

Reacting to Tragedy

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Adapted by D. Kaye

We're living in difficult times. Perhaps uppermost in our mind is- What are we meant to do? There are several things to consider. The first is that our souls are eternal. As we learned in *Bereishit*, Hashem created the world for the sake of the Jews and the *Torah*. The souls of *Am Yisrael* existed before the world. And our life doesn't end when our body ends. Every Jew has a place in *olam haba* which is eternal. The soul comes down in order to ascend. We are meant to accomplish here, so that we can return to the Next World with full hands. Everyone's time is limited and eventually the body, much like a seed that splits open, becomes unable to contain the soul any longer and must disintegrate so that the soul can sprout. When you realize that the end of everyone's story in this world is death, dying *al kiddush Hashem* is the best alternative, although not least painful.

The pain is real and it's a part of the picture. The Gemara recounts the story of Rabbi Elazar Hagadol who was lying on his deathbed. His students tried to comfort him. Then Rabbi Akiva said, "Suffering is good." And Rabbi Elazar said, "Akiva, you've comforted me." How can we understand this? Malbim offers three reasons for suffering. The first is *mazal*. Hashem gives everyone what they need in order to fulfill their purpose. Sometimes a person's *mazal* requires them to face difficulty, and it's not because they did

something wrong or that Hashem has no choice. It's something the person needs for his benefit. Even if it's harsh, it's what you need to grow into yourself and it's not something you would trade, although you might not necessarily enjoy it.

The next possibility is that people get stuck in their routines. We are forced out of that through suffering which spurs us to grow. The *Rambam* explains that a *nisayon* is taking the potential that was there all along and actualizing it, for which we will ultimately be rewarded.

The third possibility is punishment. Hashem will do something to force a person to be humbled. This could happen through emotional or physical suffering. King Menashe was very evil, but when he was suffering, he turned to Hashem and was redefined through *teshuvah*. Ignoring or denying pain is the opposite of seeing it as coming from Hashem. Hashem wants you to notice it and through *tefilah* or other means, let it transform you.

You can't interpret suffering, but you can be tranquil, not necessarily happy, in the face of it. There has to be a vision of there being more than you could see. Asking why is futile because you can't really know. The *Gra* says one of the greatest difficulties of exile is the absence of prophecy. Why then do *chazal* tell us to examine our deeds when experiencing suffering? There's a question other than why,

which is- What is this telling me and where could it take me? Every so often Hashem will lift the curtain and reveal why, but most of the time it's shrouded in mystery because the way we grow is by responding to uncertainty with faith.

According to the prophecies, the last most harsh exile will be *Galut Yishmael*. This war has been extraordinarily cruel and Israel intelligence has admitted they failed completely. We've seen that we can't rely on people. The same way before the great flood there was a mini flood, we too have had our mini flood, the virus. This is certainly moving us to a state of *bitachon* where we can say- I trust you, I'll be the person I need to be in the situation I have to face, following in the footsteps of Yonah who said, "*lvri onochi* -I am a Jew," that's my identity. This war is pushing us to have no identity other than a servant of Hashem and to admit that He is really in control.

We're in this together. This war has brought forth a level of unimaginable unification. Someone created a list which matches soldiers with people who daven for them. It was always done small, not its huge. There are people buying *tzizit* for *chayilim* who want them. We need to move towards unity, *tefilah* and faith. May all evil be eradicated and may we merit to see *kovod shamayim* revealed.

Journey's Judgment: Parshat Lech Lecha

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Torah records two different times Hashem tested Avraham Avinu by commanding him to go, *lech lecha*. The first is in this *parsha* where Hashem tells Avraham to go from his land and the second is when Hashem commands Avraham to offer up Yitzchak. The Sages debate which of the trials was more beloved.

According to the *Midrash*, the fact that Hashem told Avraham to go to *Har Moriah*, to the place from which Torah teaching and fear of God will emanate, implies that this second test is more beloved. Dying *al kiddush Hashem* is considered the highest test so how

could the *Medrash* question which was greater?

Rabbi Mordechai Druck points out that in the first command Hashem promises Avraham several blessings but doesn't tell him his destination. With the second journey, Hashem tells Avraham his destination, but specifies no reward. Because of these differences, Rabbi Levi raised the question which is more beloved. Yet the *Torah* testifies that Avraham's performance of the *mitzvah*, of leaving everything behind, had nothing to do with the promised reward, but was done because Hashem commanded him. Similarly, the *Torah*

testifies that even without a promised reward, Avraham would've followed Hashem.

My Sole Desire explains that physical desires usually overpower spiritual desires. However, when faced with challenges, the desire to connect to Hashem becomes stronger, and makes those challenges worthwhile. When a Jew undergoes trials and remains steadfast to Hashem, his spiritual beauty is revealed both to the world and to himself. Hashem presented Avraham with these challenges, forcing him to journey from place to place, symbolically releasing his beautiful fragrance wherever he went.

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Rabbi Tauber, quoting the Lubavitcher Rebbe, explains that what we become is a product of nature, nurture, and intellectual maturity. In this conceptualization, Hashem is telling Avraham to go from his natural, inborn desires, from his environment and society, and even from his own mind-set. For I, Hashem will lead you to your innermost essence, that spark of Godliness within you. Go away from your finite self to the self that is one with Me. By accepting Hashem's second command, to bring his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice, writes Rabbi Schwab, Avraham was in fact sacrificing his own intellect to Hashem's will; this was more beloved than the earlier journey.

There are two reasons for embarking on a

journey says the *Shemen Hatov*. One may either be traveling to leave a negative environment or toward a destination. As Rabbi Mordechai Ezrachi writes, in the first journey, Hashem was telling Avraham to travel away from the negativity of Charan. Therefore, Hashem does not tell him where to go. His focus is exclusively on leaving the past. But the second lech lecha is about the future. Therefore, Hashem tells him the destination, *Har Moriah*. For each of us, the *sur mei'ra* must precede the *asei tov*, but the ultimate goal is to do good.

The Netivot Shalom explains why Yaakov crossed his hand and put his weaker hand on Menashe. Menashe signifies gratitude for Hashem letting Yosef forget the troubles of his

past. In contrast, Ephraim was named for Hashem's making him fruitful in the land of his suffering. Leaving the negative is not as important as building the positive. The desire to do good will help us stay away from evil. Both Ephraim and Menashe will be great, but the positive will be greater.

Every person born is given struggles and the tools to overcome them. Perhaps our biggest challenge is to love ourselves enough to pray that Hashem help us meet our challenges successfully, for He loves even our small victories. Every trial we overcome builds our character, strengthens our *midot*, and fashions us more closely to the potential Hashem created us for.

Yechezkel-Perek 38 Gog and Magog- The Final War

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

This is what Hashem says to Gog- "And I shall unbridle you, and I shall put hooks into your jaws and bring you forth and all your army, horses and riders, all of them clothed in finery, a great assembly, with encompassing shield and buckler, all of them grasping swords." It will be Hashem doing battle against them. Who else will be involved? "Persia, Cush, and Put are with them; all of them with buckler and helmet. *Gomer* and all its wings, the house of *Togarmah*, the utmost parts of the north and all its wings, many peoples with you." Persia, Cush (Africa) and Put (Sudan, Libya), *Turgamah* and *Gomer* are the grandsons of Yefet. Interestingly no descendants of Yishmael are mentioned, however there's a lot of source material that they will allege themselves as well. The difference between Yishmael and the others is that the others will battle us because our existence renders them unchosen, while Yishmael will fight with us over land.

"Be prepared and make ready for yourself, you and all your assembly who are gathered about you, and you will be to them for a guardian. From many days you will be remembered; at the end of the years you will

come to a land [whose inhabitants] returned from the sword, gathered from many peoples, upon the mountains of Israel, which had been continually laid waste, but it was liberated from the nations, and they all dwelt securely." This sets the stage for when the Jews will come back to the land of Israel and are feeling secure.

"So said Hashem: It will come to pass ... And you will say, "I shall ascend upon a land of open cities; I shall come upon the tranquil..." The Jews will feel secure enough to dwell openly and the attack will come upon them suddenly.

"To take spoil and to plunder loot, to return your hand upon the resettled ruins..." They will come when we are at our peak, when we feel secure and prosperous. What's motivating them on the conscious level is material jealousy and on a spiritual level is the fact that they are unchosen.

Hashem says to Gog - "...And I shall bring you upon My land in order that the nations recognize Me when I am sanctified through you..." The same way Hashem's name was sanctified through Pharaoh and his army when

they were drowned in the sea, so too Gog will create a *kiddush Hashem* when we will see the vengeance upon him.

"And at My presence, the fishes of the sea and the birds of the heaven... and all the men who are upon the surface of the earth shall quake, and all the mountains shall be thrown down..." On that day they'll be a great earthquake, Hashem will enter the picture and shake the land. The invaders will be so frightened, they won't know what to do, how to fight nature. Besides for natural calamities, the various nations will blame each other for their defeat and they'll end up killing each other.

"And I will judge against him with pestilence and with blood, and rain bringing floods..." Utter destruction will take place on a level never seen before. And the result will be- "And I will reveal Myself in My greatness and in My holiness will be recognized in the eyes of many nations..." Hashem created the world so that it would be a place of *kedusha* and this was His plan from the beginning. In this last era the world will reach completion.