

YOUR APPOINTED PORTION

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"And you shall love HaShem your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources."
[6:5]*

Our Sages say, in the Medrash, that we must love G-d completely. Whether we receive something good or bad, we should accept it with joy. As the Mishnah says in Pirkei Avos, the Chapters of the Fathers, "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion."

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, is bothered by two aspects of this saying. First of all, how can we expect a person who is poor, and who provides for himself with difficulty, to be happy with his situation? And second, why does the saying refer to "his portion," rather than simply "he who is happy with what he has?"

To answer these questions, the Chofetz Chaim offers a parable. As we know, a carpenter needs a saw. But a carpentry saw is a simple instrument, available from any hardware store for a few dollars. Why not give him something better? Imagine if we were to replace his simple, cheap saw with the type of high-precision cutting instrument used by diamond cutters -- worth hundreds of times the value of the original.

Have we done him a favor? Of course not! It may be true that a carpentry saw is inexpensive, but it is a necessity if the carpenter is to do his job. He can't earn a living with a diamond-cutting saw. He can't cut wood with it, and no one would entrust their diamonds to him. In order to get his job done, the carpenter needs his plain, simple instrument -- a diamond-cutter is useless.

The Chofetz Chaim says that we must learn to look at the world the same way. The Holy One, Blessed be He, stands over every creature, and He knows exactly what each of us needs, and what tests each person needs to face. Some must be tested with poverty, to see if they will withstand difficult situations. Others must be tested with wealth, to see if they will open their hands to the poor. Every detail of a person's life is apportioned to respond to his or her unique needs, in order to enable each of us to perfect ourselves and the world around us.

Were a person to suddenly find himself in someone else's situation, in someone else's shoes, he would certainly be much worse off! This is why the Sages tell us that a wealthy person is one who is happy with his portion - using the language "portion" quite intentionally. That which each of us has, is apportioned.

Thus whenever we find ourselves in difficult situations, even those capable of causing great pain and anguish, we should not permit them to break us - for just the opposite, whatever we receive is for our benefit, so we should realize that we will profit from these tests like all others.

Obviously it takes a person on a high spiritual level to truly feel this way about every situation. But every person can take comfort in recognizing that G-d never abandons us, never leaves us in difficult times -- and quite the opposite, we often feel G-d's closeness during the greatest trials. And, says the Chofetz Chaim, if a person is able to pass through such tests and not despair, this will stand as living testimony to that individual's trust and reliance on G-d's limitless love, care, and ability to help us.

Good Shabbos,
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