

נחום אבלים Consoling the Mourner

קהלת ז'א-ב 7:1-2

א טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום הולדו; ב טוב ללכת אל־בית־אבל מלכת אל־בית משתה באשר
הוא סוף כל־האדם והחי יתן אל־לבו
:

1. A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.
2. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

YOUR KOHELET NAVIGATOR

1. Why would Kohelet say the end of one's life is better than the beginning?
2. How does that relate to a name being better than precious ointment?
3. Compare the experience of consoling mourners to going to a party. Which was more valuable to you?

קהלת רבה ז:ה Midrash Kohelet Raba 7:1

א [ב] טוב ללכת אל בית אבל מלכת אל בית משתה, למה שלב חכמים בבית אבל, שכל מי שמתאבל הקדוש ברוך הוא משמחו שנאמר (ישעיה כ"ט) ויספו עניים בה' שמחה, ד"א טוב ללכת אל בית אבל מלכת אל בית משתה, מוטב ללכת למדה שיש לה פרעון ממדה שאין לה פרעון, מוטב לילך במדה נוהגת בחיים ובמתים ממדה שאינה נוהגת אלא בחיים, מוטב לילך במדה נוהגת בעשירים ובעניים ממדה שאינה נוהגת אלא בעשירים, מוטב לילך במדה שיש בה פיוס ממדה שאין בה פיוס

5. **It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting (7:2).** Why? Because "**the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning and the heart of the fool is in the joy house (ibid: 4)**"; for if one mourns the Holy One causes him to rejoice, as it is said, The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord (Isaiah 39:19).

Another interpretation of: **It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting (7:2).**: it is better to be engaged in activities that have spiritual compensation than one in which there may be no compensation at all.

It is better to follow a line of conduct which serves both the living and the dead than one which serves only the living.

It is better to follow a line of conduct which serves both rich and poor than one which serves only the rich.

It is better to follow a line of conduct in which there is consolation [to be offered to the bereaved] than one in which there is no consolation to offer.

YOUR MIDRASH NAVIGATOR

1. Each paragraph gives a different reason for why it is better to go to the house of mourning. Look at each reason.
2. The first reason is qualitatively different than the rest of them. How do you understand it?
3. Are all these reasons compatible or do they disagree with each other?
4. What does "It is better" mean? Better how? How does the midrash evaluate "better"?

The Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 362:1-2 א-ב ש'עב:א-ב

א אין המנחמים רשאים לפתוח עד שיפתח האבל תחלה והאבל מיסב בראש וכיון שנענע האבל בראשו בענין שנראה שפוטר את המנחמים אינם רשאים לישב אצלו: (אין אבל או חולה חייבים לעמוד אפילו מפני נשיא): (פ' א"מ)

ב הבא לכבד את חברו ולקום מפניו אומר לו שב אלא א"כ הוא אבל או חולה דמשמע שב באבילות שלך שב בחולי שלך:

Those who come to console the mourner are not permitted to speak until the mourner begins speaking, and the mourner should sit in front of them and when he signals with his head that he wishes for them to leave, they should not continue to sit with him. (A mourner or a sick person is not obliged to stand for anyone, not even the president.)

One who sees a friend standing in order to show him deference should tell him to sit unless he is a mourner or he has been ill where it will be understood that he is saying "Go sit down in mourning," or "Go sit in your sickness."

YOUR SHULCHAN ARUCH NAVIGATOR

The Shulchan Aruch is the most widely accepted code of law by halachically observant Jews. In this case it is telling how one should comport herself when consoling mourners.

1. Why are these rules necessary?
2. There is a temptation to explain these rules from a psychological perspective, is there another way to understand them?
3. Are there any advantages to formalizing this behavior. If there are, name them.