

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Pesya *bas* Hershel A”H
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*.

Benefits of Suffering

If you’re like most people, you probably like it when good things happen and don’t like it when bad things happen.

Often, however, the Torah enjoins us to try and rise above mere instinctive reactions. One’s attitude to life’s challenges is no exception.

Our *parshah* contains the well-known passage of *K’rias Shema*. Based on a *passuk* from the *Shema*, the Mishnah in *Berachos* teaches how, ideally, one should react to the ‘cards’ Hashem deals him. The Mishnah (*Berachos 9:5*) states:

“A person is obligated to bless on misfortune, just as he blesses on success, as the verse states (*Devarim 6:5*), “You shall love Hashem your G-d, with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your means... “all of your means (*me’odecha*)” implies that one should praise Hashem in response to any measure (*middah*) with which he is treated.”

As Rashi (*Berachos 54a, s.v. ‘Davar acher’*) explains, a person must react positively to any experience he undergoes, be it one of success, or one of difficulty.

The question is: How? Obviously, life would be blissful if one were able to accept all pain and suffering with equanimity; and there are *tzaddikim* who have indeed mastered such a lofty level of emotional self control. However, for the rest of us, the adoption of such an attitude may seem like a daunting prospect.

The *Chafetz Chaim* (*Machaneh Yisrael, ch. 13*) provides an illustration which – if internalized – could aid in making this ideal somewhat more attainable to all who strive for it.

Why Going in For Root Canal Should Put a Person in a Great Mood (Although, of Course, We Don’t Wish It on Anyone)

A Jew of modest means had an arrangement with a certain nobleman. The latter owned much property, and would rent out houses at reasonable rates. This particular *Yid* was renting a house at \$300 per year (a significant but affordable sum in those days).

It came to pass that this aristocrat had to embark on an extended journey to a faraway place. He appointed a replacement to collect the rents in the interim.

Now this replacement was made of much different stuff than the sensible nobleman. In short order he abused his office, and would cruelly exploit his charges in order to build up his personal fortune. And so, he raised the rent of the hard-working Jewish tenant to \$500, a sum that was well over his means.

The Jew scraped and scrimped, but even with the extra back-breaking labor he took on was unable to come up with the funds. The day of payment arrived, and he was still \$20 short. All of his pleading for an extension fell on deaf ears.

“For every dollar that you are missing,” the cruel rent-collector told him, “you will be whipped. Since you’re \$20 short, that’s 20 lashes!”

The hapless Jewish tenant came home that day broken in body and humiliated in spirit.

Things continued in this manner for some time, with the unscrupulous substitute amassing a small fortune on the backs of the local populace. Eventually, he purchased for himself an elegant estate, worth a hefty sum (for those days) of \$4,000.

When the original landowner finally returned from his sojourn abroad, the oppressed *Yid* wasted no time. He immediately rushed to the nobleman’s quarters, to fill him in on the vicious behavior of the substitute collector.

The fair-minded official was horrified by the report. He immediately summoned his employee and rendered swift justice.

“For every strike,” he told the Jew, “my disgraced appointee must pay you a \$100 fine. As he struck you 20 times, that amounts to \$2,000. Now, his fancy estate is worth \$4,000. Therefore, I hereby grant you half of the property.” He issued the Jew an official document attesting to this effect.

When the Jew’s wife saw him, she saw that his face was sullen. “What’s the matter?” she asked with concern. The Jew showed her the document.

“I don’t get it,” his perplexed wife remarked. “This is wonderful. We’re rich! Why are you so despondent?”

“Don’t you see?” said her husband. “I was stricken twenty times, so we received \$2,000 worth of property, which is half the estate. But if he just would have hit me twice that amount, we could have gotten the whole thing!”

“Oh, if only he would have given me *another* twenty blows!”

The exact same scenario – concludes the Chafetz Chaim – will play itself out in the future for each and every one of us.

When a person is confronted with suffering in this world, by and large, he’d rather not deal with it. However, in truth, these difficulties are affording him the greatest of benefits; in fact, they are actually quite (spiritually) profitable! According to the Medrash (*Yalkut 942*), in exchange for every moment of pain or suffering that a person experiences in this world, he is granted tremendous reward in the World to Come.

For now, Hashem chooses to keep His calculations hidden; we put our trust in *Chazal* who tell us that “Everything Hashem does is for the good,” (*Berachos 60b*). When the time comes, however, Hashem will reveal the greater plan. At that point, it will be clear how every heartache, every hardship that transpired during one’s lifetime, actually helped him tremendously in some way, and brought inestimable merit and benefit in its wake. At that point – seeing just how valuable the suffering really was – people will remark: “If only things would have been twice as severe!”

Perhaps the knowledge of this idea can strengthen our forbearance, revitalize our hope, and help us realize that there really is light amongst the darkness.

To be continued...