

It's Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of "comfort" after Tisha B'Av,
How do we find comfort?
especially when life might still feel discomfoting?

I want to think about this question through our parasha.
Va'etchanan includes some of the greatest hits of the Torah,
Including the repetition of the 10 Commandments and the Shema.
But I want to look with you at the very first verses
When Moshe pleads with God to let him enter the Promised Land:
"God, You who let Your servant see Your greatness and Your mighty hand...[he
butters up God some more] You whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or earth
can equal. Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the
Jordan..."
And God says... "No."
God's answer actually seems at first glance pretty harsh:
רַב־לֶךְ אֶל-תְּנוּסָף דִּבַּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדֶּבֶר הַזֶּה:
"Enough, and don't speak to me about it again."
Moshe gets to go up Pisgah and look out at the land,
but he will never enter it, and that's God's final answer.
Moshe will die on the east side of the Jordan, and
Joshua will take over leading the people into the land.

Why is God so harsh here?
I mean, after all that Moshe has been through in leading the people for 40 years,
couldn't God have been kind and just said Yes?

Sure, there are lots of explanations/commentaries about leadership, and how
sometimes it's time to transition to a new leader;
And we know that God already told Moshe he wouldn't make it into the land
because of striking the rock twice to produce water. Ok, fine.
But I think there is something deeper going on here with the Torah imparting
wisdom to us about how to cope when
Life doesn't go the way we want.
Sometimes we pray and plead with God,
and the answer seems to be "no."

Sometimes things are out of our control and frightening, and that's not very comforting even if it's Shabbat Nachamu.

But I think this brief scene at the beginning of the parasha is meant to offer us some spiritual guidance about life's disappointments
And about how we might find comfort and draw closer to the Divine
Even when things aren't turning out the way we planned.

Let's look closely at God's answer to Moshe's plea.
What does it mean when God says "Rav Lach" (Enough!)?
If you read our translation with the exclamation point,
God seems harsh, angry at Moshe for even asking.
"Rav Lach! Enough, out of you and don't speak to me about it again!"
But Rav Lach can mean something else. It can mean:
"You have so much. You have enough.
Dayenu. You have everything you need."
God tells him to lift up his eyes and look to the west, north, south, and east.
Maybe God is inviting Moshe to look more expansively beyond the limited vision of his desires to see "Rav Lach/you have enough."

Rashi explains that it's only *one way* to read "rav lach" as "that's enough out of you," linking it to God's second statement "don't speak about it again."
But Rashi offers another way to read it, as do other commentators,
by decoupling the two phrases and understanding Rav Lach on its own to mean:
"there is much for you, plenty for you, there is goodness for you."

Rabbi Harold Kushner, yes, the one who wrote the classic,
When Bad Things Happen to Good People,
Also wrote a book called Overcoming Life's Disappointments,
In which he sees Moshe's not getting into the Promised Land as
role modeling for us that "You can't always get what you want,"
To quote from another genre of wisdom literature.
The Torah needed to include this kind of major disappointment to help us cope
and find comfort with the disappointments we all face in our lives: divorce, job
loss, illness, infertility, the goals we never achieved, the life that didn't turn out as
planned.

What would it be like if we read Rav Lach
Not as a harsh “No, and that’s enough out of you.”
but as a gentle invitation to see:
Rav Lach - “you have enough. Look at how much you do have already,
Don’t fixate on what you don’t have.”

In fact, if we look closely at the verse, right before God says Rav Lach,
it seems to me that Moshe’s telling of his conversation with God reveals that he
might be stuck in his own painful place of self-pity.

You know that place we all can get stuck in sometimes
when we can’t get what we want.

“The Lord was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me.”

Moshe is feeling God’s wrath.

He’s blaming the Israelites for it [“on your account”]

And God “would not listen to me.”

Isn’t that what we all do when we are disappointed by life and frustrated that we
can’t get what we want?

We feel like God is angry at us. We blame others. We feel unheard.

I don’t blame Moshe for experiencing God as angry.

We’ve all been there in our difficult times.

But I think the Torah is offering us an alternative approach for
when life disappoints us.

What happens after this scene?

Moshe seems loosened from his anger and desperate pleading with God that
things should be different for him.

Maybe he does lift up his eyes and see things more expansively,

Or maybe he does have a moment of Rav Lach, of feeling grateful for all that he
has already.

From there, the rest of the parasha is Moshe affirming the covenant with God for
the people who will enter the land.

He tells the people to search for God with all their heart and soul 4:29

He tells the people about the awesome experience of the Divine and says-

“Adonai Hu HaElohim. Ain Od Milvado” There’s none but God. 4:35

He speaks of the revelation at Horeb and how God spoke from the fire and the
mountain.

He says the Shema and tells us to listen and to love God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our might.

Moshe goes from being angry and pleading and wanting his life to be different than it is, to:

Dwelling in the Divine Presence and conveying his face to face experience of God to the people.

He even tells the people that they encountered God **בְּפָנֶיִם** **בְּפָנֶיִם** on the mountain. (5:4)

Moshe has gone from pleading to God to connecting with God,
from self-pity to awe,
From anger to love.

There is an extraordinary and beautiful thing I've witnessed in people at the end of their lives - a sense of surrender, love, connection, awe, forgiveness, gratitude. When it's time to stop fighting against whatever cruel fate life gave them to just connect to the Holy One.

I think this might be what's going on with Moshe in our parasha.

And that's the Comfort, to bring us back to Shabbat Nachamu.

I think the spiritual guidance for tough times that the Torah is offering here is:

Life doesn't always turn out the way we planned, and
we can't always get what we want.

And our relationship with God is not about everything making sense, or being fair, or not being disappointed, or good people not suffering, and it's not about getting our prayers answered, just as Moshe's prayers weren't answered.

God's saying Rav Lach, if we read it the way I'm suggesting, is an invitation to see our lives differently:

To see the abundance and the beauty and
the Divine Presence showing up in mysterious ways,
And meeting God face to face, despite our disappointments,
and our holding on to the covenant,
to Shema, to listen, and V'ahavta, to love
even when things don't work out the way we wanted.
And perhaps there is comfort in that.