



## EXAMPLES OF GROWING FROM SUFFERING

Here are simple examples. Many people go through family illness, something that can take weeks or months or even years to go through. Many people have said that until their child became ill, or the like, they never knew what it was to have bitachon in Hashem. The difficulty opened their eyes because their heart became opened. If everything in their life would have just continued the way it was, with no problems, and through their life would have been easier, they would never grow and they would just their end life on a low spiritual level, everything would have gone on as usual. What did Hashem do? He brought them a difficulty, a little bit of pain, a new world, and now the person's heart became opened and now he can cry. The pain that Hashem brought has opened the person's heart. Yes, it also causes a person to turn to more tefillah, but it was mainly a gift from Hashem to open the heart.

In any situation a person finds himself in, he needs a few seconds to think of how he can grow from it. It's hard sometimes because a person is so busy, but one can think, how will this situation bring me to a new level which I couldn't access until now? This is the way of a ben aliyah to go through all of life, to have calmness of yishuv hadaas, knowing it's all from Hashem, knowing it's all good even though it's bitter, and emunah that since this is all from Hashem I'm not going to fall from it, instead I will hold onto a small point of growth and keep to it. But even more, the constant fire of the Mizbeiach is to realize that every situation of life is so that I can grow.

For some time I had kidney stones, and I was in so much pain from it that for a while I couldn't give any shiurim. The suffering was not easy, and sometimes the pain was so great that I couldn't even concentrate at all on anything, I could barely think straight. My child saw me at home and how I couldn't learn, and he asked me, "What are you learning now?" I said, "Now I'm learning Maseches Yissurim" (Tractate Suffering)." Anyone can learn such a tractate and even write commentaries on it.

We think superficially that life is simply full of both good and bad situations, but the more inner perspective is that all the time we are in the midst of an ongoing Masechta (tractate), and if we aren't zocheh, then we are in Maseches Gehinnom (Tractate Hell), but when we are zocheh, we are learning page after page of an ongoing tractate of how to live life properly, and therefore if Hashem sends suffering our way, we are learning Maseches Yissurim – and then we know that we are experiencing life in the right way.

Of course, when we are suffering or facing difficulty, we should certainly daven that Hashem should take away the suffering, but we have to also realize that this is an opportunity to learn something. A person goes through a difficulty – is he the same person afterwards, does he think the same way? Or did he come to a new perspective? Has he progressed?

We are always learning a new sugya. We may think that a good life is to learn all day in the Beis Midrash and to daven in a shul on Shabbos with a fiery davening, and that suffering is to daven in a shul where we don't have that fire and that better times will come. But really one has to see how this dry Shabbos is really an opportunity for him to grow. Everyone goes through complex situations, even if we can't do what we're saying here, afterwards we should think, how can I learn from this situation and grow from it?

In this way of living, one is constantly in growth, he is a ben aliyah. How can one keep rising, if we keep having setbacks when it gets hard? It is when we have the true perspective that every situation is not just for our good, but an opportunity to learn something new, a constant learning process. We can learn from a sefer and from a shiur, and we can also learn a lot from our life itself and what we go through. Certainly in the ideal situation we would choose to learn all day in the Beis Midrash with peace of mind, and grow like that, but life is much more complex than that and there's a lot of hidden, unwritten Masechtos to learn – the Masechta of Chaim, the Tractate about "Life", which means learning how we can grow from all situations, without exception.

I'll tell you a story. My son came home one day and told me he fell. Then he complained he was feeling pain. I thought he just got a little fall and that it will all be fine. He kept complaining the pain was getting worse. So we decided to check it out by the doctor. The doctor said to take him to the hospital immediately, it's complicated and I don't have time to look into this, so take him to the hospital. I left my wife and kids at home and took my son to the hospital. They made some examinations and they told me, "His life is in danger, he has a hole in his intestines." This was on Erev Shabbos and the last examination was right before Shabbos, so I made up with my wife that I will switch with her for Shabbos, I will go home to be with the kids and she will be with my son for Shabbos and I will come back to the hospital Shabbos morning and probably everything will be fine. I came there Shabbos morning and found that they had moved my son to the surgery room. I asked them, "What surgery?" The doctor there said "It was life threatening so we had to quickly do surgery." I came

# JOY FROM STEADY PROGRESS

to him and saw my son thrashing around and found out that there was no time and no one around for my wife to ask if they should do it on Shabbos or not, so the doctors decided on their own to do it. Then they said to me, “The surgery maybe was successful but maybe it wasn’t.” And I said, “And if it’s not successful then what?” This was all on Erev Shabbos Pesach – all the “blessings” coming all at once. They told me “At best, it will be a 10-day recovery the least. And in worse situations, we have no idea how long it will take.”

I realized I will have to be in the hospital for Pesach. It was the first time in my life I spent Pesach in the hospital. During the Seder I was busy with my son’s surgery. Halachically it was certainly hard for me to be in a hospital on Pesach, but the emotional suffering in my soul was worse, because I knew that tonight everyone else is sitting around with their family by the Seder, the way it should be, with rejoicing in the festival and feeling freedom, and here I am in a hospital for Pesach with all that I have to deal with. I knew it’s not pleasant for me and I’ll manage, but after some more thinking, I thought: “Why indeed did Hashem send me to this place, and how can I grow from it? I feel like I’m in Egypt for the Pesach Seder!” The simple answer that came to me was so that it was all a test from Hashem that I shouldn’t become sad, and that I should be happy on the festival in spite of all the difficulties. But upon a little more thinking, I realized that Hashem sent this so that I could realize that although my situation was difficult, I could still handle this, because I knew that it could be a lot worse. Hashem wanted me to work on all this emunah precisely on Pesach night.

Then I met someone else there whose son was born with a problem in his heart, and he has to be with his son in the hospital all the time. I realized that the suffering I am going through with my son is only for a little bit of time, while this man has been going through it for all of his life. When I was talking to him, he told me that he was happy with what Hashem had given him and that now he’s going back to his house to enjoy the Yom Tov. I thought to myself, “If I was him, would I be able to be happy on Yom Tov?” I learned something new from having to be in the hospital with my son on Pesach. Until then I had been zocheh in my life to learn Torah and be immersed in d’veykus in Hashem and to do zikuy harabim, but to be happy with suffering? Who can be happy all the time with suffering? Yet here I had met a person with far more suffering than me, and he was happy with what Hashem had given him.

One of the mashpiim in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Nisim Yagen zt”l, who had inspired many baalei teshuvah with all his speeches, was niftar in the prime of his life. He came to a family member in his dream and said, “All the shiurim and zikuy harabim (benefiting the masses) which I did, which was all done with mesirus nefesh, didn’t get me into Gan Eden. Only the final period of suffering in my life, which I went through with bitachon in Hashem, is what enabled me to get

into Gan Eden. That’s when I couldn’t do anything and something else opened in my heart. Until then, everything was all external. The last illness is what opened my heart.”

This is astounding, if you know who Rav Nisim Yagen was, whose shiurim are being listened to by many until today. He had done so much, yet all of that was only inspiration and it wasn’t yet the point of truth for him. It was the suffering at the end of his life which brought him to that point of truth and which opened his heart. (Of course, suffering itself is not a free ticket to Gan Eden, unless a person grows from it. There are those who suffer and gain nothing from it because they didn’t grow from it, their hearts didn’t open from it.) For Rav Nisim Yagen, all of his zikuy rabim was a preparation for his suffering, and it was the suffering which opened his heart and brought him to Gan Eden.

No one in the world is spared from difficulties and complex situations. I just came to America on Sunday and there were times that I burst out crying from all the suffering that people told me about from their personal lives. A Kolel avreich, a true ben Torah, has three children all with a serious condition.

One needs to know that life isn’t easy for anyone, it’s always complex. On one hand, a person needs to learn Torah, gain d’veykus in Hashem through it, and daven to Hashem. But that’s only one side to life. The other, second side of life is that a person is learning all the time what suffering is about. We are always in a state of “Shabbos” - sometimes we are learning Hilchos Oneg Shabbos (how to enjoy Shabbos) and sometimes we have to learn Hilchos Pikuach Nefesh (the laws of life-threatening situations) of Shabbos.

No matter the situation, we can always be learning something new. We need to always see how we are growing from the current situation. Sucos and Pesach and Shabbos are all certain kinds of growth and so is every situation of life. Sometimes life is easier and sometimes it is less easy, and even if we are failing and falling, we can calm ourselves and return to growing.

Without this perspective, each person goes through difficulties and just remains a person who is ignorant of the Torah’s values. He will come upstairs and they may even accept his answers of why he didn’t grow from his challenges, but although his answers are accepted in Heaven, he still remains an ignoramus. He hasn’t learned anything from his problems, he hasn’t grown from them.

## IN CONCLUSION

May Hashem give us the strength to go through the difficulties and not get uprooted by any winds, but to keep rising like a fire, from any situation, even if we fall as long as we are in a direction of growth, and then we will be renewed with vigor as we get older and mature through life, reaching the joy of tzaddikim in Hashem.

FROM ORIGINAL HEBREW SHIUR IN WOODMERE  
הכרת הכוחות שמחה 016 רוח דאש דעפך שמחו צדיקים בהם

**MARKING THE DATE ON EACH DAY'S WRITING** This has ramifications on both the stages of initial writing and reviewing your personal notebook – as follows.

As explained in the previous chapter, every topic we are learning about and writing about in our personal notebook involves writing down our intellectual and emotional analysis of a topic (we write down how we define it and how we feel and experience it). Based on what we have explained in this chapter, we can now add on that every time we sit down to write, we should write the date on top.

The gain of this is because the purpose of writing our personal notebook is not merely to recognize each of our soul-faculties, but to gain a collective view and unfolding process. Writing the date will help you keep track of your progress, because later when you will review the notebook, you will connect more to the information when you see the date in which you experienced it. Your recorded definitions and feelings carry more weight to them when you are aware of the date and particular time you wrote them down on. When you skim through the notebook, you will feel more connected to what you wrote down and you will scrutinize it better, taking it more seriously, and as a result, you will be able to experience the growth process that is unfolding – or the changes that you have gone through since the date of your journaling.

Also, when writing a date for each journal entry, you can later review your notebook and pay much greater attention to the dates. You can see that on a certain date, you thought or felt a certain way, and then you can more easily experience the thoughts and feelings that you wrote.

When a person has read his personal book many times, he is apt to get used to it and regard it as a book that has nothing to do with him, regarding it as a mere daily quota that he has taken upon himself to fulfill. With such an attitude, it is hard to acquire an encompassing view on his soul and to become aware of the ongoing process that his soul is going through. In order to get to the desired goal, we need to review our personal notebook with the feeling that I am beginning each time, anew". One of the main ways of advice for this is to write a date for each journal entry, and later when reviewing the notebook, by paying attention to the time when the entry was recorded, we can re-experience the information we've written down, as if it's the first time we are experiencing these recorded definitions or feelings.

**AN ENCOMPASSING VIEW OF PAST AND PRESENT** When reviewing our personal notebook, although we are connecting to our past again, we need to be reviewing it from the present – from the current point we stand at. There is no need to feel absolutely

connected to the state that we used to be in the past, because the goal here is not to remain stuck in the past, but to mature and progress, and we don't gain from becoming overly connected with our past.

So we first need to be viewing our past from a current and calmer state than we were in the past. After that we can look at all the steps of progress from then until now, our current point: How do we think and feel now about the topic we wrote about? We should pick any particular process we wrote about over a certain period of time, and skim through what we've written during a short amount of time, from beginning until now. (For example, a person can skim through a process that took him several years to record, and read about the entire process in just a few minutes). Like this, we are fusing the past and present together, so that our soul can experience the totality of the process we have written about – all in one perusal of the notebook.

To illustrate how it works, an older person opens up a picture album, where he views hundreds and thousands of pictures that span different periods of his life. The pictures were taken periodically over many years, and with these pictures he can live and experience the past again. He can sit for a few hours looking at the picture albums and reflecting about all of these past memories. Besides for all the memories that will resurface, many times he will also experience the events as if they are new. While until now he had experienced all of these events at different times of his life and not in succession of each other, he is now experiencing them all together in a few consecutive hours.<sup>1</sup> (If possible, a person can try to use this specific exercise, to get an idea of the concept here).

**NEW INSIGHTS DON'T CANCEL OUT PREVIOUS INSIGHTS** In order to gain a collective, enveloping perspective, each time that we skim through our personal notebook, we need to be contemplating anew our definitions and feelings that we have written down, as if it's the first time we are analyzing them.

However, even if we realize that we now have a different understanding or we feel differently about something we've written down, that doesn't mean we should disregard what we've written. When we wrote it the first time, that was how we viewed things. (If not, we wouldn't have written it.) What's more is that if not for the original entry we wrote, we wouldn't have gotten to our current understanding.

If we disregard what we've written the first time around, this

*1 Sometimes this make a person experience many different emotions, causing him to experience unpleasant feelings. So this should be done sensibly and objectively.*

# SEEING YOUR DEVELOPMENT SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION

creates a gap in the steps of our soul's development, and it will become harder for us to gain an encompassing view on our soul. So whenever we skim through the notebook, we need to regard our original entries we have written and see the process of how our understanding developed. Originally we thought or felt a certain way, later we thought or felt differently, and at a later point we gained an entirely different understanding or feeling about something we've written. By reviewing all the entries we've written, we can gain a more complete picture, thereby gaining a more encompassing view on ourselves, and we will see how much we are progressing.

**THE ABILITY OF SUMMARIZING** In order to strengthen the ability of seeing an encompassing view, every time we skim through our notebook, we should try to write down again all the steps of how we thought or felt (and not just to write down the current understanding we have).

For example, write, "The first time I wrote about this, I thought or felt that this was the definition of it (A). The second time, I thought or felt differently (B). The third time, my thought and feeling was different (C). Right now, my thought and feeling about it is...(D)." Write down also any factors that caused you to change your previous understanding or previous feelings. For example, write down, "Last time, I didn't take into account a certain factor (write what it is), and therefore I concluded a certain way. But now, I have taken that factor into account, so I have a whole different definition and feeling about it."

There is no need to write down in detail everything all over again (which you wrote down the first time). This would never let us finish, and it would make the writing too long and too overwhelming, and then we will find it too hard to progress in recognizing our soul. The ideal approach is therefore to just write down a summary of the process regarding the topic that we have been through so far, to let our pen flow naturally and to write clearly. When we summarize the information we've learned, we can read through the summaries a long time later and understand well the entire process we have been through.

**EXAMPLE – ANALYZING LOVE** Here is an example of how we can gain the ability of having an encompassing view. We can take the emotion of love and analyze this emotion. Write down how you would define love, and on what occasion you identify it. For example:

Date: 1 Nissan, 5779. Topic: Love. Definition: An enjoyable partnership with another person. I identify with this when I am enjoying being involved in something together with my close friends. A month later, review the notebook and think about the topic. You might write something like this:

Date: 1 Iyar 5779. Topic: Love. Definition: A month ago, I thought that love means an enjoyable partnership or involvement with another. But now I thought about it again, and now I understand that love is more than that, because I realized that if I feel love towards others even when I'm not involved in something enjoyable with them. For example, yesterday I felt such a strong love for my children, even though I wasn't involved with them at the moment. Now I understand that love means a certain inner bond with another."

You have now written your new insight about what love is, and how you identify it in your life. A month later, when reviewing the notebook again, you might not come up with any new understanding. But 10 months later when you are skimming through your notebook again, you might discover that you changed your definition of what love is. You may write down something like this:

Date: 1 Adar, 5780. Topic: Love. Definition: Almost a year ago I thought that love means to have an enjoyable partnership with another. Later I realized that love is also an internal bond you feel with another, even when the two of you aren't involved in something. For a while, my definition of love didn't change from this. But a week ago, I heard a deep class on the topic of love, where the lecturer explained that love means to expand your soul to include another, enabling you to unify with him. So now I understand that love is when your soul expands to become unified with another." You can keep reviewing your notebook, each time clarifying a topic more and more. Every time you review it, you are looking at the process from beginning until end, all in one reading, and thereby gaining an encompassing view.

As mentioned, sometimes you will realize that you think or feel differently about a certain topic, and sometimes you will leave it unchanged. Sometimes you will just clarify it a bit, and sometimes you will completely change your definition, giving an overhaul to the concept.

What if a while has passed and you remain with the same exact definitions and feelings? There are two possibilities why. (1) Your definitions and feelings remain the same because they are coming from the way your unique "soul root" thinks – you have these specific thoughts and feelings because they are linked with your soul root, and therefore you don't budge from a certain perspective. However, it is not very likely that this is the reason, because it is rare for people to reach the thinking that comes from their soul root. (2) It is more likely that you aren't clarifying or properly implementing the instructions here. If that is the case, you need to see again how you can work on these instructions practically, and identify any parts you aren't following through on.

**NEXT WEEK: YOUR FEELINGS ARE MORE COMPLEX THAN YOUR INTELLECTUAL DEFINITIONS**