“And I returned and saw...” Hashem can shoot one target and hit many targets and because of this we have the illusion of injustice. For example, if someone steals and is imprisoned, not only is he being punished, but also his family. Hashem takes that all into account; it’s perfectly calculated. Seeing doesn’t mean ordinary vision here, but rather divine inspiration. The Rambam says, the more you seek Hashem the more you will see Him. The less you seek Him, the less He reveals. There are people who don’t want to see hashgacha. They want to approach life through the lens of the natural world where the strong prevail over the weak. The fact that the oppressors have strength and seem to be winning, encourages them not to do teshuva. The forces of evil give them the ability to go further in order to let them dig their own hole. In the next world they will have no recourse but to face their punishment.

“I praise the dead.” When a person has no sense of the spiritual value of life and no accountability, it’s worse than death. “And better than both are the people who’ve not yet lived.” The people who do evil and destroy moral systems, give birth to a generation that thinks there’s no morality. The third generation never saw the generation of those who did evil. They just saw the emptiness of their lives. Nature abhors a vacuum. When there’s a void, people seek to fill it with something. This brings them to repentance.

“...And I saw (through prophecy) that the ambition of people who don’t know Hashem, is envy.” In nicer words this refers to competitions or status. “This is vanity and breaks the spirit.” A person should be using his abilities, talent, and resources to make himself and the world a better place. “The fool holds his hands together... and eats his own flesh.” Someone who feels empty should find mitzvot to do to fill the space in his heart. It might be interaction with other people, writing, or saying Tehilim. The goal is to grow and impact others in a positive way.

“Better is somebody who has a handful of satisfaction, than somebody whose hand is full of toil and a broken spirit.” Even a tzadik might think, if my soul hadn’t ever come down and was still up there with Hashem, I would have been better off. What do I need this world for? But the truth is, engaging with the challenges of this world and making the right choices brings more meaning and a sense of accomplishment than the gift of closeness to Hashem in the next world.

“Light is sown for the righteous and for the upright of heart, gladness.” Genuine baalei chessed are people who can step into the shoes of the people they are helping and really see what they need.

“And I returned and I saw vanity under the sun.” There are people who live for other people. They don’t value their own potentials or choices. They are living for their ‘mythical child,’ as Rebbe Nachum said. They live for their children as their parents lived for them. We shouldn’t think that the next generation is somehow more important than we are. Every person’s life is unique, and we can make choices to make ourself and the world a better place, which will in turn affect our descendants.

The soul has three levels- nefesh, ruach, and neshama. When you say you love music, that’s nefesh because you need an ear to hear it. When the music takes you to deveikut Hashem and real emotion, that’s ruach, your soul awakening. Neshama is the mind and spirit itself, which is the part of you that should always prevail. Your mind should interpret what you see and then let your feelings hear your interpretations and act on it. There can be two people who are going through the same situation and each will respond differently. Two people get up early and see the sunrise. The person who says Modeh Ani slowly with intention is going to see life a lot differently than the person who says, “Oh it’s already 7:30, I can’t believe it.” Thinking about yourself and taking Hashem out of the picture limits you. Keeping the neshama in the forefront will keep you on track and help you stay focused on the greater goal.

Theodicy- Iyov Part II

Before the bad times came, Iyov saw himself under the iron protection of hashgacha pratit-Divine Providence. He did everything right, believing this would help him stay secure in the arms of Hashem, while maintaining his happiness, security, and prosperity. After the calamity, he lost everything and became as it were a leper. His friends originally came to comfort him. But in order to justify the rationalistic approach that belief in a just Hashem must mean the people who are suffering deserve it, they ended up blaming him.

Rashi says that prior to the calamity, Iyov was a yarei Hashem, but not an ohev Hashem. A yarei hashem is somebody who lives in fear of losing what he has and therefore invests effort to maintain it. True love is tested when it’s no longer worthwhile and all of your assumptions of what will be are turned upside down.

I entitled the 28th chapter of Iyov, An Ode to Wisdom. Wisdom, Iyov astutely recognizes, is not the same as scientific knowledge. It’s not a question of what or how, but rather why, and rationalism can never answer that. Iyov describes man’s technological prowess in marshalling the forces of nature for his benefit. We can dig and find copper, steel, and iron; but wisdom from whence will it come? He comes to the conclusion that wisdom can’t be found in the land of the living. It can’t be bought for the finest gold. Hashem who knows where wisdom is, told man one thing—“Fear of Hashem is wisdom.” Iyov longs to go back to how things were and in the 29th chapter he describes the man he once was.

Elihu was Iyov’s fourth friend. He saw that the three friends could give no answer that was satisfactory, and then condemned Iyov. Some identify Elihu with the prophet Yechezkel who saw maaseh merkava (visions of heaven) that others couldn’t see. Elihu believed that there’s...
Theodicy- Iyov Part II
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop
Summary by Devora Kaye
Continued from page 1

He reproves man and brings him to understand what's really important. Likewise, Hashem reveals himself through pain. Pain is not meaningless. It's Hashem's way of forcing us out of our self-righteousness and compelling us to do some serious introspection. Iyov doesn't respond to Elihu. Some commentaries say he already said what he wanted to say and there was nothing left to say. Others say what he said struck a chord within Iyov but he didn't react. In a sense, Elihu prepared the groundwork for Hashem's subsequent appearance which would present as a voice out of the whirlwind.

Travelling Through Life Accompanied by Tehillim
Part 7 Part III
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn
Summary by Devora Kaye

“...They will put their trust in Hashem… and keep the mitzvot.” If I, as a child of the avot, is committed to the same way of life they lived close to 4000 years ago, I can trust Hashem. In everyone’s life, there are factors that are unexplainable, but for the fact that Hashem is with us. The more we learn history, the clearer we see how Hashem is watching over us both on a national and individual level. This brings us to trust Him and keep the mitzvot.

We usually translate trust as bitachon; but here it’s called kislom. Rav Hirsch explains that it comes from the root word, kesel-foolishness. History portrays the Jewish nation as a lone sheep among 70 wolves. Both on a physical and spiritual plane, we are constantly challenged. The eidot and mitzvot we keep, seem foolish to the nations. Our trust in Hashem gives us the strength to keep going. Although we don’t understand, we know there is a masterplan and that our faith in Hashem will sustain us.

In Horev, Rav Hirsh divides the 613 mitzvot into six categories. One category is called eidot-testimonials. These are the mitzvot that testify about the historical events that happened to us. Pesach is a testimony that we left Egypt; Shavuot tells us that we received the Torah; and Sukkot testifies that Hashem took care of us in the desert in a miraculous way. Hashem gave us mitzvot that are a testimony to the past. Through keeping them, we make history come alive. We testify that the Jews have a special relationship with Hashem established 3300 years ago and it’s still as fresh and vibrant today as it once was. It is totally dependent on us, how deep the bond will be. If we invest effort, we can move to the level of Yisrael and connect to the Torah and mitzvot in a deeper way.

“He established a testimony in Jacob and set down Torah in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to make known to their sons…sons who will be born should tell their sons.” When we tell over the lessons of history to our sons, they become the children of previous generations by connecting to them all the way back to the avot.

an intuitive knowledge inside everyone that recognizes the truth. Hashem reveals to man his most deeply held desires, drives, and fears in his dreams. In the unconscious state, his mind is set free and can discern that which is otherwise obstructed by the body. By so revealing himself, Hashem tries to save the human soul from decadence and destruction.

Hashem wants us to not only remember the past, but to internalize it and let it impact our behavior. The Malbim calls history Torah v'emunah. Jewish history is an eidut, a testimony given through Yaakov. When we are on a lower level, we are called Yaakov while when we are on a higher level, we are called Yisrael. The commentaries explain that even when we are not at our best, when we are Yaakov, history is still our testimony. There’s nothing that reveals Hashem more in this world. The patterns of Jewish history don’t follow the same framework as global history. It can’t be explained in any way other than the fact that there’s divine involvement. The very fact that we still exist after thousands of years, is a miracle.

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