis point out that Moshe set these cities aside in his lifetime even though they would not become operative until the other three, that were on the other side of the Yarden, would be set aside, something that would not happen until after Moshe's death. Moshe, out of his love for the mitzvos, did as much as he could in his lifetime, setting an example for the nation, to pursue mitzvos.

Rabbi Naphtoli Tzvi Yehudah Berlin pointed out that Moshe's actions demonstrated another aspect of his approach to mitzvos, as well, one that is not spelled out by the rabbis. By designating these cities, Moshe was teaching us that we need to study new cases in Jewish law before they actually arise, so that we will be prepared for them when they arrive. This approach, writes the Netziv, decreases the possibility of mistakes that might obtain if we waited until actual new circumstances arose to learn how to apply the halacha in them. This approach to Torah bespeaks a love of God by showing that one does not want to make any mistakes in applying His Torah to one's life. Moshe's love of God, as expressed in his pursuit of mitzvos and his approach to learning Torah, served as an example for his people. Following the section on teshuvoh, perhaps this love of God is presented as an example of the approach one must take in doing teshuvoh, in returning to God. Returning to God is the ultimate form of consolation, bringing man back to where he should be, and thus forms an important part of the message of this week's Torah reading.

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