

# Sermon (*D'var Torah*)



שבת נחמו

איך אפשר להתנחם?

## Shabbat Nachamu: How Can One Find Solace?

by Professor Simha Goldin, Hadar's father\*

For the past three years, 36 full months, Hamas has been holding Lt. Hadar Goldin who was killed and captured in Gaza in defense of the State of Israel, and is refusing to return a fallen soldier of the Israel Defense Forces for burial in the land of Israel.

Hadar was killed on the 5th day of Av, a Friday, near the conclusion of Operation Protective Edge. In fact, Hadar was killed during a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations and the United States, which Hamas violated. However, this Sabbath we wish to focus not on the barbaric and inhumane actions of the enemy, but rather on our behavior, the behavior of the Jewish people in Israel and worldwide, regarding the fact that two outstanding soldiers, Lt. Hadar Goldin, and Sgt. Oron Shaul, a fellow distinguished soldier, who fell in the defense of the Jewish people and have not been properly buried.

Our ancient sources teach us that the city of Beitar, the final stronghold in the battle against imperial Rome, fell on the 9th of Av, the very same date as the earlier destruction of our two Temples. But the mighty empire that sought to obliterate the Jewish people forever did not just destroy the Temple during the first war and overrun the land in the second war, it also chose to humiliate and debase our brave warriors. At the end of the battle, the siege of Beitar, the Romans were not satisfied with the ruin of the city and the killing of all who fought there. They forbade approaching the city and burying the dead. Wives could not attest to their marital status and could therefore not remarry, parents were uncertain of their children's fate, and the nation, in its indignity, could not find closure.

In time, the Romans permitted the fallen to be buried and the Jews entered the city and interred them. On that very day, as we are informed by R. Mattenah in Tractate



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Ta'anit (31A), "[the recitation of] the benediction 'Hatov u' Meitiv – [God] who is good and deals kindly' was instituted in Yavneh."

"אותו יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה", מודיע לנו רב מתנה במסכת תענית "תקנו ביבנה הטוב והמיטיב".

This fourth blessing in the Grace after Meals was codified only after the Jewish people buried their captive war dead. As long as fallen soldiers had not been brought to a proper burial, it was inappropriate to recite this blessing.

The blessing "Who is good and deals kindly" is very special. Many of us know it by heart. But what does it really mean and why can we not recite it while fallen soldiers are not yet buried? We bless God because he grants us "grace, kindness and compassion, relief and rescue, prosperity, blessing, redemption and comfort, sustenance and support, compassion, life, peace, and all good things" and further pray that "of all good things may He never let us lack."

"לחן ולחסד ולרחמים ולרוח הצלה והצלחה, ברכה וישועה, נחמה פְּרִנְסָה וְכִלְפָּלָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשָׁלוֹם, וְכָל טוב; ומְכַל טוב לְעוֹלָם אֵל יְחַסְרָנוּ".

God grants us the simple, daily, most basic things – consolation, means of support, life, peace, and all that is good. But what is the essence of the connection between this blessing and burying fallen soldiers? It is gemilut chasadim – acts of kindness! The act of kindness to which we must commit with regard to a body is to engage in its burial and this is what makes it fitting to request from God the daily simple acts of kindness as we do in this blessing. Only those who perform this act of kindness are worthy to recite the blessing, for if we do not engage in acts of kindness ourselves how do we come to request all this from God?

We refer to this Sabbath as Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of Consolation, for the solace we are seeking in the wake of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This Sabbath also marks three full years that Lt. Hadar Goldin and Sgt. Oron Shaul have not been brought home to Israel for a Jewish burial. How can we continue to recite the blessing "Hatov u' Meitiv", petitioning God for grace and kindness ("חן וחסד"), while Hadar and Oron are still in enemy hands? How can we petition for support and sustenance ("פרנסה וכלכלה") when we continue to trample on the principle of mutual responsibility? How can we ask for consolation ("רחמים") when we have not fulfilled the commandment of acting kindly (מצוות גמילות החסד)?



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Every day that passes without redressing this injustice is another day in which we as a people fail to meet our own obligations to act mercifully and with kindness to one another. All Jews, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, must strive to make the return of Hadar and Oron for proper burial in Israel a religious, moral and political priority for the State of Israel and its allies around the world.

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