

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP!

by Rabbi Label Lam

All of these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you up until the point they destroy you because you have not hearkened to the 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 your offspring forever, because you did not serve HASHEM, your G-d with joy and a goodness of heart, from an abundance of all. (Devarim 28:45-47)

In the midst of a long list of potentially negative consequences that reads with retrospect like the bloody trail of the Holocaust the Torah gives what seems like one big reason "why" all these terrible things will have happened, "Because you did not serve HASHEM your G-d with joy and goodness of heart from an abundance of all." The verse before this however claims a lack of compliance to Torah and Mitzvos preceded by a complaint that there was a failure to "hearken to the voice of HASHEM". Which is the reason? Was there a lack of doing or an absence of joy or an inadequacy in listening skills that brought all this about?

The Sefas Emes quotes the Arizal "It should be that your joy in serving HASHEM should be more than your abundance of all." He then explains "A person should serve HASHEM with all character traits. It's written in Tehillim, "Serve HASHEM with fear!", and it is also written, "Serve HASHEM with joy". Therefore when a person is surrounded with good, it is necessary that his service of HASHEM should so intensify that it is more dear and pleasing than all other joys. He should sublimate all the pleasures of the body to the service of HASHEM! So it is with the pain of exile and tribulation. It's crucial that a person's fear of HASHEM and frights and worries should rather be about defects of character and deficiencies in the service of HASHEM! He must therefore channel those fears and pains and worries about material matters of the body into something greater...and then even in the midst of physical suffering and the alienation of exile he is able to draw closer to HASHEM!"

Similarly the Piacezna Rebbe wrote, "The human soul relishes sensation, not only if it is a pleasant feeling but for the very experience of stimulation. Sooner sadness or some deep pain rather than the boredom of non-stimulation. People will watch distressing scenes and listen to heartrending stories just to get stimulation. Such is human nature and a need of the soul just like its other needs and natures. So he who is clever will fill this need with passionate prayer and Torah learning. But the soul whose divine service is without emotion will have to find its stimulation elsewhere. It will be either driven to cheap, even forbidden sensation or will become emotionally ill from a lack of stimulation.."

So what was the reason for this long launch into exile? Was it a lack of hearkening, whatever that is, or under-performance, or the void of joy amidst abundance? Torah and Mitzvos are not a mechanical formula of social or religious behavior. Every act is laced with significance between man and man and between man and G-d because there is a real relationship at play. A husband that throws flowers onto to the table but shows little interest in his wife will long for the days when a bouquet and a sincere smile could charm the day.

So too when trying times arrive: It's never the problem that's the problem. It's what you do about the problem that's often the problem. The authentic concern for not causing hurt to a spouse's feelings should be of equal concern as the performance of some duty whose goal is to help or protect them. That doesn't mean the job need not be done.

A classic example might be by demanding that candles be lit on the eve of Shabbos with an overbearing and authoritative tone. One can easily undo exactly what the candles were designed to do.. That's a paradigm of not "hearkening to the "kol"-the voice- the real meaning! The "kol" -the voice of HASHEM, like the Shofar sound is an alarming tone that cries and laughs -begs and even shouts that **it's all about the relationship!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.