

Nourishment for the Neshama

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The Creek is Rising - Sink or Swim?

During Hurricane Irene, an 82 year-old Holocaust survivor and grandmother drowned in a Catskills cottage after it was overtaken with floodwater when a nearby creek overflowed. Mrs. Stern-Gluck was unable to escape her cottage when it was evacuated at 8AM. Mrs. Stern-Gluck could be heard screaming for help throughout the day but at around 3:30 PM her cries stopped. Her body was found later Sunday after the flooding subsided. Isaac Abraham, a Brooklyn Hasidic community leader said that Stern-Gluck was born in Russia and survived the Holocaust. **"She survived Hitler, but she couldn't survive Irene,"** he said.

The image of this righteous woman losing her life in this way remains with me, and I begin to see an important lesson I'moshul.

The suffering that Hashem is sending is causing something within us, the flow of spiritual awareness, to rise. It is seeping into our lives, affecting us deeply. As I listen to teachers who I cherish, and speak to learning partners, I see those trying to respond to the rising inner flow of awareness coming to a new internal balance, a more expanded sense of self, a different center of gravity, one that accommodates moving from time and space to one of consciousness and connection. We may have different words to describe our experience, but when we speak, we comprehend each other as having found the same thing.

Essentially, what we are doing is stepping back from our physical selves into our consciousness enough to move out of a time factor so that we search within our situations for a glimpse of what Hashem is showing us and asking what is it that He wants us to respond - from a place of eternity in harmony with Torah and Hashem's attributes. The path there may vary. The bridge we build is up to us. But the creek is rising and we are all learning that we can't hold onto a branch of a tree, we have to move with it and instead search for Hashem and for consciousness, creating an expanded sense of who we are. Throughout our day we beseech Hashem to please show us our next step in serving Him.

When we do this, we are pulling back from a time bound, survival and ego-oriented sense of self and viewing ourselves in a far more fluid, unified way, unified with Hashem, unified with each other. Perhaps in effect we are choosing to step back under the canopy at Mt. Sinai, in unity, in purity, with love and fear of Hashem.

Clinging to a branch of a tree on dry land alone is no longer the preferred way to survive because the creek is going to continue to rise and that branch is not eternal. We need a new center of gravity. We must stick ourselves like glue to Hashem, realizing that our consciousness has absolutely no separate existence from His, and that yearning to be in harmony with His Will is a necessary effort to show Hashem that our emunah is strong and that we merit His redemption.