

Parenting in the Parsha

פרשת ואתחנן Push and Pull

נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אל-יכם:

Comfort, oh comfort My people, Says your G-d.

ואומר במדרש על דרך צחות כי תקנו לומר בתחלת הפטרות הנחמות נחמו נחמו עמי כלומר' שהקב"ה אמר לנביאים נחמו נחמו עמי. על זה משיבה כנסת ישראל ותאמר ציון עזבני ה' כלומר' איני מתפייסת מנחמת הנביאים, ואומר...עניה סוערה לא נוחמה כלומר' הנביאים חוזרים ואומרים לפני הקב"ה הנה כנסת ישראל לא נתפייסה בתנחומין שלנו, על זה חוזר הקב"ה ואומר אנכי אנכי הוא מנחמכם ואומר עוד רני עקרה לא ילדה ואומר עוד קומי אורי כי בא אורך. על זה משיבה כנסת ישראל שוש אשיש בה' כלומר עתה יש לי לשוב ולשמוח תגל נפשי באלקי כי הלבישני בגדי ישע וגומ'.

The *midrash* states eloquently that the *chachomim* established to begin the series of *haftoros* of comfort with *nachamu nachamu ami*, meaning that Hashem instructs the *neviim* to comfort the people. To that the Jewish People respond "and Zion has stated 'Hashem has abandoned me,'" meaning "I will not be comforted by the consolation of the *neviim*." The next *haftarah* reads "unhappy storm-tossed one who will not be comforted," as if to say the *neviim* report back to Hashem "the Jewish People will not be comforted by our consolation." To that, Hashem responds "I, and I alone will comfort you" followed by "rejoice o barren one who has not delivered" and then "Arise o light for your light has come." To that, The Jewish People respond "I will rejoice in Hashem," meaning "Now I can rejoice and be happy" and "My soul shall rejoice in my G-d for he has clothed me in the garment of redemption."

- Abudraham

תנו רבנן לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת לא כאלישע שדחפו לגחזי בשתי ידיו

The Sages taught: It should always be the left, weaker, hand that pushes another away and the right, stronger, hand that draws him near, not like Elisha, who pushed Gehazi away with both hands

- Sotah 47a

We need to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. Punishment is what you do to someone; discipline is what you do for someone.

- Zig Ziglar

The Abudraham, in a beautiful citation from the *midrash*, informs us that the opening phrases of the next seven weeks of *haftoros*, the *shiva d'nechemta*, are actually an ongoing conversation between Hashem, the *neviim*, and The Jewish People. After the *churban*, Hashem sends the *neviim* to console the people in their devastation. The nation rejects the comfort offered by the *neviim*, wanting only to be comforted by Hashem, Himself, and the *neviim* report that to Hashem. That leads to the stirring declaration by G-d, "*anochi anochi hu menachemchem*", "I, and I alone shall console you." Only then do the Jewish people heed the words of comfort and consolation.

It is a beautiful, profound, and yet disturbing idea from the Abudraham. It was Hashem who orchestrated, engineered, and carried out the destruction of the *mikdash*, the ruin of the land, and the devastation and exile of the people. You would think that the last place the people would turn to for comfort would be Hashem who had brought about their pain. Yet, that is precisely what they do. Why?

The *midrash* is teaching a profound idea. The Jewish People are saying to G-d, You can rebuke us, You can discipline us, and You can punish us, but please do not abandon us. As a parent to us, His children, G-d must sometimes mete out consequences for our actions and misdeeds. We understand that is part of

our relationship with him. But, He is still our parent, and even when He punishes us, we still need to know that He loves us and that He has not abandoned us.

What an important idea for parents! Our role as parents demands that we must sometimes discipline, punish, or rebuke our children. But, we should never withhold our love for them. To a child, his source of comfort, stability, and security is his parent, and, even when that child may be angry with you for having doled out a consequence, it is still you, his parent, whom he will turn to for comfort and consolation. Too often, parents get this wrong, and the consequences for getting it wrong can be devastating.

Let's play out the scenario. Your child did something wrong, maybe even horribly wrong. You issue an appropriate consequence for the wrongdoing. So far, so good. It is what happens next that is critical. Your child is upset. He may be disappointed in himself, he may be crushed over the loss of a privilege that you just meted out. Now who will console and comfort him? Who will commiserate with him? Who will go and sit on the edge of his bed and help him work through his feelings and his actions? *Anochi, anochi hu menachemchem*. That's your role as a parent. I have punished you, I have rebuked you, I have disciplined you, but I will never abandon you.

Of course, you should not force yourself on a child who is emotionally unready to talk, but you should let him know that you are there for him and that you feel for him. Never withhold your love for your child as punishment for a wrongdoing. It is unhealthy and counterproductive. Help your child to understand that you must impose consequences as part of *chinuch*, but, as you impose consequences with your left hand, draw your child near and hug him tight with the right hand.

Good Shabbos,

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