

Dear Chavraya,

What brings comfort to your soul? Many years ago, on this Shabbos, *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Shabbat of Comfort, I asked this question of my congregation in Victoria, British Columbia. As the words floated in the still air of the sanctuary, my then two-year old daughter, now soon to be married, toddled to the front of the shul. She reached up her small hand and offered me a sprig of lavender, which she had found on the way to shul.

Shabbat Nachamu is the first Shabbos after *Tisha B'av*, comfort following remembrance of so much pain and destruction. Beginning with this Shabbat of Comfort we enter a seven-week period known in Aramaic as the *Sheva d'n'chemta*, the Seven of Comfort, which bring us to the portal of Rosh Hashannah. On each of the Shabbatot of these weeks, the Prophetic reading, the *haftara*, offers a message of hope from the prophet Isaiah. In the first words of this first week's reading, God calls out, *Nachamu, nachamu ami* / Comfort, all of you comfort My people. In both great and simple ways, each of us is called to be a means of God's comfort in the world.

On *Shabbos Nachamu* the Torah reading is always *Parashat V'etchanan*, the second portion in the book of *D'varim*/Deuteronomy. Containing both the *Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments, *V'etchanan* is a garden of possibility, lush with meaning, beckoning with invitation to explore. *V'etchanan* refers to prayerful outpouring of the heart, beseeching. From the same root, *t'chines* are poignant prayers in Yiddish that were traditionally recited by women. I have a small, very yellowed volume that is my grandmother's *t'china buch*. Marking the pages is an unlikely bookmark, a small piece of bright fabric in Scottish tartan with a tassel on the end. My father sent it home from Europe while serving as a soldier during the Second World War. Encircling her *t'chines*, marking the leaves of her heart's yearning, a thread of comfort joined mother and son across time and distance.

What brings you comfort and what comfort can you bring to others? May each of us be a bearer of comfort, raising up for each other a sprig of lavender and helping to mark with color and connection the pages of each other's lives.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

Meaning of V'etchanan

Moses etc

T'chinos

See notes