

Then at last shall their obstructed heart be subdued. (26:41)

Parashas Bechukosai contains within it the first *Tochacha*, Rebuke/curses, whose purpose is to teach *mussar*, ethical direction, reproof, in order to inspire them to wake up and repent. This is alluded to by the above *pasuk*: the rebuke/curses will liberate them from the fetters of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. Additionally, rebuke is a good thing - in that it assures us that Hashem cares. *Horav Yisrael Belsky*, zl, explains that a child who misbehaves knows that he is in for a punishment when his parents become aware of his misdeed. What if they ignore it, ignore him? This implies that they do not care; they have rejected him. Indeed, rejection is far worse than punishment, because rejection conveys the message: We have given up on you. Do what you want. It no longer makes a difference to us.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *yissurim*, suffering, troubles, is a vehicle through which Hashem communicates with us. Sadly, we view *yissurim* negatively, contending that if Hashem loves us, He will not give us pain. This is the attitude of someone who is not thinking. When a person commits a wrong he must be punished, so that he will not continue acting inappropriately. What if the person does not know (or refuses to acknowledge) that what he has done is wrong? He must be told; the wrong must be pointed out to him, so that he can contemplate the error of his ways and correct them. By focusing on the *yissurim* that he experiences, he will be able to identify what it was that he did wrong and purge the evil that catalyzed his negative behavior. When one's actions are recalcitrant, his behavior fractious, he should set his sights on determining the source of the problem.

Suffering is an indication that Hashem believes in the person's ability to correct his error and move on spiritually. It also shows the abiding love Hashem manifests, remembering each one of us and doing what is necessary to curb transgression and spur growth. As *Rav Belsky* observes, Hashem personally attends to the smallest details in every individual Jew's personal life and His nation, collectively, constantly sending a stream of messages and opportunities to enable and encourage us to achieve perfection. This is the meaning of *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence.

Our function is to believe, to trust in Hashem with unstinting faith that whatever happens is His message, His way of showing love and concern. *Bitachon*, trust, is the key to life. Some have it; others must work on it constantly until they have achieved the peace of mind that comes with total faith in Hashem. By doing this, we will learn to lead our lives in constant reliance on the Almighty, which is really what living as a Jew means: unswerving commitment to Hashem. I close with the words of *Horav Nachman Breslover*, zl, "Do not relate to Hashem about all the suffering that you are experiencing. Instead, tell your troubles that there is a Creator." (In other words, ameliorate your suffering with the knowledge that Hashem is present to support you – if you take the time to listen to the message.)

Indeed, accepting the message with love, and not balking as a result of the pain, is the test which defines one's bond with Hashem. We all experience challenges in the course of our lives,

challenges which are commensurate with our ability to withstand and triumph over them. Hashem will not test us with a test that we are destined to fail (out of weakness). The following story is about a Jew whose love for Hashem was boundless, who remained unstintingly committed despite being challenged – and challenged again. Indeed, his attitude was, “Hashem, whatever You throw at me, I am ready.”

In one of the premier European communities, a couple resides who waited twenty years for their only child. The husband serves as *Ram*, lecturer, in one of the community's *yeshivos*; his wife is a successful teacher in the local Bais Yaakov. For twenty years, they hoped, they prayed, they retained their calm demeanor. Such was their unwavering commitment, their consummate love for the Almighty. (Incidentally, the wife did conceive twice and gave birth to infants that lived a mere few days.) Not only did they not despair, they would visit with other couples who, like themselves, were still waiting for their first child. They encouraged them, imbuing them with hope. Nothing was beyond Hashem, “Look, after almost twenty years of waiting, we have not given up hope: we wait; we pray; we believe.”

Hashem responded positively to their prayers, and a wonderful, beautiful baby boy was born to them. The *bris* was more like a wedding. The entire city shared in their unbridled joy. The couple moved on to parenthood, raising their son in the Torah way. He possessed a brilliant mind and devoted himself to a life of Torah study. He passed many milestones in his Torah achievement as he matured into an exemplary G-d-fearing young man, replete with Torah knowledge, *middos tovos*, extraordinary positive character traits, and completely devoted to mitzvah observance and performing acts of loving kindness. Obviously, *shadchanim*, matchmakers, lined up at his front door with proposals of wonderful girls from outstanding families who were willing to support this young man in a manner that would allow him to study Torah full - time for as long as he desired. He ended up becoming engaged to a special, fine young lady from a background similar to his own. It was a match made in Heaven. Finally, after years of prayer and hope, the parents were seeing their “pay day.” The engagement celebration paralleled the celebration rendered for the *chosson's bris*. Unfortunately, the joy that permeated the community lasted for only a few days – when the *chassan* began to complain of severe, painful headaches. He was rushed to the hospital where, after testing, the grim prognosis was confirmed: he was suffering from a terminal disease, with mere weeks to live.

The average parent who hears such shocking news would understandably fall apart, complain, grieve, pray. The reaction of this young man's parents was to strengthen themselves with faith and trust in the Almighty. What Hashem does is for the good. Who are we to argue? These were the same parents whose faith during twenty years of childlessness remained resolute. As soon as they learned the frightful news, they knocked on the door of their new *mechutanim*, parents of their son's *kallah*, with the news and their proposal, “We do not want your daughter to suffer for even one day. We have come to revoke the match. Our son agrees. He does not want such a special girl to experience the pain of loss.”

The *mechutanim* wept. The *kallah*, who at that moment was in another room, also wept. After a few moments, the *kallah* came out of her room and spoke, "I refuse to break the *shidduch*. Such a young man, who is the consummate *ben Torah*, is rare. I pray along with everyone in the community that my *chassan* be cured." It was decided the entire community would storm the Heavens on behalf of the *chosson*.

A few days later, the individual who related this story was walking past one of the small *shtieblach* (*shuls*) in the community when he heard bitter weeping emanating from within the *shtiebel*. He went inside to see if anyone was in need of assistance. He noticed a man standing in front of the *Aron Kodesh*, crying bitterly. As he came closer he became aware of the man's identity: he was the *chosson's* father.

"My Father, my loving Father," he cried. "You must believe me when I assert that I have no grievance against You. Whatever my wife and I have received from You until now has always been kindness. Nothing that You will do to me will cause my faith to weaken or my love to diminish. I will remain steadfast in my love and devotion to You. The bonds that we have developed with You are as strong as ever. They will never be torn asunder. Indeed, no matter what occurs, I will devote myself even more to Your service.

"If, by some miracle, my son lives, we will do everything within our means to enable him to spend his life studying Torah. Nothing will stand in our way to provide for him."

The listener was all shaken up by what he had just seen and heard. Word spread. They knew that their friend (the father of the *chosson*) was a devout, G-d-fearing Jew, but were never aware of his extraordinary faith in Hashem. That *Shabbos*, the *Rav* addressed the congregation, "We have in our midst an individual of unique spiritual character. It behooves us all to help him in his time of need. Every one of us must repair our inter-relationships, elevate and sanctify our lives, dedicate ourselves with greater fervor to the service of Hashem through Torah study and *tefillah*, prayer. Let it all be a *z'chus*, merit, for the *refuah sheleimah*, full recovery, of the *chosson*." Everyone listened and immediately acted. The community was transformed. Within days, one could hardly recognize its members. To listen to them *davening Shacharis*, the morning prayer, one would think that it was *Neilah*, the *Yom Kippur* closing prayer. They were all on a mission to intercede and catalyze the *chosson's* return to good health.

A few days passed, and the *chosson* went in for a PET scan to determine the status of the growth invading his brain. The doctors looked at the scan and called the chief of medicine, who was just as perplexed as they were. The growth had disappeared as if it had never been there. The chief of medicine told the *chosson* and his parents that the only explanation for this phenomenon was: Heavenly intervention, a miracle! When one has true faith, it is a reality in which he believes on a regular basis. Everyone came together to pray for a miracle for the life of a young man whose entire existence was miraculous.