

IN OUR BEST INTEREST

by Rabbi Elly Broch

"You slandered in your tents and said because G-d hates us he took us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorite to destroy us." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 1:27) In his review of Jewish history in the wilderness, Moshe admonished the Children of Israel for the episode of the Spies (Bamidbar/Numbers 13 & 14), who brought back a discouraging report and gloomy forecast of the prospect of conquering the Land of Israel. This precipitated bitter complaints from the Jewish Nation.

Sforno (1) explains the masses believed that they earned G-d's displeasure due to the indiscretions they had committed while in Egypt, especially the sin of idolatry. They admitted their past misdeeds and attributed them as the cause of their apparently hopeless situation. That they felt unworthy of Divine assistance in conquering the Land of Israel would seem to be a sign of humility. If repentance and introspection into one's deeds are positive undertakings, why were the People of Israel so severely criticized and punished for their reaction?

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (2) explains that in every situation of difficulty or adversity one must contemplate the real possibility that the challenge is a blessing that is soon to be realized. This generation had witnessed G-d's great kindness towards them and Moshe was now leading them to gain the great and fertile land of Israel. This Nation of great spiritual stature was expected to focus upon the great delight that had been foretold to them instead of mourning and worrying that their past misdemeanors would now frustrate their entitlement to Israel.

A story is told of a family from London planning a vacation to Florida over 15 years ago. Given the many expenses of an international vacation, they opted for a less expedient but less expensive flight. To their dismay, they learned their Air India flight from London had been delayed by many hours that, aside from the inherent inconvenience, would also cause complications with the connecting flight from New York. To their surprise, there were still vacant seats on the more expensive flight and it was leaving in the next couple of hours. But the increased expense would so deplete their resources they would have insufficient funds for their time in America. Heavy hearted, they made accommodation plans for the long wait until their flight, and they watched enviously as the passengers boarded the earlier plane. A short time later the news announced a plane had exploded over Scotland minutes after its departure from London. Soon it became evident that the plane that exploded above Lockerbie was the Pan Am flight that was too expensive.

It is a fundamental Jewish principle that the Creator of the World Who bestowed upon us the wonders and beauty of nature and Who took us to be His Nation only has beneficial intentions

towards us. The Torah and Prophets are replete with examples in which hopeless and frustrating situations turn out to yield the greatest benefits and opportunities (see Beraishis/Genesis 29, the story of Yosef/Joseph). Obviously, in retrospect, it was ridiculous for the family in the story to have become despondent over their lack of funds for the earlier flight and their subsequent long delay. However, living in the present with this G-d consciousness takes a great deal of work. Sometimes the advantageous components of situations take a long time to surface; at other times they can elude us completely.

In our haste, we often jump to conclusions when we encounter challenges and difficulties. Our efforts yield results different than we had envisioned and our plans and goals appear frustrated. But the Jewish Nation was severely rebuked for jumping to the conclusion that G-d hated them. We must maintain the conviction that our Creator, Who throughout history has enabled our nation to survive two millennia of exile and has demonstrated His love by blessing us constantly with His benevolence, is not punishing us and certainly does not wish ill upon us. Our limited scope and perspective may, at times, make it impossible for us to logically understand why we experience certain life events. But our souls know that the myriad stories of clear Divine intervention - whether in ancient times with Yosef, or in our times with this writer's family not flying Pan Am - serve as beacons to the truth that G-d cares and is involved, and, in providing us with everything we have, He gives us only what is in our best interest.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1470-1550; classic Biblical commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno of Rome and Bologna, Italy

(2) 1908-2001; a prolific author and popular speaker who specialized in mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) and Jewish history, Rabbi Miller commanded a worldwide following through his books and tapes: of the tens of thousands of Torah lectures he delivered, more than 2,000 were preserved on cassettes

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