

Consolation

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

When you're feeling sad, do you go to your father or to your mother?

When I seek my father's counsel, it's usually to hear him tell me that these things happen in our lives and the trick is to rise above them. As I grow in years and knowledge -- he explains -- my trouble will seem smaller, and ultimately insignificant. After this little speech I feel a little cheated -- after all, this is *my* big sorrow he's talking about -- but it does seem diminished now, and I can begin to see a path to its eventual overcoming.

When I go to my mother, it's to hear how well she understands what I'm going through. She cries with me, and I see how my sorrow is as painful to her as it is to me. In this shared, broader context, my sorrow undergoes a subtle change. No longer is it a meaningless weight bearing down on me, deadening my heart and mind and cutting me off from the world; but an environment to inhabit, a world to navigate, a force to employ. My sorrow does not become smaller, but it is now bearable, even useful.

"As a father has compassion upon his children," sings the Psalmist, "so does G-d have compassion for those who fear Him." "Like a man whose mother does console him," proclaims the prophet Isaiah, "so shall I console you." Which is it? Who is G-d -- mother or father?

Is G-d the transcendent force in our lives, the voice compelling and empowering us to grow beyond the here and now? Or is G-d our source of comfort, the solacing embrace that assures us that nothing we experienced is meaningless, that everything we are, know and feel can be borne, inhabited and redeemed?

"Console, console My people" we read in this week's Haftorah, the first of a series of seven consoling readings that follow the three weeks of mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of Israel. "I, I am your comforter," begins a later reading in the series. The prophets are not stuttering, nor are they merely being poetic; according to the Midrash, the repetitious wording means that G-d is saying: "I shall do both. I shall be both father and mother to you."

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20 July | 9 Av

Fast of 9th of Av

Fast Begins: 9:08 pm (Monday night)
Fast Ends: 9:50 pm (Tuesday night)

23 July | 13 Av

Parashat Vaetchanan

Shabbat Begins: 8:48 pm
Shabbat Ends: 10:00 pm