

TESTS, SUFFERING AND TORAH

by Community Contributor

In our own lives, we all go through different periods of hardship. Sometimes we ask aloud to our Creator, *"Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Why are You sending me these hardships?"* There is nothing wrong with asking these questions. For the *Gemara* says, *"A person whose suffering causes him to challenge G-d is not sinful."*

Then, why does Hashem send us hardships? Is it to make us *miserable*? The Chofeitz Chayim tells us that the reason Hashem sends us hardships is, *"...in order to test you, to do good for you in your end."* Yes, to *test you*! Nevertheless, most of us would rather take a *written* or *oral* test, than to have G-d test us in life.

Yet, the *Medrash* tells us something astounding: *"G-d does not elevate a person to greatness until He first tests him – with a small matter."* For *tests* and *challenges* are not an unfortunate fact of life, but a sign of Hashem's trust and confidence in our ability to prevail. Yes, He 'knows' how difficult things are for us. For the *Gemara* states, *"G-d does not make matters difficult for His creatures. However, He does expect a person to perform according to his capacity."* As Sholom HaMelech said, *"Whatever you are capable of doing with your own strength do it."* Or as Nike says, *"Just do it."*

Hashem gave us free will. Therefore, if we fail a challenge that He sends us, don't give up! Rav Tzadok HaKohein Rabinowitz of Lublin writes, *"Just as one must believe in Hashem, so too, one must believe in himself."* Meaning, Hashem wants us to believe in our *strengths, capabilities, ability* to overcome evil and achieve *greatness*. In the words of Rav Scheinberg, *"Serving the Almighty properly involves constant challenges, which takes consistency and persistence to succeed... Only FOOLS give up HOPE."*

What about *suffering*? Why do we *suffer*? Yitzchak Avinu asked that man should endure suffering as an atonement. No one can escape suffering. As the *Medrash* states, *"There is no man who goes through life without afflictions!"* Still, the *Gemara* says, *"Pain that a person suffers in this world atones for sins."*

Speaking of atonement, the *Gemara* asks, *"Why are the righteous removed before their time? To atone for sins of the generation. Because when the wicked flourish in the world, the righteous found among them are seized for their sins."* Then, there is the universal question of, *"Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?"* Rashi answers that in his lifetime (i.e. of the wicked person), Hashem pays him that which is coming to him for the good that he has done, in order 'to make him perish' from the

World to Come.

The *posuk* said, *"In order to test you, to do good for you in your end."* What does, *"in your end"* mean? It's referring to the *World to Come*. We create our 'estate' in the *World to Come* based on how we deal with the *challenges* and *situations* that He sends us in *This World*. As the *Mesillas Yesharim* states, *"Our purpose in this world is to serve Hashem by overcoming challenges and thereby earn the World to Come."* For the *Gemara* says that the *World to Come* is one of the three good gifts that Hashem gave to Yisroel that only comes through *suffering*. Furthermore, the Chofeitz Chayim states, *"Whenever a person suffers in any way for the honor of Hashem, he is lifted to a higher station in the World to Come."*

The *Gemara* says, *"The entire forty days that Moshe stood upon Har Sinai, he would learn Torah and then forget it..."*

Can we even begin to comprehend the mental anguish that Moshe Rabbeinu must have been going through?! We all study material and sometimes forget it. Nevertheless, to study material day after day and then forget it, we would start to mentally crack!

The *Gemara* concludes, *"In the end, it was given to him as a gift."*

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* states that one of the three good gifts that Hashem gave to Yisroel only comes through *suffering*. Which gift is that? Torah. The word for *gift* in Hebrew is מַתָּנָה. Every morning in *Birchas HaTorah* we say, *"Blessed are You, Hashem... Who selected us from all the nations וְנָתַן, and gave, to us His Torah..."*

What's the connection between the words מַתָּנָה, *gift*, and נָתַן, *gave*?

They both contain the root word of נָתַן which means *to give*. Hashem is telling us, *"I gave you the Torah as a gift. However, don't think it will come easily to you."* As *Avos* says, *"Prepare yourself to learn Torah because it is not an inheritance for you."*

Rabbeinu Yonah and Rav Yitzchak Berkowitz have the same thought in mind, *"When a person tries to mix spirituality (i.e. Torah) and materialism, he will find out that they constantly compete for his attention..."* In addition, one who is accustomed to pampering himself with all forms of pleasure will have a hard time forcing himself to invest the necessary effort to acquire true Torah knowledge.

Continuing, Rabbeinu Yonah says, *"You will never master the Torah's wisdom until you make the effort to acquire it. Torah is not an inheritance that is passed down from father to son."*

How does one acquire Torah? Acceptance of *suffering*. As the *Medrash* states, *"...Fortunate is the man for whom the Torah is the source of his affliction"* As the saying goes, *"No pain, no gain."* For instance, one is in middle of learning *Torah* and suddenly, he gets a *headache*, *stomachache*, *bodily ailment* or a situation came up that deprived him of *sleep*; don't stop learning! Why? Because the reward for keeping G-d's commandments is increased in proportion to the effort and discomfort one

experiences in its performance. Therefore, *"If you learn Torah when it is difficult for you, your reward is one thousand; when things are going smoothly for you, the reward is [only] two hundred."* Yet, Torah is the best pain reliever! As the *Gemara* states, *"Anyone who engages in Torah study, afflictions keep away from him."* In addition, whoever engages in Torah study, the Torah makes him great and exalts him above all things.

What's the "best type" of suffering to endure? The *Gemara* answers, *"When a person ignores insults, Heaven ignores his or her sins."* Rabbi Moshe Cordovero points out that it is far better to achieve atonement for a sin by suffering an insult in silence than to undergo physical punishment which may interfere with one's ability to perform mitzvos or study Torah.

We said in the beginning, that Moshe stood on Har Sinai for an entire *forty days*. He would learn Torah and then forget it. The *Gemara* says, *"One who reviews a subject forty times, is guaranteed it will be rooted in his memory as if it were placed in his pocket."* However, reviewing forty times only applies to when one is learning with a *partner*, whereas a person learning by himself must see something 101 times before he will remember it. Since Hashem was transmitting the Torah to Moshe, Hashem, so to speak, was like Moshe's *chavrusa* and therefore he only needed to be taught forty times. Perhaps, when Avos tells us, *"Forty is the age when man attains insight,"* Moshe attained true insight of the Torah on the 40th day.

That's Moshe Rabbeinu. However, I wasn't in heaven for forty days?

Picture the following: You're in class and might be learning *Chumash*, *Novi*, *Gemara*, *Mishnayos* or *Halacha*. Yet, you're getting really frustrated because it's half an hour and you still don't understand the material that you just learned. On the other hand, your friend understands the material in just twenty minutes. You might think to yourself, *"I wish I was as smart as them."*

Don't have this mindset. Why not? Because behind closed doors, you have no clue of what challenges they face. In fact, your friend may think, *"My friend thinks that I'm so smart. Still, if they knew what challenges I face, they would never be jealous of me. In fact, I would rather be in their situation and not have to deal with my challenges."*

Rav Dessler tells us, "When a person overcomes some desire, pushing himself to ignore its call, this does not eliminate the desire. It has only been pushed away temporarily. Later, when he recalls his desire, his urge to fulfill it returns twice as strong as before. The original urge joins together with the new to form an overpowering urge much greater than what he encountered originally... It is like pushing on a coiled spring; the more one pushes against it the harder it pushes back. This is what *Gemara* mean when they say, *'The greater the person, the greater his yeitzer hara.'* The spiritually accomplished person has certainly overcome his desires many times. This makes his *yeitzer hara* push back that much more strongly against him."

The *posuk* says, *"If you will walk in My statutes..."* Rashi explains, *"The commandment is that we toil in Torah study."* To which the *Chofeitz Chayim* says, *"...The commandment is that we toil in Torah study, as*

it is written, 'If you will walk in My statutes'" and Chazal explain, "If you will toil Torah." The promised blessings are for the toil - the effort - even in the end, we have not completely understood what we studied. As the *Gemara* says, *"A man does not come to grasp divrei torah unless he first misunderstands them."* Hashem wants our efforts to study, even if we don't succeed. This is what we mean when we say, *"We toil and receive reward"* - because the toil is what Hashem wants from us - *"and they toil, but do not receive reward"* - because, for them, the toil is not the important thing, but rather the finished product.

With Hashem's help, in the merit of facing our daily challenges and putting in our sincere effort to acquire the Torah, may He soon fulfill, *"Torah shall go forth from Tzion and on that day, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem's glory!!!"*

Dedicated:

- In memory of Rivka bas Rav Eliyahu, Shlomo Avraham Moshe ben Yechezkeil Yosef, Rochel bas Menachem Mendel Boruch, Eliyahu ben Mordechai, Mashah Tzivyah bas R' Shlomo Zalman, Altah Soshah Devorah bas Aryeh Leibush, Chaim ben Shmuel Efraim Zalman, Tuvyah Shlomo ben Naftali Tzvi HaKohein; Yisroel ben Yeshayah, Elisheva Basyah bas Yechiel Ephraim, Leah bas Leib Yehudah, Dovid Pinchas ben Moshe Aharon, Malka Devora Sima bas Meir Nossan, Esther Perel bas R' Shlomo, Miriam bas Zelig Shaul, Menachem ben Shimon, Menachem ben Zev, Sarah bas HaRav Yisroel, Avraham Yosef ben Meir Dovid, Zushe Yosef ben Shmuel Tzvi, Dovid Tzvi ben Yosef Yochanan, Kayla Rus bas Bunim Tuvia, Dovid ben Uri HaLevi, Dovid Avraham ben Chiya Kehos, Yosef ben Moshe HaLevi and all the other departed souls of our nation.
- For the complete recovery of Chayah Malka bas Bas-Sheva and among the other sick ones of our nation.

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