

Nourishment for the Neshama

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The only thing to fear is (misplaced) fear itself!

Tragedy after tragedy, the loss of gedolim, bochurim, murders, accidental death of children, the death of a pure inspiring Rebbetzin and the drowning of a pure woman, illness, fires, threat of nuclear destruction and more are overwhelming us.

As a person who tries to do the right thing, to hear that these holy pure souls are korbonos, taken because our tefillos and our service are lacking, has put me in touch with something cognitively challenging. The more I try to improve myself, the more I try to come closer to Hashem – does that put me in danger of being a korbon? Is being pure and giving and doing what is good and right in Gd's eyes a way to be selected for such an end? And if so, my resistance to it is showing to me that I am not so pure, for I have a fear of it and that fear is a rebellion of thought toward Hashem's omnipotence.

As Jews, we must know that we are sent here and must be willing to accept that we might be selected to die Al Kiddush Hashem.

I recognize this but had to tease something apart. If I accept and submit to Hashem's reality (as if it were me), am I creating spiritual forces that lead me there? It seems like a catch 22. I re-read the 13 principles of faith and found the area where my emunah needed correction. "I believe with complete faith that the Creator, Blessed is His name, rewards with good those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who violate His commandments." I put myself more in danger by not preparing mentally to do what is necessary to accept upon myself the ultimate sacrifice that Hashem could demand of us.

The emotional attachment that I have to fearing the suffering that Hashem could send to us should we in fact succeed in becoming purified in our hearts (as Yitzchak Aveinu demonstrated at the Akeida) comes in contrast with the above principle of faith. What am I to do?

Rabbi Akiva loved Hashem so much that his entire life, he prepared himself such that should Hashem take him as a korbon, that Rabbi Akiva would be able to give up his life for love of Hashem. Immediately the question came to my mind – did Rabbi Akiva by choosing such a way to improve himself create the path that led him to it? After all, is it not true that Hashem leads us in the path that we choose to go?

If Hashem decreed that Rabbi Akiva should pass away, then Rabbi Akiva was prepared for every eventuality, to give up his very life with love of Hashem. But even if Rabbi Akiva did create the spiritual beings that led him to die in this manner, it was ultimately good, for it gave Rabbi Akiva the fulfillment of his life's work and it stands as an example for us. As does the Akeida.

There is a second component to the deaths of the pure Rebbeim, children and more. And that is the examples of their survivors in showing the love and submission to Hashem's will. They give us chizuk. But more, they demonstrate to us a response, something that each of us can do. Their emotions are attached to Hashem. Their consciousness is in harmony with Hashem's consciousness.

We are afraid of suffering, either for our very lives for the suffering of losing anyone we love. We are threatened with nuclear destruction. We have seen terrible acts of terror, brutality, and the infliction of physical pain and death at the hands of our enemies. We despise the suffering.

But the fear of the suffering -THAT is what corrupts our primal will.

How could anyone argue with the reality that we don't choose to suffer. We want comfort! We are in bodies. How does a dictator take over? He kills masses of people and rules with an iron fist. Why does this work? Because the fear of Gd that is natural in our hearts becomes corrupted and because we draw closer to the fear of suffering, we begin to serve the dictator diverting our consciousness from Hashem to just staying alive and safe.

And this is the message that I am taking from all of these terrible losses.

For me, our relationship with suffering is one of fear of it. We are emotionally attached to NOT suffering and to hating suffering. I think sometimes that if I don't submit to Hashem on this, that if I continue to protest and cry out against the pain and the terrorism and the deaths and the illnesses, that He will listen and forgive us and redeem us. Out of mercy, out of promise to Rachel lmeinu that we would return, may it be today.

But today I had an insight in a different way. Instead, I think that to stop the suffering, we have to reconnect our fear from fear of suffering back to fear of Hashem. What? Not be afraid of suffering? The promise of the thirteen principles of faith comes to our rescue. Hashem rewards with good those who observe His commandments and punishes those who violate His commandments.

We can and should continue to pray and beg for no suffering, but the emotional charge of fear connected to it must be moved to love and fear of Hashem. The only thing we truly have free choice in is whether we fear Hashem or something else. While no one, certainly not me, would ever choose to suffer, that is not what is being demanded of us. What we CAN do is use our free will to remove our emotions from fear of suffering and give that to the truth of reality, not knowing for sure what Hashem will do. But if we withhold it, we could be putting ourselves more into harms way than if we don't, for by fearing only Hashem, and doing it from love, we know with complete faith that only good will happen.

The process for doing this is what I have been sharing on this blog this month\ . Briefly, please try it and give feedback in comments if it works for you as it does for me in bringing a sense of closeness in consciousness with Hashem and a sense of peace and joy that can only be described as a moment of devekus and elevated experience.

"I see that I fear suffering and I recognize that it is an aveira of pasha. I regret it and did not realize it was operating within me . Please help me draw down the will power to rise above fear of suffering." YEARN for the will power to really match the depths of the fear in the heart. Then declare "I direct this emotion from fear of suffering to love and fear of Hashem, for I choose to use free will to love and fear Hashem."

If we can remove from our hearts the fear of suffering, and give the emotion instead in passionate attachment to love and fear of Hashem, then perhaps we will have made great strides in a valuable life saving response to the korbonos that have taken place and the emunah-dik examples of their survivors, may their memory be a blessing and the examples of faith of their survivors be an inspiration for us, to draw our consciousness closer to Hashem, to sacrifice our rebellious thoughts, and bring us under the canopy of Hashem, reaching upward to find Him within our hearts and to cling to Him like iron to a magnet.

Let us do this voluntarily, without giving any further need for Hashem to again show us how much our investment of emotion in being afraid of suffering at the hands of the sticks He sends – the terrorists, murderers and the like– competes with our sincere and ideally exclusive fear of Hashem alone. Rather, let us passionately, in harmony with Hashem's consciousness, invest our emotion in love and fear of Hashem. Why love and fear? That is the only area that we have free willed choice, - shall we exclusively fear Hashem or shall we fear Hashem and fear suffering. We can continue to pray for nbo suffering, but our fear – that is toward Hashem alone. And may Hashem be pleased with our service as a result and thereby NOT take any more pure souls from our midst and find us redeemable.

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