

PART 30: CHAPTER 5, VERSES 18- 27

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

- 18. He causes pain and binds, He strikes and His hands heal.*
- 19. From six troubles He will spare you and from the seventh you will not be touched.*
- 20. With hunger He redeemed you from death and with war from the sword.*
- 21. You shall hide from the scourge of the tongue and you will not fear destruction when it comes.*
- 22. At destruction and famine you will laugh: nor will you be afraid of the beasts of the earth.*
- 23. For you will be in league with the stones of the field: and the wild beasts shall be at peace with you.*
- 24. And you will know that your tent is at peace; and you will visit your habitation, and will miss nothing.*
- 25. You will know also that your seed shall be great, and your offspring as the grass of the earth.*
- 26. You will come to your grave like a full sheaf with a rich harvest which comes up in its time.*
- 27. Behold this, we have examined it, so it is; hear it, and know it, for your good.*

Commentary:

Verse 18 - "He causes pain and binds..." The Malbim explains this with a simple metaphor. Just as a doctor puts a bandage on a wound so that the infection does not spread to other parts of the body, at times G-d uses relatively minor disciplinary acts to tone down the psychological and physical drives that are responsible for sin. This preventative action helps to contain these forces in order to avoid more harm in the future.

"He strikes and His hands heal..." Sometimes the severity of the situation calls for more stringent action. A serious wound often requires painful procedures and medications to clean out the infection and restrain it from completely overcoming the victim. Likewise, G-d may choose harsh discipline to cleans the transgressor from severe wrong doing and thwart off a complete takeover of evil. In the case of severe physical ailment the patient accepts with understanding the pain that the doctor inflicts because he knows that ultimately it is for his own benefit. Elifaz tells Iyov that those who suffer should accept the pain and difficulties with similar understanding.

Until this point Elifaz's advice is based upon prophetic insight. In verses 19-27 Elifaz puts forth his personal outlook based upon his own life experiences. Whereas prophecy revealed that it is next to impossible to completely avoid sin; and that suffering is the necessary remedy for the resulting condition of the transgressor, there are other significant, albeit abstruse, ways that misfortune can work to our advantage.

"From six troubles He will spare you..." six troubles conveys the idea that there are many ways that people experience troubles. This might also allude to the inexplicable phenomenon that some people tend to suffer more than others. These people often have multiple forms of misfortune. Their lives seem to be filled with trouble. In any event, trouble may be a blessing in disguise... "from the seventh you will not be touched." The correct interpretation of this verse is that -through- the six (many) troubles you will be saved from the seventh, which is much worse.

In the next few verses Elifaz gives several examples of how minor trouble can be the source of major redemption. Hunger is a severe form of suffering. At such times a person may need to leave the relative security of his home in order to search for a way to sustain himself. In the meantime a deadly earthquake strikes his village and all the inhabitants are killed except... for him. One could claim that hunger saved his life. "With hunger He redeemed you from death..."

Normally one who is unarmed is more vulnerable to acts of violence than someone who possesses a weapon. War, with all of its horrors, puts weapons in the hands of the otherwise defenseless. In case of an assault on one's life a weapon can be a very handy possession. Again it can be stated that the horror of war, that put a weapon in his hands, enabled him to protect himself from aggression "With hunger He redeemed you from death and with war from the sword."

At times someone may speak evil about you to the authorities. It was absolute libel, but the judge put you behind bars. In the meantime bandits come and rampage through town causing serious harm and injury to people and property. Because the judge put you behind bars you were spared from famine and pillage. You can laugh at the irony of your situation, but the jail sentence saved you from pillage, hunger, and wild beasts... "You shall hide from the scourge of the tongue and you will not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you will laugh; nor will you be afraid of the beasts of the earth." Indeed, because of the "scourge of the tongue" you now fear no harm.

The Talmud tells a story of a man who was on his way to a business trip when he stumbled over a

sharp object on the ground and seriously wounded his foot. Due to his injury he missed the ship and lost an opportunity to make a large profit. On top of his physical anguish he suffered tremendously from the knowledge that he lost a golden opportunity. Several days later he discovered that the ship that he was about to board sank and there were no survivors. He begins to praise the sharp object that wounded his foot and destroyed his opportunity to make a great profit and saved his life. "For you will be in league with the stones of the field..." At times the entire creation, even inanimate objects, seem to be our guardian angel. The greatest misfortunes turn out to be our greatest salvation. Misery and suffering, blessing and salvation; often they are difficult to distinguish, but all are orchestrated by G-d.

Verses 24-26 - Elifaz adds that not only the bad things in life are directed from above. The good things are also part of the Divine plan for creation. Children, food, health, shelter, and wealth, are all exactly portioned to each and every individual. Good fortune is not accident or luck, although at times it may appear to be so. Elifaz does not say that we are guaranteed to receive only the good things in life. He is saying that besides the obvious misfortunes that everyone suffers, we should be grateful for the many blessings that we enjoy in life.

In verse 27 Elifaz ends with an important disclaimer. Whereas his main message, based on prophecy, claims that human suffering is G-d's response to the misdeeds of man; the insights in verses 19-26 are his own personal view. They do not have the authority of Divine communication but they are, nevertheless, good insights that Iyov can benefit from.

The Malbim points out that Elifaz says this to teach Iyov and us an important lesson. There is a big difference between wisdom based upon prophecy and that which is based on personal experience. Although everyone has the right and obligation to try to understand the purpose of the events that occur in his life, the conclusions one arrives at are subjective wisdom. There may be other approaches that lead to quite different conclusions that would be equally or more beneficial.

Subjective wisdom is fine, if you benefit from it, but it is not absolute and may not be beneficial to others. Prophecy, on the other hand, is the closest we can get to absolutely objective wisdom because it comes from the only source of objectivity; G-d. Elifaz tells Iyov that he can and should consider the validity of his insights, however, if Iyov does not find these insights to be accurate or beneficial he is entitled to reject them.

Mazel tov on the conclusion of chapter 5 !

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