



Surviving Pressures of Life

PARSHAS BALAK

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Surviving Life & Its Pressures

The Egyptian Exile

In the Egyptian bondage, our people were afflicted with terrible suffering – it is written, “And they embittered their lives with difficult labor.”

Think about what any Jew must have felt like then. They knew of the prophecy made to Avraham Avinu that the Egyptian exile would last for 420 years. How could they take it any longer? How could anyone ever hope to get out of Egypt? Even if anyone would have ran away from Egypt, they wouldn't be able to escape, because the Egyptians used their magic to hold back anyone from escaping. What did any Jew think back then – how could he cope with such suffering, knowing that it's going to take 420 years to be redeemed??

Imagine we are one of the Jews enslaved in Egypt. What would we do? How would we cope? Would we just give up and say, “Enough of this -- I'm not working”?

When the people complained to Moshe of the suffering, Moshe entreated to Hashem, and Hashem told him to tell them, “Just like I was with the forefathers, so will I be with you by the other hard times. This pain is only temporary.”

Hashem was saying, It's true – it really is a very hard time that they are going through, but do not worry – it is only temporary, and I am with you, so don't worry. How are we to understand Hashem's response – “The pain is only temporary”?! How does this help them survive a 420-year exile?

Our Problems

This lesson shows us how we can deal with our own difficulties.

Is there anyone who hasn't gone through difficult times? There is no such person. Every single one of us has gone through hardship. Some of us came out of much of our past hardships, and some of us are still going through hardships. But what we all have in common is that we are still going through something hard, and we haven't fully come out of our difficulties. We are all still going through some difficulty.

When a person has a big problem, he convinces himself that it's the worst problem he ever had. He compares his new problem to his previous problems, and realizes that it's not the same kind of problem he is used to – it's a whole new problem he has never faced, and it doesn't seem to have a solution.

What happens? Eventually, the problem goes away, and he forgets about it. Then a new problem comes, and again the person thinks that this is a problem that has no solution. The cycle repeats itself...

Remember How You Survived Your Past Problems

People don't remember that their previous problems, which didn't seem to have a solution, eventually went away.

Really, we can calm ourselves by remembering that just like our previous problem didn't seem to have a solution, yet somehow it went away, so is there is a solution to our current problem, although we don't see how. We can realize that it is only our physical eyes that doesn't see a solution, but that doesn't mean there isn't a solution.

The Ramban says, *Maaseh Avos Siman Labonim* – “What happened to our forefathers is a sign for their children.” Just like Hashem was with Avraham Avinu when he went down to Egypt and he saved him from his problem – this is when Pharoah abducted Sarah, and Avraham Avinu had no solution to his predicament – so do we now always have a solution to our problems, even though it seems like there isn't.

Although we ourselves don't know how to solve our problems, Hashem can take us out of it – just like He helped Avraham when he didn't have a solution, and just like He redeemed our people from exile when there seemed to be no way out.

This is what Hashem told Moshe to tell the people – “The pain is only temporary – Just like I took Avraham out of Egypt, so am I with you. Just there was no natural solution for Avraham, yet I was with him and took him out of his problem, so will I take you out of your problem even though there is no natural solution.”

The Lesson Of Yetzias Mitzrayim

Every day we leave Egypt. This is part of what we say everyday in *Kerias Shema* – we remember how we were taken out of Egypt. We have many mitzvos as well where we remember how we were taken out of Egypt. On Shabbos and the Yomim Tovim, we say, “*zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim*” – a “remembrance” to our redemption from Egypt. Why must we remember the redemption? Is it merely to have a memorial day to remember the miracles of the past?

Many reasons are given for this, but for our discussion, it is relevant to say that the reason why we remember the redemption from Egypt so much is because it serves as the foundation for all our troubles. It shows that there is a way out from all our troubles – just like Hashem was with us then, so is He with us now.

Just like there was a public redemption, so is there a private redemption that can take place in each person’s soul. When a person has a problem and he doesn’t know the solution, yet he has *emunah peshutah* (simple faith) in Hashem, he can experience his own personal redemption.

Experiences In Life Can Increase Your Emunah

The Gemara in Kiddushin says that there is an obligation to honor the elderly – even a non-Jew. Why? The Gemara says because he went through a lot of experiences in his life, and this makes him deserving of respect. The depth of this is that even a non-Jew has reached a deeper degree of Emunah in his life from all the experiences he has gone through in his many years; his Emunah has become stronger because of his difficulties he came out of, and this makes even a non-Jew worthy of honor.

“This Is The Worst Problem I Ever Had”

Most people, whenever they have a problem, think that “this is the worst problem they ever had in their life.” A person, let’s say, is in debt, or he is sick, or he needs a *shidduch* – and he always feels like *this* is just the worst.

Let’s say a person can’t find a *shidduch*; he thinks that this is the worst problem he ever had in his life. What happens? He eventually finds his *shidduch* and gets married, and then he has children. Life goes on, and then he encounters all sorts of problems. Now, he thinks, *this* is the worst problem I ever had....

People forget that they one time came out of their previous, “never-ending” problems, and they go through life thinking that every new problem is the worst problem ever. They forget that they ever came out of their previous problem, which they also thought one day was the “worst” problem ever.

The person who strengthened himself from his past problem

One time I knew someone who became very ill; the surgery he needed to have could have killed him. I knew him throughout the entire situation, and he was calm throughout his entire ordeal. He had to spend Pesach one time in the hospital, and I asked him how he is. He told me, “*Baruch Hashem* I can feel like I am a *ben chorin* (a freed person) on Pesach.” This person, who persevered through his Emunah, was able to feel like a *ben chorin* in a hospital; the strength he showed was amazing. I asked him, “Is this the first ordeal you have gone through in your life?”

He told me, “When I was a *bachur*, I was having a hard time finding a *shidduch*. I got older and older, I was very disappointed to see all my friends getting married, while I remained alone without a *shidduch*. I went back and back to my Mashgiach to discuss my problem, and the Mashgiach told me, “Keep waiting a little longer...it must be that the right one didn’t come yet.” I waited and waited, and it seemed to me like the worst problem of life. Then I realized – Why am I relying on my Mashgiach for support? My Emunah is in my Mashgiach?!

“I realized that although I was having a difficulty, I need to realize that Hashem can take me out of my situation. *Baruch Hashem*, after this I found my *shidduch*. And just like I remember how Hashem took me out of my situation, which seemed to have no solution, so will Hashem take me out of my current difficulty.”

Because this person remembered how Hashem took him out of his seemingly impossible situation, he was able to face a scary ordeal and even spend Pesach happily in the hospital.

It is only when a person gives up hope that he feels broken from his situation and he will not be able to cope. But when a person is hopeful that he will come out of his situation, he will be able to survive his situation.

Surviving This Long Galus

The *galus* that we are in is very long. Do we have any hope to be redeemed from it? Is there anyone who really believes it will end? We say in *Ani Maamim*, “And although

Moshiach tarries, I still wait for him.” Anyone who truly feels this way will not give up. Just like there will be a public redemption, so is there a private redemption that can take place in every person’s soul. We can all have hope to our difficulties -- if we remember the times that we came out of our previous difficulties.

When our people left Egypt, where did they go? They went into a desert for forty years, and they had 42 encampments when they were there. Each of us as well goes through “42 encampments” in our lives. How do we deal with our personal “42 encampments”?

The holy *sefarim* say that a person should deal with this by feeling like he is a “baby in his mother’s lap.” Just like a child who goes from place to place doesn’t feel like he is going from place to place, because all he feels is his mother’s arms – so can a person go from difficulty to difficulty yet not feel like he is being moved around, because he can feel himself in Hashem’s embrace.

All of us go through a lot of “movements”. The question is, do we have something to hold us up when we are being thrown around? That is the question.

Developing A Stability For Life

We need to uncover from within ourselves a source of stability to keep us strong when we get moved around from situation to situation. Just like a house that is built strong can withstand an earthquake, so do we need to fortify ourselves to withstand life’s pressures.

All of us go through emotional “earthquakes”. How can we survive life? There is a place in our soul which gives us stability to withstand hardship. This is when we are connected to our soul.

Many people are always moving from place to place; they never settle down to live in one place for a long time. They are constantly going through changes – and they lack stability in their life. They don’t know how to feel settled.

If a person never tries to change, he is kind of dead. There are people who never move at all and never seek to change. I knew a person who was born on a certain street, got married to a girl who lived on his street, and bought a house on the same street – and he is still living in the same house today. That is one kind of problem, when a person doesn’t move at all.

But the opposite problem of this is when a person is always seeking to change, because he has no stability in his life. We need to change sometimes and seek changes, but we also need to balance ourselves with a kind of stability.

Every person wants his life to work out – but such a life is not a life. Really, we need to have an inner stability in ourselves. This will help us deal with situations we have never been in before. We gain this stability when we are truly connected to Hashem and learning Torah.

Stability Involves Both Our Mind And Heart

Some people only seek closeness to Hashem, but they are missing Torah in their life. Others only seek Torah, and Hashem isn't in their life. But we need to have both in order to feel stable.

The soul of a person wants to feel free; it wants to overcome its limits and be close to Hashem. But this has to be balanced with stability.

There are people who walk the streets at night and scream, “*Shema Yisrael!*” They mean it from the depths of their heart – but is this a good thing or not? (If there would be a group of people together doing this, that would at least open up their hearts a little.)

Such behavior lacks stability; such behavior shows that a person is very emotional, but that's it. It is not enough to be a very feeling person – this doesn't build a person. Such people, who are very feeling, would become *Gedolim* if their minds would match their emotions. But because they don't have a balance between their mind and their emotions, they aren't stable, although their feelings come from the depths of their heart.

In order to have stability for life, we need our mind and our heart to be equal. If we only have a very feeling heart but we are from our minds, this is a lack of stability.

Yearning For Torah Isn't Enough

I one time asked someone, “How much Torah do you learn?”

He answered me, “I learn a lot – when I sit down at the Shabbos table on Friday night, I look at all the sefarim on my shelf and feel that I wish I could know all of them.”

He has a lot of yearnings for Torah, but he doesn't learn Torah! He is full of feelings, but it isn't balanced with his mind. He lacks stability. It is only when a person learns Torah – and constantly learns it in-depth – can a person's thoughts be immersed in Torah and have stability. When a person is immersed in Torah, it is only then that his heart is stabilized, and he will be able to find *chizuk* in any situation. Without this stability, the "Torah remains in a corner" – and he always feel that his *chavrusa* doesn't always work out...

Major Questions In Life Come From A Lack Of Stability

In fact, all major questions that people have about life comes from a lack of stability: "Where will I live?", "When should I get married?", "How will I earn a living?", etc.

Marital problems are also because there is no stability in a person. Many times a person gets into problems in his marriage because he thought that it would be as he planned. Such an attitude lacks a stability. If he would only be have more stability, he would be able to deal with the unexpected scenarios of marriage.

Without stability, a person's life is totally superficial. I know someone who converted to Judaism and became Chassidic. He keeps changing his Chasidic garb, because he has no stability in his life. His whole life is superficial, like which type of clothes should he wear.

No one knows what will happen to him in his life. But a person can survive whatever life will bring if he is always connected to his source of stability.

A good example of stability is *Daf Yomi*. Every day, no matter what, people learn the same page of Gemara. This epitomizes stability.

Depending On Your Surroundings Is A Lack Of Stability

Many people depend on their friends or surroundings for *chizuk*. What happens when, later in life, he isn't around his friends anymore, or he is in a different setting that he felt dependent on? If he is connected to his inner world, he will have the strength to go on.

Stability In Engagement And Marriage

One of the big problems in a person's life is *shidduchim*. Eventually, a person who went through this problem gets married, and his life changes and now he has new problems. How does he deal with his marriage problems? It depends. If he remembers that when he got married, he had no idea that this would be the person he would marry – he will discover that he was only able to come to the decision of getting married, because he had stability. He had stability because he was connected to Hashem when he made his decision; this is what gives a person the strength to decide he will marry this girl whom he doesn't know.

But if a person thought that his decision to marry this girl only depends on his decision alone, such a person wasn't connected to Hashem when he made his decision. Such a person, when he encounters marital difficulties, will want to get divorced, because it's all up to him anyway...he doesn't have any stability.

Don't Change Just Because Other People Change

No one knows what life will bring. A person shouldn't either depend on how he sees how others changed in their life. Just because you saw others change should be a reason for you to change? Why should your life depend on how other people live their life?

When a person looks back at his whole life, he will realize that it was only Hashem who took him out of his situation. When he remembers this, he will be able to go through any situation.

This Is Life Itself

The words here are not nice ideas – it is the meaning of how Torah is our very life. I also went through many hardships in my life, and the only thing that kept me going was how I remembered that it was Hashem who took me out of my previous struggles, together with my Emunah and that He can take me out of my new problems.

The more a person goes through life, he is able to look back at his previous struggles and see how it was Hashem who helped him out of them.

How To Get Menuchas Hanefesh

One of the *Shabbos Zemiros* is, “*Yonah Motzoh bo manoach*” – “The dove could not find any rest.” It is very painful for people when they don’t have any *menuchas hanefesh*, when they feel that they have no rest from their problems. Really, there is no *menuchas hanefesh* to be found on the physical world. But on the other hand, there is no situation in which we cannot find how to have *menuchas hanefesh*. We can always find *menuchas hanefesh*, wherever we may be. How? Because *menuchas hanefesh* is something we can uncover from our inner world, no matter where.

Is there anyone who doesn’t want *menuchas hanefesh* and who doesn’t want to enjoy himself on this world? This is what we do our whole life – looking for peace of mind, as well as enjoyment. But where can we find true peace of mind, and true enjoyment? In our very own soul. The inner kind of peace of mind we want to have isn’t so far from us, but it is not that close either. It is deep within ourselves.

The Gemara (Berachos 3a) says, “Woe to the children who are exiled from their Father’s table.” The depth of this matter is that people are always moving around, so they don’t have any rest.

The inner kind of life we need to have is found in the depths of our soul. Two people can do the same thing, yet only one of them will truly gain from it – the one who feels the inner world contained in something.

Only when we are connected to our inner world can we utilize our inner world. When a person isn’t connected to his *pnimiyus* – his inner world – he isn’t able to utilize it, because he is only connected to superficiality. For example, many times a person wants to express his love to someone, but he doesn’t succeed in conveying his full love to the other person. Even if he tells the person “I love you”, he still feels that he has not properly expressed his love enough. Why? It is because he isn’t connected to his own inner world, so he can’t express it. If he would be more connected to his inner world, he would be able to reveal it.

How A Person Can Connect To His Inner World

In order to connect to our inner world, we need to know what our strongest point is and connect to it. This doesn’t mean that a person should read *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* and learn *Shaar HaSimcha*, and attempt to connect to his *simcha*; this does not necessarily work, because if *simcha* (happiness) isn’t his strongest point, he won’t be able to connect to it. For some people, *simcha* is indeed their strongest point, and they can connect to their *simcha*.

But if it isn't a person's strongest point, this is not how he will become connected to his *pnimiyus*.

How can you know what your strongest point is? See which points in your life are already opened to you. In order to be connected to our *pnimiyus*, we need to totally be connected to *pnimiyus*; if we try to connect to something that hasn't yet been opened in our own lives, we are only connected to the external layer of the *pnimiyus*, which isn't yet *pnimiyus*.

Once a person realizes what his strongest point is, how does he actually connect to it? The way to do this is to be connected to it totally, with all his soul. This is when a person is clear – both in his mind and in his heart – of what he is doing as he does something. It is when a person does something that is his strongest point with a balance between his mind and his heart – that his heart and mind are on the same page as he does something.

There is no one who does not have a strong point already opened to him in his life. All of us have some strong point that is already opened in our life, but we need to connect to it, and then open it up even more.

I hope that the words here are not just a nice “*derasha*” to you; I don't want you to just say about this that you heard a nice speech from someone in Eretz Yisrael who came to speak here. I hope that these words not only help each person reach his true potential, but that they should actually help you deal with life: always be connected to Torah and mitzvos, and make sure you have a stability in your life – by realizing who helped you get to where you are today: Hashem.

With this, you will find the strength to deal with any problem in your life. We should be *zoche* to properly build our souls.