

ROUGH BEGINNING, EASY ENDING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Yehudah approached and said, "My master, let your servant speak a word in my master's ears. Don't be angry with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh." (Bereishis 44:18)

Rough beginning, easy ending. There was Yehudah, one moment preparing for war, possible death, and the end to a dynasty, and the next, he was making peace, more alive than ever, and watching the dynasty flourish. Talk about going from extreme to extreme. It is an important lesson for life, for as the Talmud says, when it comes to the Jewish people, the remedy is created before the illness (Megillah 10b).

I just heard a story about a couple who tried to have children for 10 years without success. In the religious world, in which having children is such a priority and completion of life (though while raising them, it is easy to forget this), every passing year, the pressure increases on the couple to have children, especially as they become older, and especially if they dreamed of having a large family.

And, though once the most a couple could do in such a predicament was pray for Divine mercy, modern technology has increased the amount of venues through which Divine mercy can filter down to the couple, increasing hope, and cost. More pressure.

Anyhow, according to what I was told, after 10 years, they were finally blessed with a child, to the great relief of the couple, their family, and their friends. And, of course, they could not wait to make a special meal to praise God for the tremendous good with which He had blessed them, to which they invited their family and friends.

According to my friend who was there, the new father spoke of how he could not tell yet if he was awake or dreaming. He said that he just felt as if he was floating through the air, so uplifted he was by the miracle that happened to them (beyond the miracle of birth itself!). And, all of a sudden, all of the struggle and pain were gone, over, as if they never occurred, leaving no scars whatsoever that they could see. If anything, my friend said, they felt as if they were better people for it all.

I know the feeling. Everyone knows the feeling. The situation looks bleak, or worse. You can't see how it is going to be solved. It drags on for so long sometimes, and it results in so much negativity that you become convinced it is going to be your undoing. And then, all of a sudden, like a burst of sun that escapes the dark clouds, salvation comes and you wonder why, in your elation, you ever worried in the first place.

On a much smaller scale, I had a similar situation occur to me about two weeks ago. I am traveling to England, the States, and Toronto on a speaking trip, b"H, this December. And though, in the past, a passport was valid up to and including the expiry date written on the passport, today a 'valid' Canadian passport is one that is valid for at least six more months, which mine was not, as my travel agent pointed out.

New Canadian passports can take at least three weeks to process here in Israel, which was fine, since there was still about six weeks until I had to depart. So, I downloaded the proper application, filled it in, got the proper photos taken, had my guarantor sign it and the relevant documents, and went to the post office to mail it.

Since the instructions were to enclose a postal check for the equivalent amount of \$100 Canadian, I purchased a check for NIS 360.00, a little more than the calculated amount. I put it all together in an envelope and sent it off registered mail with plenty of time to spare. What a relief, especially when the post office said the package arrived and was signed for two days later.

One week after that, I received a notice in my mail box that an envelope had arrived registered mail from the Canadian Embassy. Impressive! The entire process had taken just a bit more than a week, and I got the package that night when the attendant in our local post office was there to give out registered mail.

However, to my disappointment, it was everything I had sent the week before less the new passport with a letter saying that I was NIS 10.00 short in my payment, and that the birth certificate I had enclosed as part of my personal identification had been unacceptable, being old and somewhat torn, especially since they had on record that I had a newer, unlaminated one, which I had been unable to find.

Frustrated, I immediately checked again for the new birth certificate, since ordering a new from Canada at that point was highly unfeasible, and, thank God, I just happened to find it in the last place I looked that night. The next day, I bought a new check for the right amount, and re-enclosed everything, sending it off once again by registered mail. Over one week of time had just been lost, but time was still on my side.

That had been a Friday. On Sunday, I tracked the letter, and the post office online said that it arrived at the local distribution center by the Canadian Embassy in Tel Aviv. This meant that the next day, when the Embassy opened again (Canadian work hours), the application should arrive, and begin being processed in time for my trip.

However, the package did not arrive on Monday, which I confirmed by calling the Embassy. Nor did it arrive on Tuesday, or Wednesday. Tracking the package, the message had not changed since the beginning of the week, and I was becoming a little irritated and anxious. So, I used the post office's online contact e-mail address, and asked them when the package might be delivered, and the message might finally change.

By the next morning, the Post Office had not written back to me, but I noticed that the update had been removed, and it only showed the day that it had actually been posted. Confirming with the Embassy that my application had indeed not arrived, we called the Post Office to see if they could explain what was going on, why it was taking so much longer than the first time, and why the online message had been reversed.

The first person we spoke to couldn't even track the letter according to the number (that made me feel real good about registered mail), and acted a little weird on the phone. And, given what happened in Dubai recently by people who had used real passports of innocent people, I nervously joked about seeing my name in the papers after having carried out some kind of act of espionage.

We called back a second time, and asked for the manager, who we eventually spoke to, and he tracked the passport and said that it should arrive that day. Relieved, I spoke to the Embassy once again and told them what was going on, and waited to hear from them that the package had in fact been received that day.

However, when they called me at the end of the day, it was to tell me that the package had not yet been received, which made me uptight all over again. Friday, the Post Office does not deliver in Israel, and Sunday, the Canadian Embassy was closed. So, it wouldn't be until Monday the following week that I would know if my application had been received, or was still missing in action.

Monday came fast enough, but the Embassy called to say that the package had not yet been received, but at least the online message showed that it was where it was supposed to be, hopefully. Another week had been lost, and now with a processing time that takes 15 business days, more than enough time had suddenly become just enough time, if it arrived that day.

It didn't. But, on my way back from my weekly visit to the Kosel the next day, I received a message from the Embassy that the application had in fact arrived late the day before, and was already being processed. Phew! I did the calculation, and 15 business days still gave me about 4 days leeway, but given what had gone wrong in the last two weeks, 4 days all of a sudden did not seem like that much. And, we still don't know if my passport was on some kind of secret mission during its mysterious disappearance.

Thank God, the Canadian Government processed everything quickly, and a week later, my new passport arrived, with about 9 days to spare, b"H. Normally I might not have panicked so much, but these speaking trips take a lot to arrange, and cancellations can be costly and extremely disappointing for me and the people to whom I am supposed to speak. I am very grateful that the episode is now behind me without too much additional cost.

And, now that it is over, it is as if it never happened. Having received my new passport with over a week to go before departure, it feels like, "What was the big deal?" Since no police cars have stormed my neighborhood looking for me as they did to others who had been implicated by the Dubai Affair, I feel more secure. I bet you some angels had a good laugh at my expense through all

of this.

True, not all stories have happy endings. I can personally attest to that, as can everyone. Things do go wrong in life even for people who seem to have it all. A word that keeps cropping in religious newspapers these days, and on special pamphlets made for collecting charity on behalf of others who are suffering, is 'tragedy,' usually transliterated from the English. They usually tell stories that break the heart.

Nevertheless, we are told by the Talmud, which is echoed by the Shulchan Aruch, to accustom ourselves to saying that all that God does He does for the good. But clearly, in this world, good is something that has to be created, and achieved, usually the result of hard work and yes, suffering. If this is true when it comes to physical successes, how much more so must it be true when it comes to spiritual successes.

For, the ultimate good is not what we do, but the positive impact that it has on us. Every individual, from birth, is a work in progress. How many people have any clue of what they are capable of achieving, or just how great they might actually be at the time? The whole point of a Divine test is to reveal exactly this, so that we may take note, and grow even further. Though the current situation may bother us, it is necessary to help us grow to higher spiritual levels.

To achieve that level is to earn some relief. And, once the trouble is over, we realize that it was more manageable than we had thought it was while going through it. Happy is the person who copes and earns the relief. Not so happy is the person who realizes only after the trials and tribulations that he had been capable of dealing with the situation better, something that Yehudah must have wondered about after Yosef finally revealed himself, and brought an end to all of the family crises.

Text

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org