

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVI: Beshalach (Ex. 13:17–17:16)

Essay 16. Accepting suffering with love

עוד שם פל ששהקב"ה חפץ בו מדכאו בייסורין. קשה דלמה מדכאו בייסורין. ועוד אם הוא זכות גדול לסבול הייסורין, אמאי קאמר ר' יוחנן בפרק קמא דברכות לא הם ולא שוכרין פקושת המפרשים. ואין לומר פתירו צם דשמא הנה בהם ביטול תורה ותפלה ומשום הכי ר' יוחנן קאמר לא הם ולא שוכרין, דאם פן יותר קשה למה שלח ייסורין פאלו שאינן של אהבה לצדיק גמור כר' יוחנן, ואם נאמר שיש לו איזה חטא קל, למה תלה הדבר ברצונו חביבין ייסורין ואוקמיה, והא מחוייב הנה בהם, ואם נאמר שאף שהנה בהם ביטול תורה אפילו הכי מיקרו ייסורין של אהבה כמאן דאמר הכי בפרק קמא דברכות, הדרא קושית המפרשים לדוכתא אמאי קאמר לא הם וכו'.

Also there, in Berachot 5a, “Rava said that Rav Sechora said that Rav Huna said: *Anyone in whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, delights, He oppresses him with suffering.*” A difficulty is why does He oppress him with suffering?

Berachot 5a also relates two incidents:

Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba, fell ill. [Rabbi Yochanan] entered to [visit] him, and said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? [Rabbi Chiyya] said to him: [I welcome] neither [this suffering] nor its reward [as one who welcomes this suffering with love is rewarded. Rabbi Yochanan] said to him: Give me your hand. [Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba] gave him his hand, and [Rabbi Yochanan] stood him up [and restored him to health].

Rabbi Yochanan fell ill. Rabbi Chanina entered to [visit] him, [and] said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? [Rabbi Yochanan] said to him: [I welcome] neither [this suffering] nor its reward. [Rabbi Chanina] said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand, and [Rabbi Chanina] stood him up [and restored him to health].

[The Gemara asks]: Why [did Rabbi Yochanan wait for Rabbi Chanina to restore him to health? If he was able to heal his student], let Rabbi Yochanan stand himself up.

- Berachot 5a

If [a man] has the great merit to experience the suffering, why does Rabbi Yochanan say in the first chapter of Berachot (5b), “[I welcome] neither this [suffering] nor its reward.”

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This is the difficulty of the commentators.¹ One shouldn't say according to their solution that perhaps there was because of [these sufferings] a diminishment of his Torah study and prayer, and because of this, Rabbi Yochanan said "neither this nor its reward."² For if so, it would be even more difficult to understand why He sent suffering like this, which are not [sufferings] of love, to a completely righteous man such as Rabbi Yochanan.

If it is said that he had some minor sin, why does the matter depend on his will, "is your suffering dear to you," and also why was it that he stood him up and healed him, for wasn't he obligated in [the sufferings]?

If he had no sin, but it is said that there was some diminishment of Torah because of [the sufferings], and even so, they are called sufferings of love, per [the minority opinion of one rabbi who holds that in] the first chapter of Berachot [5a], then the question of the commentators returns to its place: Why does it say "neither this [suffering] nor its reward."

וְנִשְׁלַח יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל הָאָדָם הוּא מְשַׁלְּחֵם עַל מְנַת שְׂרָצָה לְקַבְּלָם, דְּהֵכִי אֲמַרְיִנּוּ בְּפֶרֶק קָמָא דְּבִרְכוֹת יָכוֹל אֲפִלּוּ לֹא קִבְּלוּ עָלָיו מֵאַהֲבָה? תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר וְכוּ' מָה אֲשֶׁם לְדַעַת וְכוּ'. שְׁהָרִי הֵיִסוּרִין שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיקִים הֵם כְּדִי לְהוֹסִיף לָהֶם טוֹבָה וְשִׁלְוָה כְּדַאִתָּא בְּמִדְרָשׁ עַל פְּסוּק "וְהִאֲלֵהֶם נֶסֶה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם". וּמִן הָרְאוּי שְׂיִהְיֶה כֹּחַ וּרְשׁוּת לְצַדִּיקִים לֹמֵר לֹא הֵם וְלֹא שְׂכָרָם, כְּמוֹ הָאִשָּׁה שְׂאוּמְרַת "אֵינִי נִיזוֹנָת וְאֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה", הוֹאִיל שֶׁהַתְּקֵנָה נַעֲשִׂית לְתוֹעֲלָתָהּ.

It can be said that when the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends sufferings to a person, He sends them on condition that the person will want to receive them, for thus it is said in the first chapter of tractate Berachot:

Is it possible [that G-d delights in him even] if he does not accept [his suffering] with love? Therefore, the verse teaches: "If his soul would offer itself in guilt."³ Just as a guilt-offering is brought knowingly [as it is one of the sacrifices offered willingly, without coercion], so too [his] suffering [must be accepted] knowingly.

- Berachot 5a

The sufferings of the righteous are in order to add to their goodness and satisfaction, as is brought in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 55a on the verse, "G-d put Abraham to the test."⁴ It is fitting that there should be power and authority for the righteous to say, "[I welcome] neither this [suffering] nor its reward," like the woman who says to her husband, "I will not be sustained [by you and, in turn], I will not work,"⁵ since the decree was established for her benefit.

¹ For example, Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Chiddushei Agadot on Berachot 5b.

² One can imagine that a chronic headache would be an example of suffering that would negatively affect Torah learning and prayer. On the other hand, a problem with an ankle could be an example of suffering that might only cause pain while walking, without affecting one's Torah learning and prayer.

³ Isaiah 53:10.

⁴ Gen. 22:1.

⁵ Ketubot 58b.

והטעם שנגמשלו לאשם דוקא, משום דאמרין בפרק ו' דכריתות ר' אליעזר אומר מתנדב אדם אשם תלוי בכל יום, דסבירא ליה דאשם בא בנדב ונדבה. ואף על גב דפליגי רבנן עליה, אפילו הכי כבר ידענו כי בישיבה של מעלה פוסקים כדברי היתיד. ועוד הם דברי ר' אליעזר דיצאת בת קול ואמרה מה לכם אצל ר' אליעזר שהלכה כמותו בכל מקום, שבשמים פוסקים כמותו. ולכן שולחים על האדם לראות אם יתנדב לקבלם מאהבה, דהא בקרא כתיב "לרצנו", וכמעשה דבבא בן בוטי שהיה מתנדב אשם תלוי בכל יום, אף אם האדם הזה לא ירצה לקבלם מאהבה פרבנו דסבירא להו דאינו בא בנדב ונדבה הרשות בידו.

The reason why they were specifically likened to a guilt offering, is because it is said in the 6th chapter of tractate Keritut, “Rabbi Eliezer says: A person may volunteer [to bring] a provisional guilt offering every day and at any time that he chooses,”⁶ because he is of the opinion that “any offering can come in fulfillment of a vow or as a gift offering.”⁷ Even though the rabbis disagreed with him, even so we already know that in the Heavenly yeshiva, they may rule according to the words of an individual. Also, these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer, for whom a Divine Voice went out and said, “Why are you differing with Rabbi Eliezer, as the *halacha* is in accordance with [his opinion] in every place,”⁸ for in Heaven the rule like him?

Therefore, [the Heavenly court] sent [sufferings] upon a man to see if he would volunteer to accept them out of love. For thus in the verse it is written, “If your offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall make your offering a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, voluntarily in your behalf before the L-rd.”⁹ It is also like the incident of Bava ben Buti, who offered a conditional guilt offering every day.¹⁰

Even if this man wouldn't want to receive [the sufferings] out of love, as he follows the rabbis who were of the opinion that a provisional guilt offering cannot be brought every day, he is nonetheless permitted to refuse the sufferings.

ואם תאמר למה הוצרך לומר זה ליה ידיה ואוקמיה, ולוקים איהו לנפשיה, כדפריך התם, שהרי כשמגלה דעתו שאינו חפץ בהם סגי. ויש לומר שהיה נראה כאילו חס ושלום מבנה היסורין וקתיב "מוסר ה' בני אלהתמאס", מה שאין כן כשהבירו מתפלל ומגין עליו. וזהו אין חבוש מתיר עצמו וכו' דמשמע אפילו שהיה חבוש בטעות.

You might say: Why was it necessary to say, “Give me your hand” and “He stood him up,” i.e. healed him, and “Let him heal himself,” as is argued there in the Gemara, as when he revealed his opinion that he did not desire them, it should have been enough to avoid the suffering.

It can be said that would appear as if, G-d forbid, he despised the sufferings, and it is written, “Do not reject the discipline of the L-rd, my son.”¹¹ Therefore, he did not ask G-d to

⁶ Mishnah Keritut 6:3; Keritut 25a.

⁷ Bechorot 56a; Menachot 90b, 91b.

⁸ Bava Metziah 59b.

⁹ Lev. 1:3.

¹⁰ Mishnah Keritut 6:3; Keritut 25a.

¹¹ Prov. 3:11.

remove the sufferings when they first appeared. However, **this** concern of appearing to despite the sufferings **does not apply in the case when his friend was praying for him and protecting him.** In such a case, he is allowed to accept a friend's offer of help. **This is** an example of the saying, **"A prisoner cannot free himself,"**¹² **which means even if he was imprisoned by error.**

ומה שאמר לא הם ולא שׂכרם, הנינו משום דאמרין התם ולא עוד אלא שתלמודו מתקיים בידו שׂנאמר "וחפץ ה' בידו יצליח", דמי שמקבלן עליו מאהבה לא ישפח תלמודו, ומי שלא יקבלם מאהבה או שבאים עליו מחמת איזה סטא ועון, הם משפחים התלמוד, דאמרין בפירק ד' דנדרים "כל-משפכו הפכת בחליו" אמר ר' יוסף לומר שמשפח תלמודו, ולכן אמר לא יבאו הייסורין עליו ולא אהיה צריך לשׂכרו, שתלמודי לא ישתכח.

As far as what was said, "[I welcome] **neither this** [suffering] **nor its reward,**" it was because it is said there in Berachot 5a: "And if one accepts [that suffering with love], what is his reward? 'That he might see his children, lengthen his days.'¹³ **Moreover, His** [Torah] **study will endure, as it is stated: 'And that through him the L-rd's purpose might prosper.'**"¹⁴ **That is, one who receives [sufferings] upon himself with love won't forget his [Torah] study, but one who does not receive them with love, or if [the sufferings] come upon him because of some sin or iniquity, they will forget their learning.** This is as it is said in the 4th chapter of tractate Nedarim (41a), "You shall overturn his bed of suffering."¹⁵ **Rav Yosef said: [That is] to say that [the sick person] forgets his studies [as everything that is organized is overturned]."**

Therefore, [Rabbi Yochanan] said that he didn't want the sufferings to be brought upon him, and he wouldn't need their reward of not forgetting his Torah learning. For because of his brilliant mind and memory, he knew that **his learning wouldn't be forgotten.** If anything, the suffering might cause him to forget some Torah. This might be different for a different person who was more prone to forgetting some Torah. For such a person, the reward of suffering, not forgetting his Torah study, would be beneficial.

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¹² Berachot 5b.

¹³ Isaiah 53:10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ps. 41:4.