

And (he) perceived the place from afar. (22:4)

In *Perek Aleph of Mesillas Yesharim*, the *Ramchal* writes: "From this we learn that the primary purpose of man's existence in this world is solely to do *mitzvos*, to serve Hashem, and to overcome tribulations." I have always felt that when we add the verse, *Zachreinu l'Chaim*, during the *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, the word *l'maancha*, for Your sake, is its most defining point. We pray for life. For what reason should we live? Hashem owes us nothing. It is almost insolent to ask for life unless one has a lofty purpose in living. *L'maancha* is that lofty purpose. We live to serve Hashem. Every action, every deed that we perform, must in some manner have the Hashem factor included therein. Otherwise, it has no validity. Life has purpose; life has meaning only insofar that it is connected with Hashem.

Nisyonos, trials, tribulations, life's speed bumps, are all part of our growth as a Jew. An integral part of our existence is our ability to triumph over the challenges that we confront. These challenges are Heavenly imposed upon us by design, so that we become spiritually stronger. There is a well-known story of a butterfly that was struggling to emerge from its cocoon (many versions), which is practical and illuminating. A little boy was playing outdoors and discovered a fascinating caterpillar. He carefully picked it up and brought it home to his mother. "Mommy, can I have it as a pet?" the boy asked. His mother agreed, on the condition that he would take good care of it.

The boy proceeded to obtain a large jar which he partially filled with plants for the caterpillar to eat and a stick for it to climb on. Every day, he would watch his pet grow, as he replaced the plants. One day, the caterpillar climbed up the stick and began to act strangely. He called his mother, who explained that the caterpillar was moving on to its next stage in life by creating a cocoon from which it would metamorphasize into a butterfly. The little boy was thrilled with the changes his pet caterpillar would experience. He would watch daily for the emergence of the butterfly, until one day it happened. A small hole appeared in the cocoon and the butterfly began to struggle to get out. Shortly thereafter, the boy's excitement changed to concern, as the boy saw the butterfly struggling to get out. It seemed an almost impossible task. In the boy's mind, the butterfly appeared desperate, as nothing was happening. No progress.

Out of concern for his pet's welfare, the boy decided to help it along. He went to get scissors and then snipped the cocoon to make the hole bigger. The butterfly quickly emerged, but all was not good. The butterfly had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. He continued to watch the butterfly expecting that, at any moment, the wings would dry out, enlarge and expand to support the swollen body. He was certain that, in short time, the body would shrink and the wings would expand. He was wrong. Neither happened. The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

Upset, the boy asked his mother to find out why his butterfly did not seem to thrive. She spoke with a scientist who explained that, by easing the butterfly's struggle, her son had inadvertently relegated the butterfly to a handicapped existence. The butterfly was supposed to struggle. By

struggling to push its way through the tiny opening of the cocoon, the fluids in its body were being pushed back into its wings. Without the struggle, the butterfly would never ever fly.

As we travel the road of life, we must remember that struggle is a critical part of any growth experience. It is struggle that gives us the ability to fly.

Avraham *Avinu* is the father of struggle. His successful withstanding of the *Asarah Nisyonos*, Ten Trials, set the stage for his confirmation as our Patriarch. The **Koźnitzer Maggid, zl**, writes (*Avodas Yisrael, Parashas Vayeira*): "When Hashem tests a person (it makes sense), at the crucial moment of trial, Hashem conceals His *kedushah*, Holiness, and limits man's cognition of Him." The reason is simple: if man were to be clear in his understanding of Hashem, if no ambiguity would be allowed to creep into his mind, it would diminish the impact of the *nisayon*. The struggle must continue unabated and unfettered. This is what is meant by our *pasuk*, *Va'yaar es ha'makom meirachok*, "And (he) perceived the place from afar." Explains the **Chidushei HaRim, makom**, place, is reference to Avraham's spiritual plateau. Thus, on the third day as Avraham was getting closer to seeing the conclusion of the trial, he saw the place from afar. His spiritual status was tested even further, and he saw the place becoming more distant from him.

At that crucial moment, as Avraham was about to slaughter his only son, Yitzchak, one would think that Hashem would bring him closer, to buttress his faith, to show him that He would be there with him, to sustain him through his ordeal. That is not, however, what happened. On the contrary! Instead of coming closer, Hashem distanced Himself from Avraham, thereby increasing the difficulty of the test! The Satan did everything to swat Avraham. In addition, Hashem had distanced Himself. Our Patriarch had no support. He was floundering in a sea of darkness with no visible means to save himself. Nonetheless, Avraham prevailed. At that moment, Avraham was rewarded that his descendants would have the same resolute forbearance to withstand the demanding tests, under the most inhumane conditions. Struggle allows us to fly! Struggle gives us the ability to soar!

This idea is underscored by the **Baal Shem Tov, zl**, who explains that Hashem leads us like a father who is teaching his young son to walk. Every time the boy takes a few steps in the father's direction, the father moves back, compelling his son to take a few more steps. At times, the child cannot handle the distance, and he falls. So the father starts over again. Each time, the child develops greater proficiency and self-confidence. Veritably, there are instances when the child falls and even hurts himself, causing him to cry with pain, but anyone with a modicum of intelligence understands that this is how the child will learn to walk.