

Voeschanan

On this Sabbath, *Shabbas Nachamu*, let us learn the meaning of condolences.

The troubles of the people of Israel were so oppressive and overwhelming that every attempt to comfort them was futile.

The *Dalkut* (Isaiah 40) relates that all the prophets sought to console Israel and were rebuked.

Hosea came and announced that the A-mighty sent him to offer solace. "What is your message?" they asked. Hosea then said, "I will be as the dew unto Israel. He shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Israel countered, "Yesterday you said 'Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit.' How can you contradict yourself?"

Joel then came and said, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine." Israel replied, "Yesterday you said, 'Awake ye drunkards and weep; and howl all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it is cut off from your mouth!' Which words should we believe?"

Amos came and proclaimed, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen." Israel answered, "Yesterday you said, 'The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise.' How can we believe you.?"

Micah came and said, "Who is a G-d like unto thee, that pardons iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" Israel responded, "Yesterday you said, 'For the transgression of Jacob is all this and for the sins of the house of Israel.' Which is true?"

Then came Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. All were rebuked. They voiced their frustration. Then G-d went with Isaiah with the prophecy of solace: "*Nachamu Nachamu Ami*"—Be you comforted, be you comforted my people. And he was accepted.

What different message did Isaiah bring? Why were all others rejected, and Isaiah accepted?

4. There should be no more than twenty-five students in a class.

The *Gemara* also discusses rules about the teachers themselves. Here is also argued the relative merits of a teacher who covers a lot of ground but is not exacting in some of his explanations versus a teacher who covers less ground but is more precise. Hiring and firing practices are mentioned, as well as “staff psychology.”

That is why it is so sad to remember the days when the people in the American Jewish community charged with setting up educational institutions and practices were so ignorant of the seriousness and particulars of their work. I do not think that it is unfair to say that many of them were guilty of being “*Machreev a Dor*”—destroying an entire generation in the spiritual sense. You see the “students” of that generation at Simchas and sorrowful occasions, not knowing how to hold a *Siddur*, looking around lost—and sometimes even hostile. It is all too easy for we Orthodox to forget that the aforementioned state of affairs is unfortunately representative of the majority of today’s Jewry. And it is really not their fault. They are “*Teenokos Sheneeshboo*”—like captured babes. It is the previous generation who is at fault. It is they who, while building temples on the boulevards of the city, neglected to build temples in the hearts of their children. It is they who ignored the full message of “*Veleemadetem Osom Es Benaychem*.” It is from their *Churban* that we have had to rebuild.

A *Shochet* once came to the Chofetz Chaim and said that he wished to leave his present profession and instead become a *Me-lamed*, a teacher of children. When asked why, he stated that he could no longer cope with the heavy responsibility of making sure that no one ate *Trayf*. He wished, he said, an easy, light job, like teaching kids. It is reported that the Chofetz Chaim laughed bitterly and replied, “The responsibility for what someone ingests into his body frightens you, but you are strangely enough not in awe of teaching that which is taken in by the soul!”

In the days of the second Temple, Yehoshua ben Gamla established community responsibility for Torah education. And when we are told in this Sedrah “*Veleemadetem*” we realize that the sharing of Torah is the most precious gift that we can give our children.