

A LABOR OF LOVE

by Rabbi Label Lam

"All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed because you will have not listened to the (KOL) voice of HASHEM, your G-d, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you. They will be a sign and a wonder in you and in your offspring forever because you did not serve HASHEM, your G-d with gladness and a good heart, when everything was abundant." (Devarim 28:45-47)

If we didn't know better we might think that these many verses of curses were penned after the Holocaust, but such was the dreaded possibility scripted way in advance of our long and arduous history. The Torah gives two reasons as stated above for all the many tribulations. 1) Not listening to the voice (KOL) of HASHEM. 2) For not serving HASHEM with joy and a good heart. What does it mean not to listen to the voice (KOL) of HASHEM as opposed to just not listening to HASHEM? Are these two different reasons or is one a reason and the other a symptom? What is the conceptual connection between not being obedient to the KOL of HASHEM and not serving HASHEM with gladness and a good heart?

A good many years ago when my wife returned to work from maternity leave after having given birth to our first child she was greeted by a senior co-worker, Esther, who had raised a large family. She had an empathetic heart for my wife's situation. My wife came home from work that day and told me that Esther had told her something not so easy to understand. After a little discussion we think we figured out what might be the meaning to her riddle-like statement. She said, "Dear, I know how you feel. When you have one child it's very hard. When you have two it gets even harder. However, when you have three it gets easier and when you hit seven then you're really flying."

We reasoned that when you have one child, it's hard because you still want to do the things you did when you didn't have that cute little bundle to care for. You want to go shopping and eat lunch with friends but you need the help of Bubby or a local babysitter. It's a huge inconvenience. When you have two it gets even harder to do all the things you want to do. You can make a round-robin play group with a couple of friends so you can go out foot loose and fancy free once in a while at the cost of having to care for a some other kids including your own.

Here comes the brain teaser. When you have three kids though it gets easy because then you would need a real professional babysitter and even Bubby won't answer your calls anymore. So what do you do? You have one choice and that is to accept that this is your new role as a mommy and the luxury of going out like the old days is over. Then miraculously, it gets easy! When you get to seven

and more then you're really flying because it's not about "you" anymore. You become so absorbed in the enormity and the constancy of the task that your identity is subsumed by the greater cause.

The Mesilas Yesharim mentions a similar paradox when talking about the need for enthusiasm and alacrity in the performance of Mitzvos. One of the things that prevent a person from exerting the proper energy is the expectation that everything should be easy. Even the lightest movement can feel burdensome and heavy if our expectation is that it should be light and effortless. The trick is that if one expects and anticipates that a certain thing is hard, and it's going to require an enormous investment of energy then paradoxically it becomes easy.

It's interesting to note that everywhere the Torah writes "SHEMA" listen or hear, the Targum, the Aramaic translation is "SHEMA". That's not the interesting part yet. In the many places the Torah says, "SHEMA B'KOL"-Listen to the voice, the Targum renders the translation, "L'Kabel L'Meimra"- to accept the statement. That's the big difference maker. One can hear and one can understand and yet struggle with accepting. For example; "Take out the garbage!" Abba says. So the disgruntled child does it reluctantly mumbling, "Why me?" while hitting every step on the way out the door till the garbage is bleeding out the back of the broken bag. The job gets done but with heaviness, under protest. Once, however, a given task is completely accepted, with all its difficulties, it then becomes **a labor of love.**

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