

GREAT FOR SHARING
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תשובה



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
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TURN PAIN INTO GAIN

It is common knowledge that Hashem has given us the great gift of *teshuvah*, a way for us to reverse all of the dreadful life choices we made up until this point. As well, it is well known that one should do *teshuvah* with sincere conviction that they will change their ways. To that end, there is a school of thought that suggests that one who is inspired to repent because of adversities that have befallen them is disingenuous and phony.

However, based on a few *pesukim* in *Parshas Nitzavim*, the Ran¹ demonstrates that this is not the case. Our *Parshah* states, "And it will be when all of these things have befallen you, the blessing and the curse... and you will return to Hashem with all your heart."² From the flow of these *pesukim* it appears that destructive and difficult events had befallen *Klal Yisrael*, which precipitated their return to Hashem. How does this make sense, asks the Ran, doesn't true *teshuvah* have to be sincere?

The Ran explains that there are two types of repentance when calamity strikes. In one instance, the individual seeks respite from their difficulties. They promise the world to Hashem, perhaps they even recognize where they've gone wrong in their life. But, when the difficulty passes, they return to their previous habits.

The other individual also seeks to ease their pain. However, once the pain has gone, they remain on the path of *teshuvah*. Why? Because they used their challenges as a catalyst for real *teshuvah* by recognizing the true purpose of our place in this world, and by reorienting their goals in life.³ While it may be true that they first started their journey to rid themselves of pain, they ended up returning to Hashem with their whole heart, as it says in the *passuk*.

Thus, you can have two individuals going through the same difficulty, have a seemingly similar response, but one ends up doing *teshuvah* with their whole heart, and the other... not so much. It all depends on how one approaches their suffering.

Nobody likes to be faced with disappointment or worse. But we can turn those moments into guidance for life, when we use them to grow closer to Hashem.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

A common response to difficulty is, "Why me?" How do we turn that into something positive, something that we can use to grow?

It can be very challenging to look at the pain in our life and declare that Hashem is doing this because we deserve it, and that these turbulent times will give us pardon from previous misdeeds. This thought process, even if true, is generally not something that people can keep up in the long run.

However, there is another way to look at troubling times, and this is true even if it is another person going through a tough time.

The Ran¹ explains that when a person is faced with the realization of how short-lived this world is, how our accomplishments can so easily be dissolved, it can remind a person of what truly lasts — a life focused on *mitzvos* and *avodas Hashem*.

When we encounter troubles, or see others in that boat, we can use that to remind ourselves of why we are here.

¹ *Drashos HaRan*, 10

¹ *Drashos HaRan* 9

² *Devarim* 30:1-2

³ *Drashos HaRan* 10

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Before his passing, the Baal Shem Tov told his students to be whole in their service of Hashem. And the primary way to do so is to learn Mussar every day, whether a lot or a little.

- *Likutei Yikkarim*, 198

THE HEAD AND THE HEART

Zev dropped the kids off at school, ate a hurried breakfast, and then drove to the hospital to see his wife and newborn baby. All of one day old, the Shapiro's were celebrating the addition of a new baby girl to their family.

Zev walked into his wife's room, and froze in his tracks. His dear wife was sitting on her bed, crying uncontrollably. "What happened?"

"I dropped the baby!" Through her tears, Miriam explained that she fell asleep while holding their new daughter, and the next thing she knew, the baby was on the floor, screaming.

Before he could respond, the nurses that were called arrived, calmed Mrs. Shapiro, checked their child, and made sure all was ok. But there was only so much they could tell at such a young age.

The next weeks were filled with endless bottles and sleepless nights. But that didn't bother Zev — not in comparison to the disturbing thought that there was something frightfully wrong with Channie, their daughter. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he noticed that, for example, she didn't grasp his finger when he placed it in her palm. There were other subtle clues, but he was no doctor, just a father.

Channie's one month check-up was coming up, and Zev knew he would discuss this with Dr. Green. But he was afraid of Dr. Green's response. So he did what every father would do — he *davened*. His *tefillos* were filled with tears, and he spent time thinking, focusing, "Where can I do better?"

He made a list of areas that needed improvement. He pared it down to something manageable, and then again down to something that was likely to succeed. And with this plan in his mind, and humility in his heart, he begged Hashem to give his daughter a healthy life.

Looking back, Zev confided, "It was a difficult time, I was truly afraid that something terrible had happened. I don't know if it was in my mind, or if something indeed happened and my daughter was healed. But either way, the lasting impact it had on me was real. I can attest that many of the changes I undertook are still with me today."

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**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- All *teshuvah* is accepted. When King Menashe, who did everything in his power to turn the Jewish people to evil, was suffering and turned to Hashem, his repentance was accepted.¹
- It's easy to feel bad about the past, the trick is making proper resolutions for the future.²

¹ *Devarim Rabbah* 2:20

² *Kochvei Ohr, Gidrei Teshuvah* 2 (Chapter 70)

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