

PART 31: CHAPTER 6, VERSES 1- 7

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

- 1. And Iyov answered and said,*
- 2. Oh that my vexation were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances!*
- 3. For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are stammering.*
- 4. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison of which my spirit drinks up: the terrors of G-d array themselves against me.*
- 5. Does the wild ass bray when he has grass? Or does the ox low over his fodder?*
- 6. Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?*
- 7. My soul refuses to touch them; they are to me as loathsome food.*

Commentary:

In this chapter Iyov continues his argument of determinism. He insists that man is an object of fate; freewill is not a factor in determining the future. Iyov's main support for this viewpoint is the fact that the righteous suffer no less than the wicked. His personal tragedy proves his case beyond a shadow of a doubt. Iyov views his suffering as a curse that will remain with him until death. In his opinion there can be no benefit or purpose in suffering.

Elifaz contends that Iyov's suffering is not random misfortune or the result of a preordained fate of misery. It is G-d's response to sin. Elifaz concedes that Iyov is an extremely pious individual but that does not preclude the possibility of minor errors in human conduct especially when that requires the fulfillment of G-d's will. The benefit of his suffering is to protect him from major misfortune in this world and replace the eternal suffering of the world to come. Iyov now begins his refutation of Elifaz's arguments.

Elifaz pointed out that Iyov is not as righteous as he claims to be as was clearly demonstrated by Iyov losing control of himself after receiving his first difficulty in life. If Iyov was as pious as he claimed he should have remained firm in his love of G-d and faith that He Judges man with absolute justice.

Verses 1-3

Iyov's response is blunt. Place on one side of a balance his pain and suffering and on the other side his anger and inappropriate response. If the results of this weigh-in would hang the scales in perfect balance then Elifaz's accusation might have some validity. But the reality is that the results would clearly demonstrate that the pain and anguish of Iyov would heavily tilt the scales in his favor. In light of such an overwhelming demonstration Iyov's somewhat inappropriate response could be pardoned.

Verse 4

As far as Elifaz's claim that suffering has its benefits; Iyov sees no advantage in horrific suffering since it can lead only to death. Furthermore, Iyov's sees no reprieve from his miserable suffering. What does he have to look forward to if not more of the same? Although Iyov has no 'inside' knowledge that his suffering will continue unabated forever he takes a fatalistic approach. This is a typical delusion of the depressed. They can see no 'out' from their present misery. In light of Iyov's remarkable recovery at the end of the story we can see how erroneous such doomsday feelings can be.

Verses 5-7

Iyov continues to predict his final demise. Animals do not have the most delectable choice of foods at their disposal, nevertheless, they do not complain about it. They eat their food out of necessity regardless of the lack of flavor. Iyov's suffering is so intense that not only has he lost his appetite, but is totally disgusted by the sight of food.

The instinct to preserve life exists in all living creatures. One of the ways that this instinct manifests itself is the drive to eat. Regardless of the quality of the food, rather that perish from malnutrition or hunger all living creatures will eat. Iyov is not functioning on the level of even an animal. How can a living organism hope to heal and continue to live without the ability to eat? Iyov's situation is indeed grim.

Rashi takes a different approach to these verses. An animal does not become agitated unless it is lacking food. But any food is sufficient for an animal whether it has good taste or not. A human being, on the other hand, is not satisfied with tasteless food. If it lacks taste it needs to be enhanced by salt and spices. Iyov states that he is no worse than an animal. As long as they have food they are content. So too, Iyov would not be screaming if he could acquire a palatable understanding of his bleak situation. The answers that Elifaz is giving him are like food without salt, Iyov cannot digest

them.

This is an important insight. Our sages ob"m teach us that just as people's faces are different their mental and emotional profiles differ. One man's poison is another man's cup of tea. When attempting to comfort someone who is in misery it is essential to have some understanding of the victim's unique temperament and perspective. No matter how intelligent or clever your thoughts and words may be you cannot expect them to have any positive effect unless the recipient can relate to them and find them acceptable.

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