

SUFFERING FROM LOVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Moshe told it to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because their spirit was broken, and because of the hardness of their work. (Shemos 6:9)

Tough love. That's when you hurt someone for their own good. You'd rather not do it, and in fact, it hurts you to cause the other person any suffering. However, you know that if you don't carry through, life will be worse for him or her later on. Sometimes you have to break someone's leg to fix it.

Jewish history seems like one big oxymoron. We are told that we are God's chosen people, His firstborn, if you will, and that His love for us is infinite. Yet, no nation has gone through as much as we have, the Jewish people, at the beginning of our history, at the end of our history, and at about just every point in-between. It makes some people wish that God didn't "love" us so much.

It might help to know that God takes no pleasure in making us, or allowing us, to suffer. Even though the Torah says, in Parashas Ki Savo, that God will take pleasure from our suffering if we stray too far from Torah, even that means only in terms how the suffering will correct history and put us back on track. As the Leshem explains, God doesn't even get pleasure from the suffering of evil Jews.

In fact, I once heard a rabbi say in response to the question, "How could God let a Holocaust occur?" that God will have His own question to ask us on the Final Day of Judgment: "How could you force Me to allow a Holocaust to occur?"

It's like the son who is kicking and screaming to his father from the dentist's chair, "How can you just stand there and watch him cause me so much pain?! Why don't you just take me out of this place?!"

But the father recalls how many times over the years he told his son to brush and floss his teeth. How many times did he warn his son through the years that if he didn't take care of his teeth now, he would have to pay a heavy price later on in life, but to no avail. The son ate, drank, enjoyed himself, but rarely cleaned his teeth after.

"How can I do this to you?" the father whispers to himself. "How could you have done this to me? I fed you and even gave you sweets when you asked, and all I asked in return was that you take care of your teeth! I love you! Do you think I enjoy watching you suffer like this? It pains me so much that I would switch places with you, if I could. But, if we don't fix your teeth today, then tomorrow you lose them completely!"

It is a gross over-simplification in terms of the Holocaust, but it makes the point. God would much rather have sent Moshiach instead of allowing the Nazis to come, but that would have created more problems than it would have solved. There is no such thing as a free ride when it comes to a portion in the World-to-Come, and the Holocaust, in ways we won't understand until much later, somehow got the world back on track.

Knowing that God does everything for our good—always—is the basis of trust in God, the foundation of any true relationship with Him. If a person were to think, at any point in time, that there are times when God does not look out for our good, then he would never know if what is happening to him is for his good or to his detriment. Even happy moments could lead to destructive results if God wasn't concerned for our well-being when he gave them to us.

In fact, God loves the Jewish people so much that He is even prepared to bend the rules of Creation for the benefit of the Jewish people:

Both the redemption of the Jews and the plagues against the Egyptians were supernatural. As it is known, the Jewish people had not been deserving of redemption and likewise, regarding the plagues in Egypt, [the Egyptians] had not yet filled their measure, as it says in the Holy Zohar (Noach 61b; Chaye Sarah 121b) . . . God acted above measure because of the pain of the Jewish people, who are the Children of God. Their cries ascended, as it says, "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and I have heard their cries . . . And now the cries of Israel have come before Me and I have also seen the pressure . . ." (Shemos 3:7-9). Therefore, Egypt was judged severely even though they had not yet filled their measure, as the Holy Zohar says. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Siman 6)

In other words, before God punishes a nation, He prefers to wait until they have become as evil as they can become. This way, there is time to repent, as the great city of Nineveh did in Yonah's time. Apparently, as bad as Egypt had been to the Jewish people, they still had been capable of doing worse, and would have had the Jewish people not called out to God. Yes, things can always be worse, why wait? Call out to God now.

Moshe Rabbeinu made known to Israel how dear they were to God so that their hearts and souls would be directed to God always, and all they had to do was strengthen themselves in faith and trust in God, that He would forever do miracles for them. They knew that the entire redemption could have happened without such revealed miracles, as it says, "He could have unleashed His power and destroyed you and your people with pestilence . . ." (Shemos 9:15), which is not such a great miracle. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Siman 6)

We take for granted that all 10 plagues were necessary for the Jewish people to leave Egypt. However, the truth is, God could have severely weakened Egypt with a natural plague, and since 12,000,000 Jews died in the Plague of Darkness anyhow, they could have been the ones to die in the plague.

Likewise, it was true of the entire miracle of the splitting of the sea and all the miracles that occurred

while they traveled through the desert. None of this was by necessity, as it says, "God led the people through a circuitous route, by way of the desert around the Red Sea" (Shemos 13:18), which Rashi explains to mean: He took them in bent manner as opposed to a straight one . . . (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Siman 6)

Hence, we see God going out of His way to perform miracles for the Jewish people, setting up situations of distress just to perform great redemptions. Thus, it was not only about ending Egyptian slavery, but about something else:

All of this was just to show the Jewish people that God deals with them supernaturally and above measure, since all of the miracles did not have to be performed. They only served the purpose of showing them that they were supernatural and above all the normal workings of the world, and that the entire order of Creation was ready to be altered for them. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Siman 6)

One could argue, "That was then. Where do we see that now?" We don't necessarily, but that does not mean it is still true. We are living during times of hester panim, when God's face is hidden. However, a hidden face is not a missing face. It is just one you can't see, which doesn't mean that it can't see you. God is as much here as He always was, pulling the strings as He always does, except in a way that escapes the observation of the average person.

Instead of seeing open miracles, we see hidden ones, meaning, only after the fact, if we take the time to notice them. For example, the fact that Israel has not only survived over the last 64 years, it has thrived, b"H, with so many enemies daily planning its demise, incredible world pressure to surrender Jewish land, and few natural resources to sustain its energy needs, is nothing short of an amazing miracle.

The fact that Jews have prospered so much over the last seven decades in the Diaspora, especially in America, enjoying the respect of the gentile world around them and what has amounted to pretty much equal opportunity—with minimal anti-Semitism—is also a great miracle. As the Midrash points out, anti-Semitism is natural, so when it goes away, at least before Moshiach arrives, it is a great miracle.

We should appreciate that, not assume it. The last time we assumed it we were in Europe, right before World War II and the Holocaust. Then we found out just how wrong we were, and how miraculous life had been until then, and it still wasn't as good as it has been over the last 70 years.

Text

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