



The events of last week were devastating. The murder of the six hostages, six precious souls, Hersch Goldberg-Polin z'l, Ori Danino z'l, Eden Yerushalmi z'l, Almog Sarussi z'l, Alexander Lubanov z'l, and Carmel Gat z'l, shook us to the core. Their faces and names had become familiar to us. Many of us watched the heartbreaking funeral of Hersch Goldberg-Polin and, together with the thousands who were there in person, we could not hold back our tears. As these families conclude their shivas in the days ahead, we note that we are in the midst of the **Seven Weeks of Consolation** during which we recite seven Haftarat selected from the last section of the book of Isaiah. These texts are believed to have been composed by an anonymous prophet who lived after the destruction of the First Temple (586 BCE). He spoke these words to an audience that was shattered by destruction and demoralized by exile. 2500 years later, these texts still have the power to comfort and console. They inspire. And they instill hope. But perhaps the reason why his words are so powerful, is because they are not really "his" words. They are God's words. Human words can only go so far. But God's words are eternal. The Haftarah opens with these four words:

אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי I, even I, am the One (יש' נא"יב) הוא מְנַחֵםכֶּם. who consoles you! (Isaiah 51:12)
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Biblical texts are in conversation with each other. These words are a rebuttal to a verse in the book of Lamentations (Eicha) attributed to Jeremiah. He says:

פָּרְשָׁה צִיּוֹן פְּדִיָּה אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ. (א"יכה א"יז) Zion spreads out her hands, She has no one to console her; (Lam. 1:17)
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The desolate city is a woman bereft of her mate. In anguish she holds out her arms but there is no one to hold her or **console** her. Channeling God's voice, Isaiah counters: **You are not alone! I, I Myself will console you! Nobody else! No person, no idea, no nothing. Only I.** Rabbi Maurice Lamm in his book, *Consolation* writes: **Man comforts. God consoles.**¹ Human beings are certainly capable of **comforting** one another. But true **consolation**, by which we mean the deep abiding tranquility that enables us to go on

with our lives, only comes from God. Lamm bases this idea on a lifetime of pastoral experience and on these four words from Isaiah. He is saying: Of course comfort is a gift. The comfort that family, dear friends and community bring you when you are grieving is immeasurable. It's a blessing. But despite that, it always falls short. Despite the goodness and the kindness, we still experience an emptiness, an aimlessness, a sense of desolation and destitution when shiva is over or in the days and weeks, often months after a loss. There is only so much comfort that another human being can give us. It will never be enough. Because no matter how wise, or how smart, or how learned some people are, no one will never be able to adequately answer our unanswerable questions. Despite their compassion, no human being will be able to give us a full sense of meaning in the face of our loss, and a full dose of courage in order to go on. Lamm: **Perhaps the most revealing insight that I have learned in my study of consolation is that, with all the religious and moral necessity for people to console, they in fact cannot do it. Surprisingly, giving and receiving consolation simply is not in the human makeup.** In other words, **we can give each other comfort, but we cannot give each other consolation, true consolation,** which to Rabbi Lamm would be the deepest sense of eternity, solace and peace; the ability to emerge from sorrow; the sense that we can go on with life; the capacity to experience joy again, comes from God. Our sincere human attempts to console others are thus only approximations of **true divine consolation.** They will always fall short. That doesn't mean that we aren't obligated or that we shouldn't try. It just means that **true consolation, divine consolation** is a mystery, in fact, it is a miracle. Lamm: **God performs a separate miracle for each mourner. Consolation** will in the end come.

אֲנֹכִי-Anokhi: God's Pronoun of Consolation

If our verse from Isaiah answers a verse from Eicha, it is also in conversation with the first verse of the Ten Commandments, which also begins with the word- **אֲנֹכִי**:

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. (ש"מ כ:ב) Anokhi-I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt... (Exod. 20:2)
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A midrash (Shmot Rabbah 29:9) connects the two texts:

כְּשֶׁדִּבֶּר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל הַר סִינַי, הִשְׁתַּיֵּק כָּל הָעוֹלָם, כְּדִי שִׁנְדְּעוּ הַבְּרִיּוֹת שְׂאִין חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאָמַר: אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, וְלִעֲתִיד לְבוֹא כְּתִיב (ישעיה נא, יב): אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא מְנַחֵםכֶּם. When God spoke on Mount Sinai, he silenced the entire world so that all the creatures would know that there is none but he. And he said, Anokhi-I am the Lord your God. And well beyond that time there is a text (that also begins with Anokhi) I, I am the One who will console you.
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¹ Maurice Lamm, *Consolation*. Philadelphia: JPS, 2004. p. 104.

There is an arc that stretches out from the spiritual summit of Sinai to the desolate and destitute Jerusalem.

The **Anokhi** of Sinai, is the **Anokhi** of Jerusalem.
The **Anokhi** of the covenant is the **Anokhi** of consolation.
The **Anokhi** of the Redeemer from Egypt is the **Anokhi** of the Redeemer from Exile.

The **Anokhi** who gave Israel its moral anchor at Sinai is the same **Anokhi** who gave Israel its spiritual skyhook to enable it to lift itself up and imagine its future. The **Anokhi** of liberation is the **Anokhi** of consolation.

Anokhi - The Pronoun of Proximity

The two pronouns for I, **Ani** and **Anokhi** appear dozens of times when God speaks in the first person. While they have different etymologies, they are indeed synonyms. **Anokhi** however, is generally understood to convey a little more grandeur and gravitas (similar to the way "Thou" is to "You") because **Anokhi** is the first word of the Ten Commandments. If the midrash above stretches an arc between the Sinai and Jerusalem, the following midrash (Bereshit Rabbati, Vayetzei) creates a whole web of arcs to many more texts in which God refers to himself as **Anokhi**.

אָמרו רבותינו: בָּאֲנֹכִי דָּבַר עִם מֹשֶׁה שְׁנֵאמַר: אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם. (שמות ג:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי בָּרָא הַדְּבוּר וְשֵׁם בָּפִיו שְׁנֵאמַר: אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי עֵם פִּיךָ (שם ד:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי שָׁלְחוּ לְפָרְעֹה: אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ (שם ג:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי נָתַן הַתּוֹרָה: אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ (שם כ:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי הִשְׁלִיכֶם לַמִּדְבָּר שְׁנֵאמַר: הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִפְתִּיחַ וְהִלְכְתִּיךָ הַמִּדְבָּר. (דברים ב:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי בָּנָה צִיּוֹן: הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מְרַבֵּץ בְּפִיךָ אֲבִינִיךָ (ישעיה נד:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי מְבִיא הַגּוֹאֵל שְׁנֵאמַר: הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לָכֶם (מלאכי ג:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי מְנַחֵם אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֲנֹכִי הוּא מְנַחֵמְכֶם (ישעיה נא:1)
בָּאֲנֹכִי דָּבַר עִם אַבְרָהָם: אֲנֹכִי מָגֵן לְךָ (בר' טו:1)
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם (בר' כד:1) עִם יַעֲקֹב: וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ. (בר' כח:1)

Our rabbis said: With Anokhi, God introduced himself to Moses. (Exod. 3:6)
With Anokhi, God created speech and placed it in Moses' mouth. (Exod. 4:12)
With Anokhi, God sent Moses to Pharaoh. (Exod. 3:12)
With Anokhi, God gave the Torah. (Exod. 20:2)
With Anokhi, God cast them into the desert. (Hos. 2:16)
With Anokhi, God built Zion. (Isa. 54:11)
With Anokhi, God brings the redeemer to Zion. (Mal. 3:23)
With Anokhi, God comforts. (Isa. 51:12)
With Anokhi, God spoke to Abraham (Gen. 15:1), **with Isaac** (Gen. 26:24), **and with Jacob** (Gen. 28:15).

However, when it comes to Jacob, God first revealed himself not with **Anokhi**, but with **Ani**! The midrash:

וּכְשֶׁנִּגְלָה עַל יַעֲקֹב בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה לֹא נִגְלָה אֵלָּא בָּאֲנִי, שְׁנֵאמַר: וְהִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם (בר' יג)

But the first time he revealed himself to Jacob, he didn't use the word Anokhi. He used Ani, as it is said: And here, the Lord was standing over against him. He said: I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.

מִיָּד נִתְבָּרַר יַעֲקֹב. אָמַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵי נִגְלָה בְּלִשׁוֹן אֲנֹכִי וְעַל בְּלִשׁוֹן אֲנִי! תֹּאמַר מָה עוֹן אָרַע לִי שֶׁלֹּא הִשִּׁיחַ לִי בְּלִשׁוֹן אֲבוֹתִי? כְּשֶׁרָאָה

הַקֹּב"ה יַעֲקֹב מִצָּטֵר וּמִפְחָד עַל זֶה מִיָּד הִתְחִיל מְדַבֵּר עִמּוֹ בָּאֲנֹכִי, וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ. לָפִי שְׂהִיָּה יַעֲקֹב גּוֹלָה מִבֵּית אָבִיו הִבְטִיחוּ שְׂהִיָּה עִמּוֹ כַּד"א עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה (תה' צא:15).

When this happened, Jacob became scared. He said: For my fathers he revealed himself with Anokhi but with me he only uses Ani! What punishment has befallen me that he is not speaking to me in the manner he spoke to my fathers? When God saw that Jacob was distressed and afraid about this, he immediately began speaking to him with Anokhi, as it is written, "Behold, I-Anokhi, am with you." Because Jacob was exiled from home, God promised him that he would be with him, as it is written, "I-Anokhi am with you in distress." (Psalm 91:15)

Not only is **Anokhi** a pronoun of consolation, but it is also a pronoun of proximity. The author of this midrash is trying to convey to us that when God uses this pronoun, we have to imagine his closeness and intimacy. Thus, when God speaks to Moses for the first time, we have to imagine the their affinity and their bond, their companionship even. Similarly, when God reveals the Ten Commandments to Israel, despite the overwhelming display of fire and thunder, that moment reflects God's desire for connection. And certainly, in the opening words of our Haftarah, when Isaiah says, **I, even I am the One who consoles you**, God is speaking out of love and deep concern. Proximity. Given all of this, Jacob is afraid that God is not close to him. Of course he had every reason to feel that he was being punished for his moral failings. He lied to his father and usurped his brother's blessing. And yet, God still needs him to father the people. And when Jacob perceives God being distant from him, God endeavors to get closer to him, to console him. Therefore, he speaks to him with **Anokhi** as if he is saying-**I will be with you**. The proof-text that the midrash uses is from one of the most important Psalms of **consolation**, in which the Psalmist calls God, **my refuge and my stronghold**. And the key line in that Psalm is this:

יְקָרְאֵנִי	When he calls on Me,
וְאֶעֱנֵהוּ	I will answer him;
עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה	I will be with him in distress;
אֶחֱלִצֵהוּ	I will rescue him and make him
וְאֶכְבֵּדְהוּ.	honored;
(תה' צא:15)	(Ps. 91:15)

Divine **consolation** boils down to this: the feeling that God is with us in our distress, in our pain, in our torment. That we are not alone. Friends, family and community can give us comfort. But only when we perceive that God is with us in our anguish can we experience **consolation**. We pray that the memories of the murdered hostages be a blessing. An inspiration. Indeed, a revolution. Shabbat Shalom!

ON THIS DAY 337 WE PRAY FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THE REMAINING HOSTAGES. MAY GOD HEAL THE WOUNDED AND SHIELD ISRAEL.

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by the Dickstein/Weinstein family in honor of the 94th birthday of Stanley Dickstein. Mazel Tov!