

We have emerged from the three weeks between 17. Tammuz and Tisha b'Av (9. Av), when we remember and mourn the many calamities that occurred during this time. Now, the 7-week countdown to Rosh HaShanah and new beginnings has begun. Two weeks ago we read the final chapters of our forty-year trek through the wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land, and last week we began to read the final instructions, entreaties, and warnings Moses issues before he must pass the mantle of leadership to the next generation. From the slanderous report of the scouts through the destruction of both Temples and the razing of Jerusalem, the expulsion of the Jews from England, France and Spain, to the outbreak of World War I and the initiation of the Nazi's "final solution," these three weeks have marked an especially tragic time for our people. As Moses explains throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, our behavior has been, and will be, the source of many of these catastrophes, but we also know that many others have occurred through no fault of our own. We mourn them all – the lost lives, the lost opportunities, the senseless waste. But we cannot live continually in the past. Life must go on, and it is our responsibility to participate in creating a better future. That is why Tisha b'Av ends on a positive note. After the somberness of the evening and morning services, we get up from the floor and begin to sit again on chairs. In the synagogue, the curtain of the Ark is returned to its place before the afternoon service, and at home, some people begin to houseclean. In other words, the act of remembering and mourning the bitter events in our history should ideally lead to renewed hope for the future, an idea that is reflected in our parashah as well as in our Haftarah. This is Shabbat Nachamu, named for the opening words of the Haftarah. *Nachamu, nachamu ami* – "Comfort, comfort My people, says your God." (Isaiah 40:1) The verb *nachamu*, the plural imperative, commands us to console and support our fellow humans. We remind our fellow Jews of HaShem's promise to never let our people vanish from the earth, and we do what we can to help all people who are in need. As the opening words of our parashah reveal, this is a very painful time for Moses. "*Va'etchanan* – And I entreated HaShem ... to let me cross over and see the good land ... but HaShem was angry with me on account of you ..." (3:23-26). Moses is deeply distressed, and somewhat resentful (which makes him all the more human!) that HaShem is about to end his life and his leadership. The word *etchanan* (to implore, entreat) derives from the root חנן (to pardon, have mercy, pity). Midrashim tell of his many attempts to convince HaShem to let him at least enter the land, but like all of creation, he too, must die. Only HaShem is immortal. In a series of speeches he berates, cajoles and encourages the people, reminding them of their history and of their part in upholding our eternal covenant. In doing so, he stresses the same fact that changes our mourning into renewed resolve on the afternoon of Tisha b'Av: "Not with our forefathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, we, all of whom are here alive today." (5:3) And after reiterating what we call the Ten Commandments (5:6-18), he continues (6:4) with the words most of us learn as children, and many of us repeat at least twice a day: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad* – Listen (intently), Yisrael (*yisra-el* – you God-wrestlers), Adonai your God, Adonai is one/unique/all-inclusive. Then, addressed to each of us individually (6:5-9): "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Rashi teaches that the unusual spelling of "your heart" לְבַבְכֶם (two בָּ instead of one) suggests that we should love HaShem with both our good and our evil inclination. He also explains that our hearts should not be at odds with the divine commandments. He also pointed out that acting out of love is better than acting out of fear (פחד *pachad*), which is not what the word יראה – *yirah* (awe/ reverence), which is often used along with love, implies. If the source of fear is removed, motivation usually ceases; but the motivation for acting out of love comes from within, not from external threats. It stands to reason then, that that if we model reverent love when we obey the commandment to repeatedly instruct our children in the *mitzvot*, we will transmit this to the next generation, and they will do likewise with their children. The operative word here is love, which also implies compassion, and brings us to *nachamu* and our collective duty to bring comfort not only to our fellow humans, but to our entire earth. Moses continually reminds the people that even when they disobey, HaShem will never revoke our eternal covenant, which was made in love and is upheld in love, even when that has to be what we today call "tough love." Much of what Moses says is addressed to each of us individually. There is a profound message here: The collective is only as good as the individuals who comprise it. Each one of us carries the burden of responsibility, not only for ourselves, but ultimately for our world. We have mourned collectively, we have arisen collectively, and together we are emerging from the brokenness of Tisha b'Av, albeit into a very uncertain world. But strengthened and encouraged by reverent love for HaShem and by the promise of our eternal covenant, let us try to view our world and ourselves with love and compassion as we end this year and prepare our hearts and minds for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

Shabbat shalom!