

Va'eschanan 5771

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

Chazal arranged that Parshat Va'etchanan is *always* read immediately after Tisha B'Av, so there must be some connection between the two. In my previous Divrei Torah I have indicated several ties between the day that marks our commemoration of all Jewish tragedies and Parshat Va'etchanan. At this time I would like to show the connection from the Haftarah.

The idea of this connection came to me as my wife and I have just returned from a trip to Poland. Thinking of what my eyes beheld; the mass graves, the gas chambers, the crematoria, and the ashes, I desperately needed to read the warm words of comfort from HaShem through the Navi Yeshaya as he is speaking to us today in the Haftarah.

HaShem is saying that after two thousand years of galut [exile] the time has finally arrived for the Jewish nation to return to G-d and His Promised Land. But, as Chazal explain (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya 443,445) the painful scars of galut, persecution, and *Hester panim* rejection are still fresh in our minds and it will be difficult for us to approach HaShem as if nothing ever happened, forget our suffering and rebuild our relationship. Furthermore, we are vividly aware of our acts of defiance, neglect of Torah, assimilation and intermarriage [by vast majority of our people] and feel embarrassed to return to G-d saying it's time for total forgiveness for all our people, it's time for Moshi'ach.

To this HaShem instructs the Navi Yeshaya, "Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim and call her because her long term has been served and her sin has been forgiven." [40:2] After all this time, the Jewish people find it difficult to accept that HaShem is truly interested in us. Although, the time for Ge'ulah has arrived we have not yet thoroughly cleansed ourselves from all our wrongdoings. We question how we could entertain establishing a perfect relationship with HaShem without having perfected our ways. HaShem responds, "Her sins have been forgiven because she suffered an abundant and full measure of them" [ibid.] The Malbim explains this to mean that the harsh severity of their suffering will compensate for their incomplete steps of Teshuva. We, the Jewish people deserve our redemption after enduring and outliving the most horrifying and tragic experiences that anyone can imagine and that no other nation has ever had to endure.

During our trip to Poland, our wonderful and knowledgeable guide, Rabbi Aharon Adler [my nephew] told us when we saw the magnificent shul of Warsaw that the great cantor Moshe Koussevitzky served here as chazzan just before the war. He personally witnessed all the gruesome horrors that our people were subjected to.

Chazzan Koussevitzky survived these horrors only because of his golden operatic voice. He was ordered to entertain the Nazi officers by singing operatic arias, and thus saved his life. After the war he was appointed as chief chazzan of Temple Beth El of Boro Park, New York. On the first night of Slichot he informed the rabbi (Rabbi Schor) that he will have to omit one line of Slichot, the line that reads, "Ashamnu Mikol Am, "[*We have become the guiltiest of all people.*] The chazzan said, after seeing what my brothers and sisters went through, I cannot get myself to utter the words that We are the guiltiest of all people. That is just not true!

The consolation is here in the Haftarah. A double nechama, *NACHAMU NACHAMU AMI*, for the *Hester panim* and for all our suffering. Everything is forgiven and we are ready for the Ge'ulah. May it come speedily in our time.