

Parashat Vaetchanan – Shabbat Nachamu, 5774, 2014:

Shabbat Nachamu and the Mashiach

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shmuel David ben Moshe Halevy, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and to the safety of the soldiers of Tzahal in their holy mission to protect the Jewish people.

This Shabbat is called “Shabbat Nachamu” after the first verse of this week’s Haftorah (*Yeshiyahu* 40:1): “‘Console, console My people,’ says your G-d.” (“*Nachamu nachamu ami yomar Elokeichem,*” this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The Hebrew verb “*nachem,*” the root word of “*nachamu,*” connotes, as well, a sense of comfort. Therefore, Isaiah is teaching us that there will be a time in the future when we will finally be at true peace with the nations of the world, with one another, and with ourselves. As the great Spanish exegete Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235) notes in his commentary on our *pasuk* (verse): “All of these consolations and words of comfort pertain to the future – to the days of the Messiah.”

What will the “days of the Messiah” (“*yimot hamashiach*”) be like? Will they literally be like Yeshiyahu’s famous words?

And a wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling [shall lie] together, and a small child shall lead them. And a cow and a bear shall graze together, their children shall lie; and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw. And an infant shall play over the hole of an old snake and over the eyeball of an adder, a weaned child shall stretch forth his hand. (11:6-8)

Shmuel (165-257 C.E.), one of the greatest of the Babylonian Talmudic Sages, clearly

understood the preceding passage in a metaphoric sense. Instead of a world wherein Nature and the instinctual behaviors of the animal kingdom will be radically altered, we will have a world wherein the Jewish people will finally be completely free of the yoke and control of our oppressors. Thus he declared: “There will be no difference between our world and the days of the Messiah except for the cessation of the domination of the kingdoms of the world [over the Jewish people]. (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 99a*) In sum, for Shmuel, the *yimot hamashiach* will be a time of complete socio-political freedom for our people, when we will finally be in total control of our own theocratically conceived and ruled nation.

The Rambam (1135-1204) explicated Shmuel’s position in his halachic *magnum opus*, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 11:1 and 12:1 and 2:

King Messiah will arise in the future and return the kingship of David to its former greatness and glory. He will rebuild the Holy Temple and gather all of the exiles to the Land of Israel. All of the laws will be in effect during his days just as they were in earlier times. We will [once again] offer *korbanot* (animal offerings) and keep the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years just like all of the other laws stated in the Torah.

One ought not to think that in the days of the Messiah anything will change in the nature of the world (*m’minhago shel haolam*), or that there will be some new creation within Nature (*b’maaseh Bereishit*). Rather, the world will continue in its normal fashion. The passage in Isaiah that states “And a wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid...” is merely a metaphor. Rather, it really means that the Jewish people will live in comfort and without fear of the evil non-Jewish nations who are symbolically represented by the terms “wolf” and “leopard.”

Our Sages stated: “There will be no difference between our world and the days of the Messiah except for the cessation of the domination of the kingdoms of the world [over the Jewish people].”

One is immediately struck by the purely naturalistic position taken by Maimonides. The reinstatement of the Davidic monarchy “to its former greatness and glory,” in the person of

the true Messiah, is the necessary and fundamental criterion for the fulfillment of all other authentically Jewish eschatological goals. “Former greatness and glory,” in a word, means uncontested Jewish hegemony in our own G-d-promised and -gifted land. Pragmatically, it means that all of the unending political pressures faced by our beloved modern State of Israel will cease. It means, as well, that Israel will finally be perceived as the preeminent nation in the world, since all countries will recognize it as being G-d’s unique dwelling place amongst mankind. This will take place as a natural result of all of the nations of the world “returning to the true faith” i.e. monotheism.

Once we are truly politically free and no longer beholden to any earthly power, the *Melech Hamashiach* (King Messiah) will be free to “rebuild the Holy Temple and gather all of the exiles to the Land of Israel.” Approximately 1500 years ago, these hopes and aspirations were given ardent voice by our Sages in two blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Amidah* or Silent Prayer):

And may You return to Your holy city in mercy, and dwell therein as You have spoken. And may You build it soon and in our days as a permanent construction. And may the throne of King David rapidly be re-established therein. Blessed are You Hashem, He who builds Jerusalem.

Sound the great shofar [whose clarion call] declares our freedom. And raise up our standard to gather around all of our exiles, and gather us all together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You Hashem, He who gathers the exiles of His people Israel. (Translation my own)

Perhaps we can now more clearly see the unique bonds that connect *Shabbat Nachamu* to the one and only *Melech Hamashiach*. Perhaps we can now understand, as well, why this Shabbat has had such a profound effect upon the Jewish psyche. After the dark days of the Three Weeks and Tisha b’Av, we finally feel that the Great Shofar heralding the

imminent coming of the Messiah can and will be sounded at any moment and that he is finally just a few steps away.

With G-d's mercy, kindness, and compassion, may this past Tisha b'Av be our final one in *galut* (the Diaspora), and may we celebrate the next one together in peace and tranquility in the newly rebuilt *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple). Then, at last, we will hear and understand Yeshiyahu's timeless message: "*Nachamu nachamu ami yomar Elokeichem.*" *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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