

“For just as a man chastises his son, Hashem, your G-d, chastises you.” (8:5)

The word *yesurim* also indicates suffering. Hence, the suffering we sustain in this world is actually Hashem's chastisement of us. Perhaps this is the only way one can endure the pain and anguish of suffering: he knows it comes from a loving Father. He also knows that he is not alone in his suffering. I once visited a young woman who was suffering through the terrible pain of end-stage cancer. I wondered what to say to her. Her life was dependent upon a miracle. The pain she sustained was excruciating. The mental anguish she suffered knowing that she would probably not live to see her son's *Bar-Mitzvah*, her daughter's *chasunah*, was overwhelming. I told her the truth, that she was not alone. Hashem was with her in her travail, because everything that she was enduring was from Him. I did not know the reason. The fact was, however, that she was not alone. From that moment on, she faced the future with a positive attitude. There was to be no future, but she was prepared to accept her fate with a renewed strength. She was not alone.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, z.l., suffered a number of personal tragedies that would have destroyed the average person. Eight of his eleven children died in his lifetime, most of them in the prime of their youth or early middle age. His strength of character and trust in the Almighty were incredible. He never once uttered as much as a sigh of complaint over his lot in life. Typical of his personality is the following note which he wrote to his brother during the terrible years of famine and illness that ravaged *Yerushalayim* during World War I. He wrote the following lines shortly after burying two sons, a son-in-law and a grandson:

“My dear brother,

I received your precious letter. It is difficult for me to write. Our Father in Heaven has taken away from me to the World of Truth my dear son Shmuel Binyamin, who had lain ill with typhus for fourteen days. He was a man at the apex of his achievement, and we had expected great things from him. The ways of G-d are hidden, but we believe with complete faith that everything that appears to us now as incomprehensible – like the mystery of the world in its entirety – will have an explanation in the future, when it will become clear that it was all for the good. This is actually the underlying meaning of our *Kaddish* prayer.”

Rav Yosef Chaim was wont to relate the story of the *chasid* who went to the *Mezritcher Maggid, z.l.*, and asked, “*Rebbe*, how is it possible to fulfill *Chazal's* dictum that one must bless Hashem when misfortune occurs just as wholeheartedly as when good fortune occurs?”

The *Mezritcher* responded, “Go to the home of my disciple, *Rav*

Zushia (m'Annipole), and you will understand.”

The *chasid* did as he was instructed. When he arrived at *Rav Zushia's* home, he was taken aback with the abject poverty that he saw. Moreover, *Rav Zushia* was not a well person. Yet, he spent his entire day in *avodas Hashem*, serving the Almighty. The *chasid* entered the home and told *Rav Zushia*, "The *Maggid* sent me to you to find an answer to my query. How can it be expected of a person to react in the same manner to misfortune as to good fortune?"

Rav Zushia looked at his visitor incredulously and said, "I am afraid there must be some error! I have no idea why the *Rebbe* would send you to me. I have never experienced misfortune in my life. In fact, I have no idea what misfortune is!"

While this narrative gives us insight into the profound perspective of *Rav Zushia*, it also indicates the total acquiescence to accepting Divine judgment that exemplified *Rav Yosef Chaim's* life.