

Va'etchanan – Shabbat 01 August 2015

I dedicate this article to the memory of my late father: Rev Sydney Black whose Yahrzeit falls in the forthcoming week.

The Shabbat after Tisha B'Av, is always called Shabbat Nachamu after the opening words of the Haphtarah of consolation from Isaiah "Comfort you, comfort you my people".

On Tisha B'Av we remember all the persecution and suffering that has affected Jewish existence for the past 2000 years. Ever since the year 70 when the Second Temple was destroyed together with hundreds of thousands of our people who were butchered and slaughtered, and then following with the centuries of turmoil and suffering, with crusades and inquisitions, culminating with the horror of the holocaust in the last century. One could be excused for asking if there were any real consolation for such wholesale destruction.

The question becomes even more difficult to understand when we consider the outset of the Sedra which paradoxically speaks about anything but comfort. Moses continues his recapitulation of the Torah. After describing the capture of the Lands of Sichon and Og in Jordan, he relates that he had entreated G-d and requested that he be permitted entry into the Holy Land. However G-d's response was negative, G-d tells him that He would acquiesce to Moses' going to the top of a cliff to view the Land but due to the fact that he had struck the rock instead of speaking to it, he would never gain entry. However, Joshua as his successor would lead the Israelites into the land.

So here we have the major figure Moses who had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years, and spoken to G-d "face to face" yet would be denied entry in the land. It's a little bit soul destroying especially post Tisha B'av when we need a more upbeat message of hope for the future.

But I believe that there is an important message here from Moses which helps us to cope with our condition. Here he's been told that his lifelong dream; that of bringing the Israelites into the land would never see the light of day. Imagine his disappointment on being told no- you cannot enter the land.

But read his reaction. After he has been told the news- he moves on, leaves it all behind him. We no longer encounter from Moses any words of regret or complaint; on the contrary in light of his new situation he reframes his position. The Israelites need guidance for the future, it's easy to mope on the past but the next generation needs to be prepared to enter the land. No wonder therefore that he proceeds to tell them about the importance of keeping the commandments and following the Torah. Indeed in this Sedra we read the Ten Commandments and the Shema –two of the most fundamental passages in Judaism.

Sometimes in life G-d says no- but however difficult it may be, like Moses, we need to be able to restructure our lives in light of the new challenge and rise above.