

CHEVRAH TORAH...5777

With HEART in MIND

MUSSAR Teaching to Transform the Text & Our Lives

B'Shallach—Exodus 15:22-27

KABBALAT HaYISSURIN—Accepting Suffering

...Key KOSHI...

WHAT do the waters of Marah teach us about life's suffering?

HOW does the 'suffering' we face help us hold fast to Torah/find God?



P'SHAT...Studying Torah—Encountering The Word—The Will—The ONE

The truly wise individual is not one who has achieved wisdom but a *talmid chacham*—a wise student...one who is constantly learning—including by observing and reflecting on what can be learned from other people.

<p>15:22] Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23] They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Mara because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. 24] And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” 25] So he cried out to the Eternal, and the Eternal showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There [God] made for them a fixed rule; there they were put to the test. 26] [God] said, “If you will heed the Eternal your God diligently, doing what is upright in God’s sight, giving ear to God’s commandments and keeping all God’s laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Eternal am your healer.” 27] And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there beside the water.</p>	<p>ס 22 וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵיַם סוּף וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל־מִדְבַּר־שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבָּר וְלֹא־מָצְאוּ מַיִם : 23 וַיָּבֹאוּ מַרְתָּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִמָּרָה כִּי מְרִים הָיָה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מַרָּה : 24 וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה־נַּשְׁתָּה : 25 וַיִּצְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּרְהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שֵׁם שָׁם לוֹ חֵק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשֵׁם נִסְהוּ : 26 וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִישַׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ תַעֲשֶׂה וְהִאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל־חֻקָּיו כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא־אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה רֹפְאֶךָ : ס [חמישי] 27 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילֶמָּה וְשֵׁם שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה עֵינֹת מַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים וַיַּחֲנוּ־שָׁם עַל־הַמַּיִם :</p>
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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.
 Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.
 Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

D'RASH...*Helping the Heart feel what the Mind understands ...*

Alan MORINIS...

The Hebrew word for suffering is *yissurim*, which shares a linguistic root with the word *Mussar*, which means “to instruct.” Suffering contains lessons, but it is up to us to probe to discover what our suffering can teach us.

The starting point is to be present and accepting of the fact that we are suffering, without running away in fear or anesthetizing ourselves or seeking comforts that we hope will mask the anguish. Our model here is the bitter herb, *MaRoR*, that figures in the Passover Seder meal. The horseradish or other sharp food we eat reminds us of the embittered lives we led when we were slaves in Egypt. Bolting down the bitter herb does not fulfill the commandment to eat *Maror*... One must actually taste the bitterness. Similarly, we won't be able to grasp the lesson contained in our own suffering without first absorbing the bitterness that is its herald...

We have to make a distinction between suffering and pain, which are not the same thing. Pain is a direct reaction to an invasive stimulus and reflects simple cause and effect. Suffering, on the other hand, arises from interpretation and expectation. Pricking your finger with a needle and getting a health-inducing injection might score identically on a pain scale. But the suffering attached to the two may differ widely. Suffering invokes our sense of self, ego, relationship to God, and everything else that goes into creating our relationship to the world in all its dimensions. “Ouch!” reflects pain. “Why me?” is about suffering.

We are wise to avoid unnecessary pain...but to avoid or deny or repress our suffering can stunt our growth...Accepting the disturbing and dislocating experience...contemplating and perhaps revising your notions of who you are, how much control you have over your life, how you relate to God's Will, and—most important of all—how you live.

When we accept that such givens are part of the design of the world—even if we cannot make sense of them, and even as we do our best to alleviate them, we have connected ourselves to truth and reality...Not only dramatic life-and-death circumstances but even small and mundane disappointments can cause us to suffer...This is not a call to fatalism, as you may yet take vigorous action...To peel back to the core of your feelings and accept your reality, this is your starting point in the now... ..Acknowledging the truth of the world as it is forms a solid foundation for the transformation that is the acquisition of Torah. [With Heart in Mind, pgs 135-139]

Rabbi NORMAN COHEN ...

“*He cast it into the waters and the bitter waters became sweet.*” And the next verse, “And there He gave them a statute and ordinance.” It was the words of Torah which could transform the bitter waters of *Marah* into life-sustaining sweet waters which would enable them to survive the trek through the desert...God had symbolically revealed to Moses and to the people the redemptive vehicle, the Torah—the tree—cast into the bitterness before them and it was changed. It was necessary for Moses, the individual human being, to use this divine gift and to internalize it, in order to transform the bitter water of life. As R' Gunther PLAUT has noted, the biblical text limits God's participation to showing Moses a way to sweeten the water. The process itself was not miraculous; it simply demanded the involvement of the Israelite with Torah. Survival in the desert was dependent upon the willingness to imbibe the sweet waters of Torah...By so doing, Israel could navigate through the inevitable tribulations through sea of sand and reach the mountain of the Lord.

[CCAR Journal, Summer '86]

SOD...*Helping the soul-light shine...*

Practice focuses on recalibrating the soul-traits that are obstructing your soul's light from shining into your l

Rabbi HAROLD SCHULWEIS...

[Founder of the *Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers*, transformational Congregational Rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom Temple in Encino, Calif. For 4 decades, Rabbi Schulweis was the most prolific theological voice of his movement, perhaps the Jewish world, having framed Predicate Theology, and from it evolved new-age understandings of how prayer works, how we approach the world, how we understand evil & morality, and God.]

...The rabbinic tendency to take what appears evil and see it as disguised good may quiet the rages of a Job; but it suggests equally a suspension of all human judgment. Involuntarily, such a theodicy is akin to the false prophecy against which Isaiah inveighed: “Woe unto them who say of evil, it is good, and of good, it is evil; that change darkness into light and light into darkness; that change bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).

...Nurtured in a tradition which provided them experience in making moral judgments and decisions, some Rabbis refused to see in suffering and death anything but affliction, or to transform righteousness from an intrinsic good into sin. They refused to deny that evil can occur without sin.

“Are your sufferings welcome to you?” ask some Rabbis. “Neither they (the sufferings) nor their reward,” respond their colleagues. The Talmud reveals how the very Rabbis who earlier had preached the doctrine of divine chastisements of love (*y’surim shel ahavah*) to comfort sufferers were unable to accept it when they themselves were stricken. God does not cause those He loves to suffer, nor does He test the loyalty of the believers with trials of pain. Such doctrines, he argues, are unscriptural, ignorant and absurd.

...In summary, rabbinic theodicy, which is predicated upon the divine, moral causation of all events, in which man is also a free moral agent, carries with it the warmth and intimacy of a personal God who is the author of justice in the world. But it also bears the sign of strain. The moral dialogue of Biblical Judaism can emerge as a clash of forces.

...Why does theology bog down when confronted by the challenge to explain evil?... This sort of question is limitless...Only a universe peopled with motivations, deliberate actions and purposes is regarded adequate to account for important personal affairs. Hence, we speak of an “act of God” or the “will of God.”

...It is self-evident that traditional theodicy limits its scope to one kind of theological view: God is a Person who punishes and rewards with sickness and death, with health and long life. Unless we are willing to challenge that underlying assumption, the gnawing problem of evil and suffering in God’s world remains insoluble.

...A new approach to the relationship between God and nature sees the latter as belonging to the realm of *chol* or the *non-holy*. Nature itself is morally neutral, neither hostile nor friendly to the realm of values. “*The world pursues its natural course...*” (Avodah Zarah 54b).

In separating God from nature, we do not reduce divinity but clarify its essential meaning. Physical evil requires no justification. This does not mean that the tragedies wrought by nature are not real. But unfortunate physical accidents which befall man ought not to be converted into events derived from cosmic purpose. If we trace our tragedies to hidden divine causes, we cast a shadow of disillusionment upon an omnipresent personal God who has betrayed us. Such resentment and frustration are needless; because God conceived as Person fails us, we need not repudiate divinity.

A more positive approach is to see that man and the universe are incomplete. Nature is not law to be followed; it is power to be controlled and organized for moral ends. Endowed with freedom of will man encounters divinity in his effort to overcome sickness, ignorance and greed. In his transactions with his environment, he discovers the attributes of divinity which are essential to his health and moral maturity—love, justice, knowledge and compassion.

These predicates of divinity are real and effective. In what soil can these values be rooted so that their significance is preserved? What will endow these values with power?....

...We call for a different conception of God.

We experience divinity not as a Person or “*He who*” but as “*That which*.” That which cures the sick, loosens the bonds of the fettered, upholds the fallen, supports the poor, we identify as Godly. These revelations are not arbitrary, neither being cast earthward from heaven nor capriciously invented. They are discovered, tested and affirmed in this world through our individual and collective interactions with nature, human and non-human. Activities are Godly and real without being objects, things or persons.

Evil and good are encountered in the world, not as the effects of contending supernatural powers, but as distinguishable events which frustrate or contribute to our moral maturity.

The moral dualism in the world we experience is the tension between *what is* and *what ought to be*—between *chol* (neutral and uncommitted energy) and *kadosh* (energy dedicated to ideal ends)...**Godliness** is revealed to us in terms of values we can understand as human beings. Godliness is that feature of the world which penetrates the dumbness of nature and makes it speak the language of moral intent.

Moral evil and moral good are not super-naturalized. They are both in the same world, where men may be blameworthy or praiseworthy, but divinity is blameless. For divinity is neither person nor omnipotent will. Divinity, by our meaning designates those energies and activities which sustain and elevate our lives, which enable us to transcend human suffering. Such an understanding of divinity requires no justification in the presence of evil.

[from Great Jewish Ideas, B'nai Brith Adult Education, 1964]



...PRACTICE...

Looking out and looking in:

...REFLECT on the nature of the life you are living...
WHAT is the source of greatest suffering in your life?
HOW do you approach it?
HOW do you endure it...HOW, transcend it?

ASK someone you know/love about the suffering in his/her life...
SHARE tsoris together...
AFFIRM one another's suffering...
TALK and LISTEN

CONSIDER:

HOW does that suffering help you hold fast to life-values [Torah]
& hold on to divinity? [God]