

TOLDOT

The Meaning
in Suffering

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

How do we find the meaning in and the purpose of suffering? When we can be aware of the purpose and goal, we can more readily put up with pain and suffering. Finding meaning in tragedy, makes the pain more bearable. Pain and suffering whose purpose is known are relatively easy to deal with. The question is how to deal with such difficulties when the meaning is not yet known. Seeking meaning and purpose in suffering, and using the suffering to spur on to new meaning are very productive ways of dealing with life's tragedies, great and small. When we can keep our eyes on life's destination we can more easily get around life's roadblocks and detours.

Text**Beresheet 25:21-25**

Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was



Mosaic from an old synagogue floor in Israel

barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord answered her, "two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb, the first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. Then his brother emerged, holding the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob.

(Continued on page 2)

*Prayer Schedule***SHABBAT****PARASHAT TOLDOT**

Friday, November 20th
Minhah & Arbit 4:30 pm
Candle Lighting 4:28 pm

Saturday, November 21st
Shaharit 8:30 am
Minhah & Arbit 4:00 pm
Motzei Shabbat 5:31 pm

WEEKDAYS

Sunday, November 22nd
Shaharit 7:30 am
Bar Mitzvah Class 8:30 am
Talmud Torah 9:30 am

Mon.-Wed. Nov. 23-25
Shaharit 6:30 am

Thanksgiving Holiday
Thurs. Nov. 26
Shaharit 7:30 am

EREV SHABBAT
PARASHAT VAYETZE

Friday, November 27th
Minhah & Arbit 4:30 pm
Candle Lighting 4:26 pm

(Continued from page 1)

Analysis

Like our first Patriarch and Matriarch, Yishaq and Ribqa had difficulty conceiving. After intensive prayer, and after twenty years, they finally conceived.

However, Ribqa had a very difficult pregnancy. The pain was so unbearable that she wished to die. This pain and suffering led Ribqa to seek out God (through prayer, prophecy, or meditation at a special place.) God answered Ribqa not by stopping the pain, but by giving Ribqa information.

The pain does not stop, but once Ribqa knows the purpose of the pain, the pain is more bearable. She now sees that her pain is part of divine providence; part of which God revealed to her. After she receives the prophecy, we no longer hear about her pain. Even though it probably still existed, Ribqa bore it in silence, knowing that there is a higher purpose and meaning in her difficult pregnancy.

Discussion

Why was it always so difficult for our matriarchs to give birth? Why did God put them through such suffering? (The Talmud explains that God craves the prayers of the righteous. Also, something that comes after a waiting and yearning is more appreciated.)

Just as Ribqa was better able to bear the pain when she knew that it was for a purpose, we are better able to put up with pain when we know that the purpose is great and meaningful. For example, having your tooth knocked out by a bully and having a tooth pulled by the dentist have the same result and could be just as painful. Yet, when the dentist is doing it we know that there is a purpose. That helps us bear the pain. . .

There are things that are so important that we would be willing to put up with suffering in order to achieve them. R. Shimon bar Yohhai has taught us that the Holy One, blessed be

He, gave Israel three great gifts. And all three were given through affliction. The gifts are: Torah, the Land of Israel, and the World to Come. (Berakhot 5a)

Why does it have to be through affliction? Couldn't Hashem have given us good things without having to suffer to achieve it? In addition to the greater appreciation that one has when one has worked hard to attain something, there is also the feeling of accomplishment.

Listen to the words of one of America's great thinkers, and publicists, Thomas Paine. It was the winter of 1776-1777. Washington's army had been routed in New York and was driven across New Jersey. They lay shivering on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River. Washington confided in a letter to a relative, "I think the game is pretty near up." Amid this crisis of morale, Paine implored the colonists not to give up the fight. Paine's words resound as strongly today as then.

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated....

I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves of his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death. (from Bennet, _The Moral Compass_ pp. 298-299)

(Continued on page 3)

In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services in honor of their loved ones.

Sunday / 5 Kislev

Eliyahu ben Yehezkel Itzhak
Silas ben Moshe Kadoorie
Farha bat Simha
Nassim Reuben Suleiman

Monday / 6 Kislev

Marjorie bat Sam Dabby

Tuesday / 7 Kislev

Eliyahu ben Yoseph Ezer

Thursday / 9 Kislev

Itzhak ben Yoseph
Ezra ben Reuven Yitzhaki*
Sholkat bat Zekharia*

Friday / 10 Kislev

Ruhama bat Chana

Shabbat / 11 Kislev

Ludwig Altman
Sasson Shimon Duek
Hacohen
Rachel bat Simha

Yahrzeit names with asterisks are missing contact phone numbers and addresses for family members. To update the database, please call the office at 310.474.0559.

Community News

THANK YOU

to all the dedicated individuals who made Rabbi Ezra Basri's visit to Kahal Joseph a wonderful experience for all participants

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these individuals in your prayers for healing:

Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana ▪ Matilda Louisa ▪ Jack Wickett ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina ▪ Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah Noa bat Sara ▪ Victor ben Pauline ▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪ Moshe ben Naji ▪ Pnina bat Esther ▪ Yosi ben Esther ▪ Victor ben Latif ▪ Ramah Regina bat Farha ▪ Aziza bat Sara

Announcements

Spice Club for Haftara Readers

Wouldn't you like to chant from the Torah? Reserve your haftara portion at 310.474.0559. Schedule time with Saeed & learn your haftara with authentic Baghdadi ta'amim, Iraqi melodies for Torah reading.

Kahal Joseph

Norma & Sam Dabby Talmud Torah

Classes have started. Register now! For more information call 310.474.0559 or e-mail molly@kahaljoseph.org

Send Us Your Ideas

For the betterment of our service to the community at Kahal Joseph, please forward your comments and suggestions to:

president@kahal.org

(Continued from page 2)

A corollary of the above idea is that if we experience suffering and tragedy we should do our best to find meaning or create meaning as a result. Some examples that come to mind are "Mothers Against Drunk Driving" founded by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver. Another is Zichron Menahem, a charitable organization that helps terminally ill children enjoy their few remaining weeks alive founded by a parent of a child that died of cancer. Although the pain does not go away, these are examples of using the pain to ease the pain of others; of creating meaning out of the suffering. Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom