

And leave a space between drove and drove. (32:17)

The *Midrash Rabbah* quotes a poignant request made by Yaakov Avinu of Hashem: “Yaakov said to *HaKodesh Baruch Hu*, ‘*Ribbono Shel Olam!* If adversity/troubles/pain will (be decreed) to come upon my children, please do not send them one following (immediately) after another; but rather, leave (a) space between them!’ This is to be implied from the word *revach*, ‘space’ between the flocks of sheep.” *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita*, wonders what is the meaning of “space” between troubles? How does space make a difference?

The *Maggid* quotes an explanation which he heard from the **Steipler Gaon, zl**, given during a group lecture while in the Novardok *Yeshivah* in Bialastok, Poland. In the *Talmud Berachos 5b*, *Chazal* relate that when Rabbi Elazar became ill, Rabbi Yochanan came to visit him. When he entered the house, he noticed that it was very dark. Rabbi Yochanan uncovered his arm, and the house immediately became illuminated. He then noticed that Rabbi Elazar was crying. “Why are you crying?” he asked. “If it is because you feel that you did not sufficiently learn Torah, it should not be of concern to you. We have learned that it is not how much one learns, but rather, his intention and devotion to Heaven, that it be *l’shem Shomayim*, for Heaven’s sake, that counts. If it is because of your extreme poverty: not everyone merits two tables (i.e. distinction in Torah and material wealth). If it is because you did not merit to have children: I have here with me a bone from my tenth son to have passed away. The bottom line is: Do you appreciate *yissurim*, troubles?” Rabbi Elazar replied, “Neither them, nor the reward they incur.” When Rabbi Yochanan heard this, he stretched out his hand to Rabbi Elazar and the sage immediately became cured. The question is obvious: If Rabbi Yochanan possessed this incredible power, why did he wait to pose all of these questions to him? Why did he not heal him on the spot?

The *Steipler* explained that, had Rabbi Yochanan asked him outright, “Do you want to be healed?” the immediate response would have been one of dejection, “Leave me be; I want to die!” Why would he have responded so negatively? Because this is exactly how he felt. He had not learned enough Torah; he had no money, no children, and now he was gravely ill on top of all of that! Yes, his immediate response would have been, “Leave me alone, I just want to die!” He no longer had any strength left to continue his painful suffering.

Therefore, Rabbi Yochanan took apart the various adversities which, throughout his life, had taken their toll on him. Each one was disassembled and ameliorated. Individually, none was a catastrophic burden with which he could not deal. What was left? His illness! That, he could cure! This is how the brilliant Rabbi Yochanan was able to bring Rabbi Elazar back to manifest a positive outlook on life.

This is the meaning of *revach*, space. Everyone suffers through some form of adversity. Some experience much more than others. Yet, it does not destroy them. This is because they catch their breath in between each one. There is a space during which one can straighten out his life, pull himself together – and then go on to the next one. He breaks up his *tzaros*, troubles, into distinct

adversities dealing with each one on an individual basis. This allows him time to reflect when transitioning from one situation to another.

Perhaps we might suggest another interpretation of allowing for *revach bein eider l'eider*. *Revach* means space. It also means benefit, profit, surplus. If we follow along the lines of *Chazal* that we are addressing issues of adversity, *revach* can be interpreted as the benefit or lesson one derives from the adversity. Thus, he triumphs over the troubles, rather than letting them envelop him. This idea came to me when I read a simple, but poignant, quote: "Grief is the price we pay for love." One who loves someone grieves over his loss. One who cares about something mourns his separation from it. One who does not care, who does not love, does not grieve or mourn. Every "negative" emotion is a response to a positive feeling within us. One who undergoes an adverse situation can either: gain from it, thus triumphing over it, or it can destroy him.

I recently read a book about people who had undergone various challenging situations. They coped and grew from their experiences. At times, the ending was a happy one, but sometimes not: the patient did not survive. Yet, the people who were involved in the experience emerged stronger, emotionally healthier, nobler, wiser and more caring individuals. Despite the grief that overtook them following the bad endings, they benefitted so much from their ordeal that the tragedy itself was redefined.

Whether *revach* means space or it is interpreted as benefit, the message remains the same: Do not allow adversity to triumph over you. Delve into every situation. Allow yourself to think, to expand your horizons, to recognize that every situation carries a lesson, a message, an opportunity for betterment. "Grief is the price one pays for love" is a powerful statement, which teaches us that it is not all bad. One who does not love will never have to grieve. Think about that.

I close with a powerful exposition attributed to the **Chiddushei HaRim**. Avraham *Avinu* was tested through the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak, whereby Hashem commanded him to sacrifice his only son, whom he loved. It involved a lengthy process of traveling three days to *Har HaMoriah*. Why could Hashem not have tested Avraham with a quick, sudden command: "Put a knife to your son's throat." Why did he have to go through the whole process? The *Rebbe* explains that a person's senses can desert him under such duress. A moment so sudden, so traumatic, can have a deleterious effect on his consciousness. Avraham and, – by extension, each person who is tested by Hashem – undergoes a test for how well-prepared he is for the challenge. Every human being can study, contemplate, mull over the issues of life and fill his internal repositories of faith, compassion, trust in Hashem and Jewish perspective, to the point that his instincts are well-honed and properly molded. Therefore, when the time of challenge – that awful moment we pray never happens – does come, he is prepared to deal with the adversity that confronts him.

We live a life of hope – hope that "bad things" will never happen, but we must leave ourselves *revach*, take every opportunity to pack our bags with inspiration and faith, so that if it "does happen," we are prepared.