

You shall cut away the barrier of your heart. (10:16)

Metaphorically, the heart represents the seat of a human being's passion and emotion. When one loses his moral compass and begins to fall prey to his base desires, this moral weakness is described figuratively as a dulled heart, ensconced in a layer of dross which prevents it from connecting spiritually. In other words, the person's ability to perceive and be inspired spiritually is hampered by this encumbrance. The only way to resuscitate the heart spiritually is to "cut away" the layer that dulls the person's spiritual impulses, preventing him from growing in the manner of becoming a Torah Jew.

What is the source of his spiritual obtuseness? What grants it the power to sway a person, to so distort his spiritual perceptions that he requires a "surgical procedure" to remove the ingredient?

Horav Nosson Breslover, zl, writes: "The tremendous *tzaros*, troubles, pain and adversity which plague a person in this world weigh down heavily upon a person, making it very difficult for him to come close to Hashem, to express his pain, to entreat Him concerning his troubles. It is also difficult to come forward, due to the many impediments and pain that dull his heart to the point that he is unable to open his mouth and articulate his feelings." Apparently, he feels that the *otem ha'lev*, obtuseness of the heart, is due to the many adversities through which we suffer. So, what does one do? We all have adversities. No one leads a charmed life. The wealthy and the poor, the high and the mighty and the downtrodden – each has his own unique *peckel*, package of *tzaros*, troubles. Some are run of the mill; some are exotic; some are self-imposed, some are victims, but everyone has something. Some just have greater proficiency in covering up their personal adversity, but it is still present. What does one do? Hashem says *u'maltem* – "You shall cut away" - Now that we have some idea concerning the meaning of *orlas levavchem*, the barrier of your heart, we better understand why it is so difficult to remove, because we are all affected by this restrictive dead weight.

Rav Nosson offers illuminating advice, which, when applied, changes the playing field, allowing one to transcend his *tzaros* and come close to Hashem. "Therefore an *eitzah gedolah*, great recommendation, is that a person should always recall the good things that have occurred to him, to our ancestors, our People. (It is not only about us. We are part of a larger collective; we must learn to think out of the box.) Most of all, one should thank Hashem that he has been included among the Jewish People, that he is a part of the nation which accepted the Torah, that he is among those who have been distinguished from among those who wander aimlessly, with no direction in life."

According to *Rav* Nosson, *orlas ha'lev* is defined as *ribui ha'tzaros*, the detrimental effect of increased troubles and pain to which we, as human beings, are subjected for various reasons. These obstacles can have a deleterious effect on one's ability to come close to Hashem. They take up one's time, his life, his mind, thereby causing his heart to be surrounded with a covering that has a dulling effect on his spiritual impulses. The cure for this disease is to look at the good

and delve into all of the good fortune of which one has been the beneficiary since birth. If we get in the habit of acknowledging and appreciating the good, we will be able to cut away the covering of pain and adversity surrounding our heart, so that we can reach out to Hashem.

In the often-quoted *perek*, chapter, of *Tehillim*, 23, David *Hamelech* begins, *Hashem ro'ee lo echsar*, "Hashem is my Shepherd, I shall not lack." After describing the many gifts of good he has received from Hashem, he says, *kosi revaya*, "my cup runneth over." Simply, this means that David acknowledges that his life is one long series of gifts from Hashem. The statement, "my cup runneth over," has become a metaphor for expressing one's gratitude to Hashem for all the good things that He does for us.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, comments on the *pasuk*: "A cup can only run over if it is first full. If there is a hole at the bottom of the cup, it will never become full; thus, it will never run over. This is a lesson for us constantly to remember the good things that Hashem does for us. Never forget them. Then the good things will add up, and your happiness will follow."

As human beings, we tend to focus on the present – our momentary needs. We focus on that which we have already received and enjoyed, while that for which we need to be forever grateful remains in the back of our minds: "Been there, done that." It is no longer a priority. Thus, we most often feel that our cup is far from running over, since we are always focusing on what we still (think) we need. As soon as our request is filled, our happiness is short-lived, because there is always another "need" waiting in the background. *Rav* Nossan teaches us always to focus on the good that we have received. Otherwise, we have no chance of getting over that insurmountable hump of dissatisfaction, layered with adversity, and hinged with pain.

When we focus on something, it becomes reinforced in our minds. Therefore, when one attempts to ferret out the positive of each day, each situation, it will become habit-forming, and, suddenly, his "bad" days will no longer be considered bad. Furthermore, he will generally be a happier person.

There is another aspect to *orlas halev*, whereby one realizes the therapeutic effect of the *ribui ha'tzaros*, adversity and pain. I came across the following analogy attributed to **Horav Yisrael Gustman, zl**. A young, talented artist drew a beautiful painting on an outdoor easel. He was quite proud of his work. After all, he was still young and had labored long hours to produce this wondrous graphic. Days were spent perfecting every nuance, every aspect of the shades, colors, and contrasts of the painting. He was now ready to show it off, to receive the acclaim that he so deserved for a job well done. He called for his father, hoping to receive his compliment concerning the painting.

The father came and could not stop marveling at his son's brilliance. He was effusive in his praise, hoping to encourage his son's continued commitment to painting. As his father continued with his praise, the young artist stepped back to behold the beauty of his creation. As he moved further and further back and then to the side, he was left standing one step from the edge of the cliff. One more

move would be his last.

The father suddenly realized that his son was moving precariously to the edge. He might fall backward into an abyss. Yelling “Stop!” would only shock him and cause him to move backward. He quickly grabbed a can of paint and threw it at the painting, completely ruining the beautiful work of art! Seeing this, his son came running, screaming hysterically, “How could you have done that? You destroyed my painting. All of that hard work was for nothing.”

The father waited patiently while his son vented and blew off steam. Then he spoke softly, “My son, I saved your life. You were so close to the edge that one more step would have proven fatal. You were so engrossed in your beautiful creation that you did not realize that you were endangering your life. Your priority should be your life – not your painting.”

The lesson is obvious. At times we become so involved in our daily pursuits that we lose sight of the priorities in life which should serve as our lodestar. We are on this world to serve Hashem, to be good Jews, to glorify His Name in the world. Everything else is second place. When we appear to forget our true objective, Hashem must throw a monkey wrench into the engine, spill some paint on the painting, in order to get our attention. This how He helps us remove our *orlas ha'lev*.