

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Consoling Mourners

---

### ☞ The Mitzvah

1. To console mourners is a major precept. Some consider this *mitzvah* to be Scripturally ordained (*deOraysa*).<sup>1</sup>

We find that the Holy One, Blessed is He, comforted mourners, as it is written (*Genesis 25:11*), ‘*After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac.*’ The *Talmud* (*Sotah 14a*) interprets this to mean that God Himself, as it were, comforted the bereaved Isaac. Likewise, we find that God consoled Jacob in his bereavement, as *Rashi* explains on the verse (*ibid. 35:9*), ‘. . . and He blessed him.’

2. It is not enough merely to console the mourner; one must also say good things to him until one makes him happy, and his face becomes cheerful.<sup>2</sup>

### ☞ The Manner of Consolation

3. The comforters are not permitted to begin speaking until the mourner speaks first.<sup>3</sup> However, even if the mourner does not speak, one is permitted to say the customary condolence blessing: . . . הַמְקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם, “May Hashem console

1. See *Rabbeinu Yonah* on the *mishnah* in *Berachos* (17b): “When they have buried the deceased and gone back. . .” He writes: “. . . [the *mitzvah* of] comforting mourners is Scripturally mandated (*deOraysa*), because it is included in doing kindness to others (*gemilus chassadim*); and *gemilus chassadim* is Scripturally mandated, as the Sages proclaim (*Bava Kamma 99a*): ‘And you shall make them know the way’ (*Exodus 18:20*) — this refers to *gemilus chassadim*.” However, *Rambam* (*Hilchos Avel 14:1*) writes that the *mitzvah* is Rabbinically mandated (*deRabbanan*).

2. *Shelah 144a*. And *Ma’avar Yabok* (*Imrei No’am*, chapt. 35) writes: “It is obligatory upon the comforters in the home of the mourner to pray for mercy for the deceased; for the ordinary conversation customarily conducted there is only a burden, not a comfort.”

*Responsa Sheivet HaLevi* (*Yoreh De’ah* §213) writes that the *Zohar* (*Parashas Korach*) implies that before a person goes in to console the mourner, he should carefully consider what he will say and how he will comfort him.

*Prishah* (393:3) comments on the words of *Tur*, who wrote there: “They sit for a period of time.” He points out that *Tur* did not write, “They sit and speak words of consolation,” but only afterwards wrote: “They say: ‘May He Who dwells in this home comfort you.’” From this *Prishah* infers a certain amount of support for the current custom of comforting mourners, whereby, usually, the mourner does not open any dialogue at all. People come into his home, sit awhile, and then say: ‘*May Hashem console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.*’ One must ask: Is this called comforting mourners? But, *Prishah* concludes, from the words of *Tur* one may draw some evidence that simply entering the home and sitting there to show respect to the mourner is called comforting him.

3. *Shulchan Aruch 376:1*.

you. . .” (see paragraph 5).<sup>4</sup>

4. Once the mourner nods his head in a manner indicating that he has dismissed the comforters, they are not permitted to remain sitting with him.<sup>5</sup>
5. Upon entering or leaving the mourner’s home, the visitor should not extend greetings to him, because such greeting are not appropriate to one who is grieving.<sup>6</sup> When the visitor gets up to leave, he should say:

הַמְקוֹם יִנַּחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר אַבְלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם,

“May Hashem console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”<sup>7</sup>

The mourners should reply, “Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

One should not say things as, “I haven’t received all the punishment I deserve,” because one should not imply to the Accuser that further punishment is in order. Similarly, one should not tell the mourner, “What can you do? There’s no way to change things,” because this is an insult [to Heaven], implying that if it were possible, one would change things. Instead, one should lovingly accept the decree of Hashem, Blessed is He.<sup>8a</sup>

### ⚡ The Time for Comforting

6. Some have the custom not pay a condolence call until after the third day of mourning,<sup>9</sup> but others rule that one may perform the *mitzvah* even during the first three days.<sup>10</sup> In any case, if it is difficult to go after the third day, one may do so during the first three days.<sup>11</sup> It is also permitted to comfort mourners at

4. *Nachamu Ami* chapt. 21, in the name of the *gaon*, R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *shlita*.

5. *Shulchan Aruch* loc. cit.

6. *Shulchan Aruch* 385:1.

7. *Prishah* 393:3 (cited above, footnote 2).

8. *Nachamu Ami*, in the name of the *gaon*, R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *shlita*.

8a. *Rama* 376:2.

9. See *Gesher HaChaim* (20:5:5), who explains that the first three days are for weeping (*Mo’ed Katan* 27), and during that time the grief is most intense.

*Da’as Torah* (§376) writes: “It was pointed out to me that *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Parashas Miketz*) implies that during the first three days one does not accept consolation.”

*Mishmeres Shalom* (*os nun* §12) cites responsa *Tuv Ta’am* (*mahadura* 3, part 2, end of §10): “The custom is not to comfort the mourner until the third day, for that is when the ‘three days of weeping’ end; and part of the [last] day is counted as a whole day.” See also *Da’as U’Mezimah*, who writes: “This custom has its source in the words of *Midrash Rabbah* (*Vayikra*): ‘For the first three days, grief is at its strongest, since the facial features [of the deceased] are still recognizable.’ According to *Yedei Moshe*, this means that during this time it is as if the deceased is still alive; therefore the mourner does not accept consolation.”

10. *Da’as Torah* (loc. cit.) writes: “However, in my humble opinion, the *Gemara* in *Mo’ed Katan* (21a), with *Rashi* and *Rosh* there, proves [that the mourner may be comforted during the first three days]. . .” *Kol Bo Al Aveilus* (p. 297) writes: “There is explicit evidence in *Kesubos* (8b) that one is permitted [to comfort the mourner during the first three days]; and likewise I have heard from a number of great scholars that they deliberately go to comfort the mourner during the first three days, since there are not many other comforters then.”

11. *Gesher HaChaim* loc. cit.