

## PART 33: CHAPTER 6, VERSES 12- 21

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz*

- 12. Is my strength the strength of stones? Or is my flesh of brass?*
- 13. Is not my help in me? And is sound policy driven quite from me?*
- 14. One who withholds kindness from his friend abandons the fear of G-d.*
- 15. My brothers betrayed me like a streams of water that pass in the wadi;*
- 16. which are frozen by the ice and which the snow dissolves.*
- 17. When the time comes they grow warm, they vanish; when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place.*
- 18. The caravans turn this way and that in their course; they go up into the waste and perish.*
- 19 The caravans of Tema looked, the companies of Sheva waited for them (the streams of water) they were confounded because they had hoped;*
- 20. they came there, and were abashed.-(because they found no water in the stream beds)*
- 21. Now you are like that; you see terror and are afraid.*

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### Commentary:

At this point Iyov begins to 'prove' his position. Iyov finds that his life has become an impossible situation; after all, his physical strength does have a breaking point. Whereas stone and brass retain their strength indefinitely organic matter such as flesh and blood is by its very nature destined to disintegrate. Eventually, as Iyov's internal strength is spent, his body will succumb to the horrific flesh consuming disease that afflicts him. As far as Elifaz's position is concerned Iyov takes an offensive approach. If G-d actually appeared to Elifaz with a message of consolation for Iyov why did He overlook Iyov and deliver His message to Elifaz. Is Iyov less worthy of Divine communication than

Elifaz? Why couldn't G-d turn directly to Iyov since he is the suffering party?

In addition to this Elifaz claims that G-d is punishing Iyov in order to secure him a brighter future in this world and preserve for him a portion in the world to come. But his style of delivery is lacking, to say the least. One might say that Elifaz has an extremely offensive bedside manner. After all, Iyov is sick and suffering terrible physical and emotional pain. Instead of using gentle words of kindness Elifaz attacks Iyov with a barrage of accusations of iniquities, character faults, and shallowness of faith. Elifaz has good intentions; to strengthen Iyov's faith and rehabilitate his trust in a just and compassionate G-d. Nevertheless, he should have delivered his remarks with the same sort of compassion that he claims that G-d possesses. Instead of accusing Iyov of spiritual and character weakness he should have helped Iyov to understand for himself-not to preach- the possible root of his troubles. Iyov cannot accept this type of reproach. In his eyes it is absolutely unfathomable that G-d delivered such a thoughtless message. Therefore, Iyov totally rejects Elifaz's claim that his message is prophetic.

Iyov now lashes out at his friends. They have been sitting quietly with Iyov for seven days without uttering a single word of comfort or encouragement. If your friend is experiencing physical or emotional trauma he needs to hear words of comfort. Until you do so you are not only remiss in fulfillment of your obligations to your fellow man but are also unmindful of your obligations to G-d. Eye rolling and knee buckling submission to the awesome power of G-d are not necessarily genuine expressions of fear of G-d. True reverence of G-d demands of us that we attempt to emulate His ways. G-d is the great comforter of all. Anyone who has experienced the sublime closeness of G-d at times of difficulty and tribulation can testify to the comfort and support that G-d's presence provides. One who genuinely fears[reveres] G-d will conduct himself in a manner similar to his Creator. When your friend is in trouble don't preach to him - comfort him.

For many people the seasonal streams of water that flow in channels may be essential sources of water. However, often they are not reliable because they may freeze in the winter, dry-up in the summer, or be absorbed by the porous ground. Eventually they disappear into thin trickles that quickly vanish. For the thirsty and parched sojourners who rely upon them this can be a great disappointment. Iyov's friends are likened to these disappointments. Iyov is in dire need of strength and encouragement. He looks forward to the comforting words and support that only strong friendships can supply. Instead he is humiliated by their callous insensitivity.

Now Iyov gives a penetrating and startling insight into human nature. He turns to his friends with the following... "Rather than comforting me you have taken the position of my prosecutor. You have taken up the side of G-d because you cannot bear the discomfort that my suffering causes you. You are afraid that if G-d deals with the righteous Iyov with such severity there can be no hope that you will receive anything better. Because you fear for your own skin you are afraid to defend me."

Often we are deeply disturbed by the suffering of others. However, at times we may be more

concerned that something similar does not happen to us than genuinely care for the welfare of the one who is suffering. Such an attitude is usually not at the forefront of our mind, nevertheless, it lurks just under the surface. When we come with such a perspective we cannot possibly be a source of comfort for our suffering friends because it is our own wellbeing, not their welfare, that is our prime concern. In order to help others during their time of need you must be totally focused on *their* experience. It is true that in order to accomplish this you will need to identify with them, to feel that their pain is yours. But identification is not the goal; only the means to achieve the goal. The goal is to alleviate some of their pain and suffering by communicating the message that they are not alone; that we bear part of the yoke of their suffering on our shoulders.

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