

Nourishment for the Neshama

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A Spiritual Perspective on Virginia Tech - Inner Peace

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Most of us have heard of the horrific murder that stole the children of 32 families, perpetrated by a rage-filled shooter who declared himself a victim and a martyr, having suffered at the hands of others. This tragedy shook us and, in the shaking, let us awaken to something.

As a mature adult, I have, as has everyone else, run up against situations where but for the way I think about it I could deem myself a “victim”. Basically not wanting to give control of my life over to anyone else, I came to the perspective that I am NEVER a victim, and that I always have choices. Even if the external apparent choices available are both unacceptable, I can still choose and in the choosing (not in the external events before us but rather a thought process of choosing that will be explained below), I have control and am not a victim. This manner of thinking I have found crucial to autonomy. Without it, it is easy to see how a person’s anger can fester. The key ingredient though to this thinking is good self-esteem. And this is the purpose of this article, to focus on what good self-esteem means and why it protects us from the suffering we incur.

In my opinion, both bullies and victims have low self-esteem. That is, both feel something is lacking and that they themselves have to “do” something about it. A person with a fragile ego who turns to bullying might demand things and say things in a nasty manner, to manipulate and control others. These tactics prey on weaker people, controlling them, and are designed to victimize those perceived as a threat. The one targeted suffers and damage is done to a person’s self-esteem if it is based primarily on external realities. Once the self-esteem is compromised, it becomes harder to fight the feelings of being a victim and the corresponding rage. What this leads to are acts that disgrace the victim further that the bullies use to strengthen their bullying. It is not a desirable position to be in, but the way people are built, a bully who wants to dominate and target another person truly places that targeted person at a point where in order to survive spiritually in a healthy manner, that targeted person needs a sense of wholeness and a sense of completion that is inviolate and healthy.

We have the ideal example of how to acquire this sense of wholeness from the Book of Psalms, written by King David. The simple answer is that at all times, a person must never feel that they are lacking ANYTHING, but rather, that everything that is happening, including suffering, is ultimately for the good of the person, coming directly from the Creator of the world. Now it is imperative that the person not feel that the Creator of the world is punishing them, because that will just increase the feelings of victimization. Rather, it is important to acquire a simple understanding that everyone on this earth is here because we are all souls in need of rectification. Souls that have completed their mission have no purpose on earth. They remain or are returned to Heaven for their eternal reward, which is to bask in the light of the Creator, feeling close to Him, attachment to Him, emotional bliss and contentment.

What we need at the moments when we suffer is nothing short of those emotions! Thus, when we are in a situation of suffering, when we turn to the Creator in prayer and ask for His protection, we bring those feelings into our lives and the very asking is the saving grace. In other words, it is crucial to remember at times of suffering that the cause of the suffering is not the apparent cause (those inflicting it) but rather the Creator Who has deemed this suffering “good” for the purpose of helping us rectify our souls. Reaching toward the Creator at these times IS the solution because we come to see that our peace of mind lies in knowing that we do not run the world, the Creator does, and that we are attached to Him whether or not we realize it, and that the reason we feel relief when we turn to Him is because we have been constructed by the Creator Who constructed us in this way so that we would find Him and realize He is running things and wants us to turn to Him for help. Just as the shadow of our hand can only be seen when we move our hand over something, so can the blessings of the Creator only be felt when we turn to him and concentrate on

feeling His goodness coming to us, which it is doing at every moment of our lives no matter what pain we may be undergoing. Empirically, our sense of completeness comes from knowing that the Creator is involved with us at every moment and that He loves us at every moment and is available at every moment to give us peace of mind. He wants us to submit to His Wisdom and His Will and then He places us on a rock above the fray..

When we are able to accomplish this, then we are able to ward off feelings of lack that the actions of others generate in us. The actions of others then become sources of pain, but we do not suffer, because we know that He is giving us an opportunity to build our relationship and trust in Him, so that He can protect and save us from despair and spiritual demise but even more so, so that He can give us the ultimate good for all eternity. By strengthening ourselves in seeking His presence in this world, we have the ability to enjoy His presence more for all eternity.. This is true even if the actions of others cause our death.

This was the case with Professor Livui Librescu whose connection to the Creator gave him the courage to save others and sacrifice his life knowing he was doing a good thing. Professor Livui Librescu had good self-esteem because he knew that his existence was to fulfill the will of the Creator and that by following the principle of saving a life that he was doing something that would benefit his eternal soul. He did not even question it. His self-esteem was based on having had a G-d-conscious life and a trust and a relationship with G-d that filled him. He is now receiving his reward.

In contrast, the shooter was not connected to the Creator in this positive way. His suffering he attributed to others, and his anger and resentment festered until these negative thoughts produced delusions and so much pain that he performed this hideous act.

The crucial point is that we should never feel victimized even if we suffer the role of victim, for the emotions of feeling victimized place us into the hands of a dark side of our nature, a side of our nature that feeds on feelings of lack, a dark side of our nature that wants to draw us down into a dangerous pit of despair, depression, negative thinking, delusions and possible insanity and into acts of sin. Every person has this part of their nature. We teach our children not to get into a car with a stranger offering candy bars because we do not want our children to go where the driver wants to take the child. This is comparable to the temptations to indulge feelings of self-pity for too long. We must realize that the "candy-bar" of evoking sympathy from others and attention could, if we don't rebound, take us somewhere that we do not want to go, a place much worse than the initial suffering that provoked it. What is more important to us than our peace of mind, our sanity? Nothing. Even our lives themselves are not more important to us, for would we rather not be of sound mind no matter what our existence becomes? What is our life without sound mind?

To maintain sound mind, two things must begin in our lives. We must believe that there is a Creator who is running the world and that everything He does is good, even if we don't like it. Secondly, we must see the feeling of lack as a candy bar to turn away from and to declare out loud that we are not lacking anything and to implore the Creator to take away the painful feelings and event, and we concentrate our minds in order to sense and remember that even at the present moment, we are alive and full of His blessings and goodness and presence. Once we shift to this concentration, He gives us a sense of peace of mind and closeness to Him, and we then feel trust in Him, for He has answered us through these feelings. Then we entreat Him on the matter at hand, begging forgiveness for whatever we did that caused Him to permit this particular event to inflict pain upon us, and we thank Him for having brought us back to Him.

The reason that this works is because this is how we have been designed. As soon as we do this, we feel relief. Why? Because the suffering inflicted was for that very purpose, to teach us that we can be autonomous only if we view ourselves as connected to the Creator.

We live in a free country where there is freedom of religion, thank goodness. But it is connection to the One True G-d that is our salvation for it is the only solid footing for our self-esteem. When our self-esteem and peace of mind are rooted in G-d-consciousness, pain is just pain, not suffering. Thus, our souls can perform pleasant acts and good deeds all the days of our lives, remaining healthy until we pass away. When each person is able to strengthen themselves in G-d-consciousness and to divert their thoughts away from lack and instead yearn for the closeness of the Creator, we will have made ourselves ready to receive the Moshiach.