

# A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

The Chofetz Chaim in his work on the Chumash (Pentateuch) shares with us a novel approach to suffering. He bases his words on the following passage in this week's parsha. The deeds of the Mighty One are perfect, for all his ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4). This is understood to mean that all of the things which G-d (Hashem) causes to happen in this world are with perfect justification. This is not the "G-d is punishing you for your sins" speech. Justification doesn't necessarily mean someone has done something for which he/she is being punished. It means that there is just cause. It could be any of a number of reasons that constitutes just cause.

No pain no gain, is a famous line people use. It reflects a true attitude that when something is very worth while having, it's worth while working for, even to the extent of suffering. We see Olympians using their last ounce of strength toward attaining their goals. We see people giving their lives fighting for their ideals (whether we agree with them or not). The bottom line is that when we experience purposeful suffering we accept it knowing that it is justified. This passage in our parsha teaches us that whatever we experience from G-d is purposeful and justified. Nothing is without purpose. Needless to say, this is the attitude every person should take about his/her **own** suffering. Regarding other people, the Torah attitude is to join with them in their suffering, and share in their pain. It's their job to justify their own pain.

In one of his famous parables the Chofetz Chaim explains this passage. There was once a man who rented a house and its surrounding courtyard from a powerful and wealthy landowner. The relationship was good, and the price was fair. The renter was careful to make his payments on time. It happened that the landowner needed to be away for an extended period of time, so he placed the management of his landholdings in the hands of an executor. This executor was a nasty, abusive person, and he immediately raised the rent astronomically. The renter was placed under great pressure to raise the money he now needed to pay the rent. When the time came to pay the rent, the executor refused to give him time, and he ordered to have him whipped 20 times to make up for the 20 dinar (or whatever monetary units they used in those days) that he was missing.

The exploitation continued, and soon the executor became wealthy off of the backs of all of the people he was robbing. The renter suffered greatly from the pressure that was placed upon him. He finally decided to go see the landowner, and he related to him the entire episode. The landowner was incensed. He immediately ordered in writing that the executor should pay the renter 100 dinar for each of the 20 lashes he received. This sum equaled 1/2 of the value of the piece of land the

executor had purchased for himself with all of the money he extorted from his defenseless tenants.

The renter went home with the written decree in hand, and found his wife waiting for him. She noticed that her husband looked quite upset. "What happened?" asked his wife, and he related the entire story. "Why are you upset? You should be dancing in the streets!" she said. "I'll tell you, my dear wife. The 20 lashes I received have long healed, and the pain is now passed. If I would have gotten 40 lashes, the pain would still be over and done with, and now I would have been rewarded with the executor's entire courtyard. If only I had received 40 lashes!" Good Shabbos!

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