

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
August 17, 2019 *** 16 Av, 5779
Parashat Va'Etchanan

Today's Portions

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Va'Etchanan in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2260/jewish/Vaetchanan-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Moses tells the people of Israel how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the Land of Israel, but G-d refused, instructing him instead to ascend a mountain and see the Promised Land.

Continuing his "review of the Torah," Moses describes the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, declaring them unprecedented events in human history. "Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . and live? . . . You were shown, to know, that the L-rd is G-d . . . there is none else beside Him."

Moses predicts that in future generations the people will turn away from G-d, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered amongst the nations; but from there they will seek G-d, and return to obey His commandments.

Our Parshah also includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments, and the verses of the Shema, which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d ("Hear O Israel: the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one"); the mitzvot to love G-d, to study His Torah, and to bind "these words" as tefillin on our arms and heads, and inscribe them in the mezuzot affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/540269/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah is the first of a series of seven "haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

This section of Isaiah begins with G-d's exhortation to the prophets: "Console, O console My people . . . Announce to Jerusalem that her period of exile has been fulfilled and that her sins have been forgiven."

Isaiah's prophecy describes some of the miraculous events that will unfold with the onset of the messianic era, such as the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, the revelation of G-d's glory, and the rewards and retribution that will then be meted out.

The prophet then goes on to comfort the people, describing G-d's power and might, and reassuring them of His care for His people.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Why Is The Jewish People So Small? (Va'etchanan 5779) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/why-is-the-jewish-people-so-small-vaetchanan-5779/>

Near the end of Va'etchanan is a statement with such far-reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah. This remark gives an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Genesis, God promised the patriarchs that their descendants would be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the seashore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but

of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were “fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7). Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being “as many as the stars of the sky” (1:10; 10:22; 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as being part of “the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number” (I Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that “the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted” (Hos. 2:1).

In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasised. What then are we to make of Moses’ words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as “the fewest of all peoples” but as “the most lowly and humble of peoples.” Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham’s words, “I am but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27), and Moses and Aaron’s, “Who are we?” (Ex. 16:7).

Rashbam and Chizkuni[1] give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants. Rabbeinu Bachya[2] quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since “the glory of the King is in the multitude of people” (Prov. 14:28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God chose it, despite its smallness, to be His *am segula*, His special treasure.

Rabbeinu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and “as many as the stars of the sky” (Gen. 22:17). He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno[3] gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people – today, less than 0.2 per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain and nineteenth-century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no Crusades, and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.4 billion) or Islam (1.6 billion). In fact, Malbim[4] reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites were about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with the other nations, not for racial but for religious reasons: “They will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods” (Deut. 7:4). Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites: Do not justify out-marriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers. Notwithstanding all these interpretations and explanations, Tanach itself offers one extraordinary episode that sheds a different light on the whole issue. It occurs in the

seventh chapter of the book of Judges. God has told Gideon to assemble an army and do battle with the Midianites. He gathers a force of 32,000 men. God tells him, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2).

God tells Gideon to say to the men: Whoever is afraid and wishes to go home may do so. Twenty-two thousand men leave. Ten thousand remain. God tells Gideon, "There are still too many men." He proposes a new test. Gideon is to take the men to a river and see how they drink the water. Ninety-seven hundred kneel down to drink, and are dismissed. Gideon is left with a mere three hundred men. "With the three hundred men that lapped [the water] I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands," God tells him (Judges 7:1–8). By a brilliant and unexpected strategy, the three hundred put the entire Midianite army to flight.

The Jewish people are small but have achieved great things to testify in themselves to a force beyond themselves. It has achieved things no other nation its size could have achieved. Its history has been living testimony to the force of Divine Providence and the impact of high ideals. That is what Moses meant when he said: Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4:32–34)

Israel defies the laws of history because it serves the Author of history. Attached to greatness, it becomes great. Through the Jewish people, God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are judged not by their size but by their contribution to human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes, and rashei yeshivot. It has also yielded some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers, Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, teachers fighting ignorance, and therapists fighting depression and despair.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition. Judaism asks of us the willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

This is still evident today, especially among the people of Israel in the State of Israel. Traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, Israel continues to produce human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, and the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. Israel remains a small nation, surrounded, as in biblical times, by "nations larger and stronger than you" (Deut. 7:1). Yet the truth remains, as Moses said: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples."

This small people has outlived all the world's great empires to deliver to humanity a message of hope: you need not be large to be great. What you need is to be open to a

power greater than yourself. It is said that King Louis XIV of France once asked Blaise Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and theologian, to give him proof of the existence of God. Pascal is said to have replied, "Your Majesty, the Jews!" [1] Rabbi Chezekiah ben Manoah; France, 1250-1310 [2] Bachya ben Asher ibn Halava, Spain, 1255-1340 [3] Ovadiah ben Yacov Sforno, Italy, 1475-1550 [4] Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, Ukraine, 1809-1879

Parashat Va'etchanan by Rabbi David Markus

<https://ajrsem.org/teachings/divreitorah/>

It's fitting that the "Jewish greatest hits" of Parashat Va'ethanan come immediately after Tisha b'Av.

After our spiritual calendar's lowest day, Torah promises that anyone who seeks God with whole heart and soul will find God exactly where we are – even in exile (Deut. 4:27-29). We stand again to hear the sacred utterances we call the Ten Commandments, recalling that together we stood at Sinai (Deut. 5:6-18). We receive the Shema of unity and the V'ahavta of a love that far transcends place – both "dwelling in [our] home and walking on [our] way" (Deut. 6:4-9).

Notice how the three Va'ethanan dimensions of content, place and time commingle spiritually.

The content is core Jewish theology. It's our full-hearted search for God amidst a promise of real sacred encounter. (Heschel's God in Search of Man, anyone?) It's God pouring Self into Word becoming Law shaping Life. It's a creed of unity to infuse the world with love and ethical living – a creed for which countless have lived, struggled and died.

The place is en route, unsettled, somewhere between where we were and where we're going, nostalgic and anticipatory all at once. The Deuteronomic plot brings these words on the "other side of the Jordan, in the desert of Aravah" (Deut. 1:1) – in the proverbial middle of nowhere. There we were, wandering a vast wasteland, trudging sandblind toward a Land of Promise we'd never seen but, we heard, awaited us with milk and honey.

The time is now – a palpable radical life-changing now. Va'ethanan shifts from three chapters of Moses recounting what happened "then" to a sudden "and now" (Deut. 4:1). All of "then" was a lead-up. In Torah's plot, the whole point of "then" (40 years wandering) was to prepare for this "now" nearing the Land of Promise, recalling the Ten Commandments, invoking unity and love.

As for "them" "then," so for "us" "now." Our palpable radical life-changing "now" is just after the breaking and exile we call Tisha b'Av. Whether our Tisha b'Av is more historical (destructions and ejections) or more internal (spiritual wall-busting before the High Holy Days), tradition puts these words in our Torah cycle at this most poignant and raw "now." It's "now" that we are en route and unsettled, in a vastness somewhere between where we were and where we're going.

The Ten Commandments, Shema and V'ahavta – refracted through textual lenses of place and time – take on especially poignant meaning. These words come precisely for the unanchored and raw, for the sandblind weary wanderer. In that place and time, because of that place and time, finally we could become ready to receive these words and live them.

Put another way, a deep essence of the Ten Commandments, Shema and V'ahavta is that these words are precisely for the faint of heart. We are to live these words exactly from those places inside us – and precisely for those places out in the world – that are most unsettled, vulnerable, raw, broken and exiled. We are to live them not only from our stability and comfort, in safety and ease, but also precisely the opposite.

If so, then life's difficulties magnetize these words, like a koan, as if to say, "Live these words exactly where they are most challenging." Living that way, we refine our souls. Living that way, we aim our most loving and ethical behaviors at people and places that most need them. Living that way, we can transform the world.

This understanding might be different from how we learned these “Jewish greatest hits” – and from how many modern communities invoke them.

The Shema and V’ahavta can be liturgical, musical and meditative – but do they also galvanize all parts of us? We can receive them as comfort, but do we also receive them as orders however inconvenient? Do they send us racing to douse a burning building? How about a burning relationship? How about a burning planet?

When our settled sense of comfort and ease inhibit us from a full-hearted “yes,” then we miss the point. After all, the point of these words is not settled comfort and ease, but the opposite. We received these words as wanderers, literally hot and bothered, when nothing was safe. We are to live these eternal words now with equal courage and resolve.

To be sure, comfort has its place. After the breaking and exile comes the reassurance that God comes with us. Where Moses spoke the words of Va’ethanan – “on the other side of the Jordan, in the desert of Aravah” – might be the same place of Haftarah’s words of comfort: “Comfort! Comfort, My people – says your God... The way in the Aravah will be made straight, as a highway for God. Every valley will be lifted, every hill and mount made low, the crooked straight and the rough places plain – and all flesh will see together the glory of God” (Isaiah 40:1, 3-5).

That place is this place; that “now” is this “now.” These words rouse us to seek God anew, in exile and yet with full hearts – not because it’s safe, but because the search is more important than safety. We do so not where life’s terrain is even, but precisely where it’s not. Living that way, we ourselves can become vehicles for Isaiah’s prophecy of comfort and transformation.

The exiles of history, and the exiles of spirit, remind that we received Judaism’s keystone ideas in exile – at the time and place that might most prepare us to live by them. Teach them that way to the children, the congregations, the students, and the students of their students. Speak them that way in your home and en route. Live them that way, in exile, in every in-between place that is most unsettled, the places that are unsafe and hot.

Do that with a full heart and we’re sure to find God journeying with us every step of the way. Let that be our comfort, our cause and our covenant. (Rabbi David Evan Markus (AJR Adjunct Faculty – Rabbinics) is rabbi of Temple Beth El of City Island (New York, NY) and Founding Builder of Bayit: Your Jewish Home, a spiritual innovation start-up for all ages and stages. Rabbi Markus also serves as Faculty in Spiritual Direction and past Board Co-Chair for ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. By day, Rabbi Markus presides as Judicial Referee in New York Supreme Court, 9th Judicial District, as part of a parallel career in government service.)

[VaEtchanan: Learning to Read by Rabbi Jay Kelman](https://www.torahinmotion.org/discussions-and-blogs/vaetchanan-learning-to-read)

<https://www.torahinmotion.org/discussions-and-blogs/vaetchanan-learning-to-read>

Our Torah encompasses all aspects of life: it regulates our existence from the day we are born until the day we die, and from the moment we awake until we retire at night. It is only after one has accepted the binding nature of the Law that one may begin to question the whys of the Law. While clearly some laws are more important than others, our attitude towards them all must be one of absolute obedience. “Be as meticulous in the light mitzvot as in the heavy ones” (Avot 2:1). It was this fear of prioritizing the mitzvot that led the Rabbis to remove the Aseret Hadibrot from our daily prayer service. We have 613 categories of mitzvot, not just ten[1]. However, the Aseret Hadibrot, which appears, with slight—and not so slight—variations, for the second time in this week’s parsha, is the initial Divine revelation of G-d to the world at large, and hence does have special importance.

We tend to read the Aseret Hadibrot vertically, dividing them into two sets of five. The first set represents the obligations between man and G-d (and since our parents are partners with G-d in our formation, they are included on this “side”) whereas the second set enumerates our obligations to our fellow man. The two tablets are bound together, teaching us that we must not focus on one side at the expense of the other.

Were we to do so, we would distort the values of our faith.

In addition to dividing the Commandments vertically, the Dibrot can also be read horizontally, linking each command between man and G-d with its corresponding command between man and man. The way we treat our fellow man reveals much about our relationship with G-d and how we relate to G-d reveals much about our relationship with our fellow man.

The first commandment, "I am the Lord, your G-d" teaches that each and every human being is created in the image of G-d. The natural corollary of this is the prohibition against murder, of extinguishing the G-dliness of man.

The second Commandment teaches us the message of monotheism, "Do not have any other gods before Me." Hence, the seventh commandment against adultery. Our relationship with G-d is that of a husband and wife, each one demanding absolute devotion and fidelity. The breaking of these bonds is so serious that both idolatry and adultery carry, at least in theory, the death penalty.

The third Commandment which prohibits the taking of G-d's name in vain corresponds to the eighth Commandment of "do not steal". One might suggest that since everything in this world belongs to G-d, "to G-d is the earth and its fullness" (Tehillim 24:1), one who steals is taking G-d's name in vain, for the objects are not being used as intended. Furthermore, a thief runs the risk of taking G-d's name in vain if and when he appears in court.

The mitzvah of Shabbat testifies to the fact that we accept G-d as the ultimate creator. While we are mandated to be creative six days a week, by abstaining from the 39 categories of creative work on Shabbat, we bear witness to G-d's creation of the world- for "six days G-d made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them and He rested on the seventh day." Therefore, the ninth Commandment tells us that we may not bear false witness against our fellow man.

The last set of Commandments pairs the duty to honour our parents with the prohibition against jealousy. The crucial mitzvah of honouring our parents is predicated on the expression of our gratitude to them for bringing us into the world and nurturing us. We recognize that it is only through the caring of others that we have attained our position in the world. Those filled with gratitude have no desire to compare themselves with others. They are happy with whatever blessings they do have, whereas those who are envious tend to be ingrates, thinking that they are masters of the world.

Honouring parents and avoiding jealousy are two of the hardest mitzvot in the Torah to properly fulfil. Rabbi Tarfon, proud of the fact that he would wait by his mother's bed so that when she awoke, she could put her feet in his hands and not the cold floor, was told by his colleagues that he had not even reached half the mitzva (Kiddushin 31b, and Tosafot s.v. Rabbi Tarfon). No wonder our Sages recommend a parent waive the honour due them. And who amongst us has fully complied with the prohibition against jealousy. At the same time a (normal) parent is never jealous of a child. Deep love and concern for another enables one to fulfil this last and most difficult

command. [1] According to the count of the sefer haChinuch there are actually 14 mitzvot in the aseret hadibrot. The "Ten Commandments" is a mistranslation of the aseret hadibrot, the Ten Statements, revealed by G-d at Sinai.

[A Leader's Limits by Hillel Gruenberg](http://www.jtsa.edu/a-leaders-limits)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/a-leaders-limits>

The very title of this week's parashah, Va'et-hannan ("and I pleaded"), presents the larger-than-life figure of Moses in a humbling place. Before sharing with the people fundamental elements of the faith that they have taken on and the civilization that they aspire to become, Moses confessed to them that his exclusion from the destined land of promise was against his will, and in spite of emotional pleas to God (Deut. 3:23-26). The man who chose to forgo the trappings of a life among the royal Egyptian

elite to lead an at-times ungrateful band of liberated slaves through the desert would ultimately be barred from tasting the final fruit of his sacrifice.

Commentators suggest a variety of reasons for God's refusal to let Moses enter the Land, including his striking of the rock at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:9–12, Rashi); his impetuous rebuke of his people in this episode (ibid., Rambam); and his behavior in the dispatch of spies to the Land of Israel (Num. 13, Abarbanel). However, we might take a step back to explore the question of why Moses should not have entered the Land despite everything he did in the service of God and his people.

Let us consider for a moment Moses's own biography: he went from being a member of the Egyptian royal house, unaware of his true origins yet not entirely comfortable with his supposed family's oppression of another people, to an exiled prince resigned to a simpler life in the desert, and then on to become a liberator, teacher, and preacher to his people. Moreover, Moses came to his leadership role somewhat begrudgingly, humbly expressing at the outset of the Exodus saga that he was *aral sefatayim*, "deficient of speech," (Exod. 6:12) and might not be suited to the monumental task of speaking to the ruler of a great civilization or navigating an unwieldy group of recently freed slaves through an unforgiving desert.

With this, we must consider how different experiences, characteristics, and skills can equip people for different forms and contexts of leadership. It is difficult to deny that Moses's leadership as conveyed to us in the biblical narrative is anything short of awe-inspiring, whether in relation to the personal impediments he overcame, the life of luxury he gave up, or the sheer magnitude of the task of guiding a fractious multitude through the desert. However, different challenges call for different solutions depending on their context and, by extension, demand different sorts of people to effectively face particular tests and trials.

As Jews, we believe that Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our teacher, was alone in his ability to meet the task of guiding the people of Israel through the desert and imparting the morality and rituals of the Torah on a people who remained otherwise ignorant of such matters as they emerged from the shadow of subjugation. However, the skills and abilities that made him so unparalleled in this regard were not necessarily transferable to the baser and more brutal work of generals and politicians that would be unavoidable following the people's entry into the Holy Land.

One might be tempted to ask why, despite this conclusion, Moses couldn't simply enter the Land as a private citizen, conceding his all-powerful leadership roles for a simpler life, like the Roman dictator Cincinnatus who chose to forgo absolute power in favor of the quiet existence of a farmer. To answer this, we can look to the 17th century commentator Or Hahayyim, who argues that implicit in Moses's request for entry was a willingness to resign from his position of leadership. However, the Or Hahayyim contends, Moses's particular leadership role was so immense and so unique that resigning from it would essentially be impossible. We can extrapolate further that Moses's very presence was so overarching for the people in his charge that it would always serve as a challenge to the authority of Moses's successor, Joshua, whatever Moses intended.

Considering that both Moses's essence and experience precluded his entry into the Land as the Children of Israel transitioned to the reality of life in their new land, leads us back to the first word and title of this parashah, *Va'et-hannan*. This word is directly related to *hanan*, grace, and Rashi points out that all forms of the connected verb *hanan* denote requests for an "ex gratia gift," meaning one that is not in return for any specific good deeds or worthy action. In addition to this, earlier in the Torah we see that one of the thirteen attributes of God is *hanun*, gracious. We might then assume that a more gracious response to Moses's late-in-life request would be to allow him to enter the Land rather than a curt refusal paired with a command to "never speak to Me of this matter again!" (Deut. 3:24).

However, God's true grace here may be in recognizing that Moses could not enter the Land, both because of the potential negative impact it could have on his people's survival and cohesion in their new land, and because Moses was just as ill-suited to the upcoming tasks of conquest and governance as his persona was indomitable and irreplaceable in the eyes of his people. In telling Moses to immediately cease discussion of this request, God may merely have been shifting Moses's gaze inward, pushing him to see what perhaps he already knew—that both in spite and because of his deeds and status as the unparalleled leader of the people, he could not, for their sake, join them in this new chapter in their collective history. (Hillel Gruenberg is the Director of Israeli Engagement at JTS)

[The Source of Comfort by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pnFAj9Rf0BfHpcUOedtEq8oTERRYDjerb7Ow1G12pd8/edit)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pnFAj9Rf0BfHpcUOedtEq8oTERRYDjerb7Ow1G12pd8/edit>

With this week's haftarah, we begin a series of seven haftarot of consolation (Shiva D'nehamta) which follow Tisha b'Av and bring us to the Yamim Noraim (The Days of Awe) - Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These haftarot are drawn from the last part of the book of Isaiah which contains prophecies from the beginning of Shivat Zion, the return from the Babylonian exile. And many contain messages of reconciliation with God, inspired by the end of the exile from Eretz Yisrael.

The prophets emphasized that with the end of physical exile the people's relationship with God was also on the mend. This message comes through most clearly in the opening words of this week's haftarah, which famously begins: "Nahamu nahamu ami yomar Eloheichem," which translates most simply as "Be comforted, be comforted, O My people, says your God." (40:1)

Commentators throughout the ages have sought to explain both the doubling of the word "nahamu" as well as the odd syntax. While it is likely "just" a literary device used by this particular prophet, Rabbi Mordechai Malkovitch, the teacher of the Netivot Shalom, Rabbi Shalom Berezovsky, takes more creative license. He reads the verse to say: "Nahamu / Be comforted, ami / that you are My people, yomar / then your God will say, E-loheichem / I am your God." For Malkovitch our consolation lies first in knowing that we are God's people, because, as God's people, reconciliation is always possible.

For Malkovitch though, this isn't a reason to feel entitled. He elaborates: "Since you are children of the King, don't make yourselves loathsome through inappropriate behavior, since being the child of the King necessitates totally 'other' behavior." (Netivot Shalom, Devarim p. 41) For Malkovitch, as CHILDREN of the King, we are expected to live up to our elevated status. Though we will be given second and third chances, we live (or should live) with a healthy fear of causing God to be disappointed. Jews view exile and redemption through this prism. National sin leads to periods of alienation where we are exiled from our home - the place where we feel closest to God. It is painful to come to grips with God's disappointment and feel exile's chill, but we are ultimately supposed to trust in our special bond with God and know that God will never refuse our return. Like a child who trusts their parent's love, even when we do wrong there is a core of self-esteem that motivates us and gives us the confidence to do the work of repenting and returning.

Rather than make us complacent and entitled, our people's unbreakable covenant and bond with God should inspire us to be our best selves, as individuals and as a nation.

Yahrtzeits

Michael Hessdorf remembers his mother Regina Hessdorf (Nacha Rivka bat Moshe v Minna) on Saturday August 17th (Av 16).

David Horn remembers his wife Alice Horn) on Sunday August 18th (Av 17).

Marianne Sender remembers her father Roman Popiel on Tuesday August 20th (Av 19).

Harriett Katz remembers her husband Erving Katz on Wednesday August 21st (Av 20).