

Happy Thoughts

THINKING PROPERLY

THE LIGHTS AND SIRENS OF HATZALAH broke through the quiet of the neighborhood. Nineteen-year-old Simchah had been severely injured, and the paramedics tried their best to revive him. After a few strenuous minutes, Simchah was able to be transferred to a local hospital.



The doctors at the hospital weren't convinced that prolonging his life was worth it. "The quality of life he is looking at," they said, "is nothing to compare to what he was used to. He won't be able to perform even basic tasks. He will have to undergo many long years of physical therapy and surgeries just to give him a chance. Why give him that suffering?"

They all conceded to this grim outlook except for Doctor Fried, a Yid. "Who are you to decide on his quality of life? Who said **your** quality of life is any better? Do you really have a good life? Is your life so good that it's worth living?"

He went around the table, asking the doctors to rate their quality of life from one to ten. As expected, the answers weren't so positive. Some said that they had lawsuits lingering against them that didn't give them any peace of mind, while others had various troubles at home. Eventually, Doctor Fried calculated that the average quality of life from among the doctors there was a paltry six. That was how happy they were with their quality of life.

He then suggested they ask Simchah what he felt was his quality of life, and thus they proceeded to the ICU. Simchah could barely speak, but when asked to rate his quality of life, he responded, "Ten."

"Ten?!" they repeated, astonished.

"Ten plus!"

Even in his semi-comatose state, Simchah was completely satisfied with the life that Hashem had given him! Doctor Fried had made his point.

One of the disproven doctors asked Simchah how he could be so happy knowing his bleak future. Simchah answered: "How can I not be so happy?! Hashem is giving me life. I'm able to do mitzvos. What more could I ask for?"¹

¹ On Friday night, we sing the song of *L'cho Dodi*, which contains ten stanzas. The *minhag* is to sing the first six with one tune, and the remaining four with a different one. Usually, the first tune is more emotional and heartwarming, while the second is more upbeat.

Why is this so? There's no clear difference between the two halves to warrant a shift. Most of the stanzas speak about the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, so what changes that we go from a heartwarming tune to a dancing one?

Perhaps this teaches us a lesson. Though nothing changed from the first part, we still shift to show that the same situation can be faced how ever we choose to face it. We can sing it with excitement or with sorrow.

Life is as you perceive it. Two people can go through the same situation. One will be calm and happy, and the other will be nervous and sad. The difference between them isn't their situation but rather how they react to it and how they perceive it. (*The Joy of Emunah*, p. 95)



THE "KOSSEL" AT HOME

One of the *talmidei chachamim* of Yerushalayim who lived one hundred years ago, **Reb Nachum Yasser** ז"ל, came to the Beis Midrash one morning and said to his friend, **Reb Nota Zenwirth** ז"ל, "I received a *bas kol* today!"

Reb Nota looked at him in wonderment and said in frightened worry, "What are you saying, Reb Nachum? Are you hearing voices? How do you know that you received a *bas kol*?"

"Yes, it's true," Reb Nachum told him. "I awoke this morning and couldn't find my shoes. I understood that Hashem wanted me to search for my shoes. It was a *bas kol* telling me that I must search for my shoes.



"Ten minutes later, I found the shoes beneath a dresser. Then, I heard another *bas kol*. This one said, 'You can stop looking for your shoes because you found them.'"

Reb Nachum would go to the Kossel every morning. Once, he was ill, and he had to daven at home. Someone came to visit him, and said, "*Im yirtzeh Hashem*, you will be well soon and then you can go back to the Kossel..."

Reb Nachum Yasser told him that he wasn't speaking rationally. "Why are you speaking about going to the Kossel? Today, Hashem wants me to daven at home, so why should I be upset about that and want to go to the Kossel? I'm doing what Hashem wants from me today."



"LOOK WHAT I WAS SPARED!"

We continue our discussion of "happy thoughts" with another *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, **Reb Zalman Brazil** ז"ל.

Once, his son asked him how his day was. Reb Zalman responded, "Don't even ask. It was an extremely difficult day..."

"What happened?" the son asked with concern.

This is the lesson that we tell ourselves with the onset of Shabbos. Now is the time that we set ourselves aside from whatever we are dealing with in this world. How do we do that? By remembering that every situation can be sung how ever we choose to sing it. It is up to us.

זכרו תורת משה

“Don’t even ask. I awoke at 3 AM, like every morning, but my shoelaces weren’t in my shoes. It took me two hours until I found them. I had to search all over the house... Apparently, one of the grandchildren played with my shoelaces.

“Then I went to the *mikvah*, and someone came and stole my clothes! It took a long time before someone brought me clothing so that I could leave the *mikvah*.”

The son moaned about the difficult time his elderly father endured, but Reb Zalman then said, “Actually, none of that happened. My shoes had their shoelaces in them, and no one stole my clothes at the *mikvah*...”

Reb Zalman imagined difficult scenarios to help him be happy with Hashem’s *chesed*. Through visualizing such scenarios, he’d build an appreciation for what he did have.

These stories help us to think about life in a healthy, happy manner, as it is important to look at life correctly.



NOTEBOOKS SAVE LIVES

The Rosh Yeshiva walked out puzzled from the physiologist’s room.



The professional had told the Rosh Yeshiva that the burden of the finances of the yeshiva was endangering his life. “Take your pick,” he’d said. “Either continue what you’re doing and endanger your life, or resign as Rosh Yeshiva and get back your health.”

The Rosh Yeshiva immediately approached **R’ Shlomo Zalman** for his guidance. Hearing the situation, R’ Shlomo Zalman questioned him, “Have you ever had more challenging times when carrying the finances of the yeshiva?”

“Yes” was the response.

“Did you pull out of it?” asked R’ Shlomo Zalman.

“Most definitely. Every month, I go through the same challenge in some form or another, and each time miraculously we pull through.”



Said R’ Shlomo Zalman: “You see how Hashem is running your life? You see that all the months you’re challenged with the same challenge, and yet Hashem pulls it through. This is something that all *roshei mosdos* face. You’re not the only one challenged with it.

“What’s the ultimate solution? The tangible solution is to be thankful. But how do you get to this? Go buy yourself a notebook, and every time you encounter *hashgachah* in how Hashem helped you, write it down. By doing so, you’ll be conscious of the *brachah* Hashem gives you.

“Also, when you get to *Modim* in *Shemoneh Esreh*, take one thing that you’d like to be thankful for and focus on it. If you do so, I **guarantee**

you that the worries will disappear, and you’ll live a peaceful life.”² (*Chachmas Ha’nefesh Ha’yebudis*)



POSITIVE APPROACH

R’ Yechiel Perr remembers being told by **Rav Aharon Kotler** more than half a century ago about an experience he had. When repeating the story, R’ Aharon didn’t remember clearly if it took place before his marriage or immediately after his marriage, but it seemed to him that it was before.



His father-in-law, **Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer**, took him along to visit a certain sick man. This person was just a simple Yid who lived in Slutsk. Rav Isser Zalman told Rav Aharon on the way that the doctor said that the man was suffering unimaginable pain.

The sick man greeted his two visitors with a smile and seemed to be very happy. Rav Isser Zalman asked the patient how he could be so happy while suffering, and the man replied, “Imagine if I had been sentenced to die but was later ‘let off’ with a beating instead. Wouldn’t I be full of joy?”³ (A letter he wrote on 2 Elul 1966)



THE ENORMOUS LOSS

News came to **R’ Aryeh Schechter** about a person who had a heart



attack after being informed that one hundred thousand dollars of his had been stolen. When he heard the news, he responded that he too had been robbed once of half a million dollars. It had been on Erev Shabbos, and he was staying somewhere far from home. His host that week recalled that R’ Aryeh hadn’t acted any different that Shabbos. Only when people came and told the host what had happened to R’ Aryeh did the host believe that R’ Aryeh had lost so much money.

“We see from here,” concluded R’ Aryeh, “that two people can encounter the same situation. One lives with Hashem and understands that this is from Hashem and is for his best, while the other simply can’t handle it and collapses from the distress.”⁴

² This is remarkable, as the professional had told him that the stress was endangering his life, and yet R’ Shlomo Zalman said that his solution **guaranteed** that he would be permitted to continue the job.

³ When we face a situation we would rather not face, we are used to saying: “*Gam zu l’tohav!*” by some people the connotation can be: “Terrible. I’m so upset that this happened! I would have much rather this not happen.”

But this is not the real understanding. Rather, it means: “Wonderful! Hashem knows what’s best for me and is only doing this for my best!”

This is hinted to in the words themselves. We say “*Gam zu l’tohav.*” Why do we say “*gam* – also”? Shouldn’t we just say “*zu l’tohav*” – this is for the good? Why do we add that this **too** is for our good?

It could be teaching us the fundamental way to accept the challenges facing us. By thinking of all the *brachah* in our lives, and how Hashem at that very moment is giving us great things, enables us to accept the situation willingly.

That is why it says *gam*. *Gam* here means to remind us that we have so much good. When we encounter challenges, we come and say that this too is for our good. We include the challenge in the things that we see openly, and with this, we can accept everything gladly.

⁴ A frequent reader told me that someone played for him a recording of Elon Musk, from the wealthiest people in the world, saying how he doesn’t understand why people envy him. His life is not a life. He doesn’t have any peace of mind. His whole life is full of stress and pain. “Why would people want to be like me if I myself don’t want to be myself? I’m so unhappy with who I am, so why bother envying someone who doesn’t want to be themselves?”