



Parashat Bo



English version

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THE ART OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Martin Seligman, the author of Learned Optimism and founder of modern-day Positive Psychology, writes that successful people are usually positive people. Positive people are masters at the three Ps. They believe that 1. Problems are not **permanent**. 2. Problems are not worse than they are; they are not **pervasive**. 3. Positive people don't take things **personally**.

How does one who is disliked not take it personal? "My Rebbi/ teacher/ friend/boss/ in-laws doesn't like me anymore!" "No one wants to date my daughter/ son!" "Nobody likes Baalei Teshuva" "Nobody likes Sephardim" "Nobody likes Ashkenazim" "Nobody likes Jews" The thought that you are not wanted or liked, by family, by society or by the community, can scar. How do we train ourselves and others to cope with not being liked?

Judaism teaches us that if someone does not like us, it is because G-d does not want them to like us. And if someone does like us, it is because G-d allowed it. It is not that the person decided not to like you. It is that G-d does not want that person to be fond of you, for some reason. It has little to do with that person, and a lot to do with G-d, something that we learn from this week's parashah.

G-d could have taken us out of Egypt with one Plague. Instead, G-d preferred ten plagues to show humanity once and for all, that all of nature is subservient to Him. Exodus is a glimpse of how much G-d is involved in every part of our everyday lives. When G-d introduced Himself at Mt. Sinai,

He presented Himself as the G-d that took us out of Egypt, not as the G-d who created the Universe. Because G-d wants us to recognize Him as forever alive in our every breath, thought, and reality.

R Friedlander points to something that I felt that every Jew who feels disliked deserves to know. When G-d kept His promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their slavery with great wealth, He did so in such an unusual way. G-d asked Moshe to tell the Jews to *borrow* goods from the Egyptians so that they leave with the not returned goods. The Egyptian neighbor, who until now was only disgusted from the Jew, was now ironically pleased to lend their best utensils and possessions to the Jews.

Why did G-d make this seemingly superfluous miracle? G-d could have forced the Egyptians to give up their possessions, even against their will! Why did G-d specifically want the Jew to borrow, and depend on the Egyptian being nice to him? Dependent on the Egyptian liking the Jew?

The answer is because G-d wanted the Jew to know that the antisemitism was only possible because He allowed it. Once G-d wanted it to stop, the Egyptians were happy to do favors for the Jew! All of a sudden, all the gentiles liked the Jews! G-d was showing the world, once and for all, that G-d is in charge if people will like you or dislike you!

Why did G-d want that the Egyptians should not like the Jews until the Exodus? Our Rabbis tell us that there was a reason for this. During the years of the Egyptian exile, the Jew would attempt to blend



and be as Egyptian as possible. G-d did not want us to lose our Jewish identity in Egypt, so He caused the Egyptians to hate us. But now, that the Jews were at the Exodus, G-d wanted to show the Jew, that it was G-d who caused the Egyptian not to like the Jew! G-d preferred that the Jew borrows from the Egyptian, to show, that He is in control of who likes who.

The secret to emotional resilience is to bring G-d into the equation. If you are disliked, and you have no control over it, it is because G-d for whatever reason wills that this person dislikes you.

If you want to do great things and become great, you need to do what is right and ignore what people might say. You cannot anchor yourself on what people think is "normal." After all, there is no one "normal." "Normal" is only a setting on washing machines and dryers. If you follow the Torah's way and you are disliked, then G-d does not want you to be liked for some amazing but unknown reason. It is only to help you, not to hurt you. If you are being the best person you can be, and still you are not liked, G-d has His plan. Only by living this way, we can become emotionally resilient, and our child follow.

One of the most excellent questions to ask someone who is feeling not liked, not accepted, is, "Aside from G-d, which three or four people do you care what they think about what you do or what type of person you are?" If you cared about what everyone thought about you, you would become a slave to society!

I care what my Rebbi thinks about me. I care about what my Rabbi-mentor feels about me. I care what my wife, mother, and father think about me. That's it! From the moment that I embraced this new mindset, I felt like I free man. A real, personal, emotional Exodus!

I began meditating on not caring if others like me, so long I am doing the right thing. What a powerful emotional exercise! Here are some of the thoughts that I came up with; some of them are empowering, and some are just funny!

I don't care if you tell me no when I ask you for a favor. I don't care if you don't want to donate to the causes that I feel important enough to get involved in and collect for. I don't care if you don't like my Sephardic accent, or the fact that I am a Jew. I don't care if no one responds to my ads of Effective Learning Specialist. I don't care if you don't like this article or the way I write.

Wow! That felt so good! That felt awesome to *think* that and *write* that! Can you feel the power in meditating on all the things that you really could not care about? Do you realize how emotionally liberating this can be? If G-d wants me to be disliked, and I am doing the right thing, it means that He has a reason for it!

2019 taught us that people could become addicted to checking if they are liked, and for the dumbest of things. How many hearts were broken because of the lack of a "like"? Whatsapp groups and status, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and LinkedIn have shown us how much people need to feel liked, by anyone, for anything. But what if it is all G-d? What if, for some reason, G-d does not want you to be popular in this area at the moment?

If you are liked or not, it is not "them"; it is G-d. That is what G-d wants. It could be a test, and it could be a blessing. Whatever it is, it is because that is what G-d decided.

So what are the Selfie Steps to cope with not being liked?

- Stop overthinking what you have no control over. Recognize that G-d can switch things around faster than you can blink! He changes people's hearts all the time.
- Meditate often on all the things you do not care about.
- Carefully choose the three or four people that you care what they think about your decisions and behavior.



EMOTIONAL OXYGEN TUBES

At the beginning of the Parasha, before the plague of the locust, G-d tells Moshe, לְמַעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי בְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. I will bring these plagues on Pharaoh, in order for you to tell of it in the ears of your children and grandchildren. What was so special about the plague of the locust that only here, not in reference to any other plague, G-d said that we are to tell our children and grandchildren?

It is interesting. Each plague was a month. A week of plague and three weeks' break. That means that the plague of Firstborn was Nissan, Darkness was Adar, (ליהודים היתה אורה ושמהה וששון ויקר), And Locust was Shevat. Even before this plague of Locusts, in the beginning of Shevat, Pharaoh had tried to bargain. Let only the men go now. The children stay in Egypt. Only the men need to go to serve G-d, not the kids. Moshe said, nothing doing. We are not leaving anyone behind. So Pharaoh refused, and opted for the plague.

In essence, if we wanted to worry about our own spirituality, alone, we could have just left the children behind, for the meantime, while we go to Har Sinai and accept the Torah. But, by staying for another three months, until Pharaoh gave in, by slowing down our own spirituality for the sake of the spirituality of the children, we merited וְיִלְמְדוּ וְיִסְפְּרוּ בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי בְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. The power of connection, that our children will be willing to listen to religion, and to trust in it enough, to pass it down to their own children. Because the only way we can affect our children, to keep them religious, is to slow down for them.

Slowing down does not mean lowering our own level of observance, for their sake. It means having patience with them; it means taking interest in their seemingly simple values. It means recognizing that they are not moving at our pace, and it requires us to learn what is on their mind. To be emotionally present with them.

There is a power-question I use when trying to connect with people. *What do you do in your spare time?* This question helps me find the values of the person I am trying to connect with. And in order

for me to coach someone successfully, I need to build rapport. And rapport is dependent on how well you connect. It is a mistake to think, "I am too much above this", "My Shabbat table should be only Divrei Torah". If you want to influence, you need trust. If you want trust, you need rapport. If you want rapport, you need to slow down.

When R Moshe Feinstein came to test yeshiva bachurim on the Perek they learnt, R Moshe did not end up testing them. He asked them, What do you do in your spare time? They said, "We play basketball". R Moshe opened up the conversation: "In what ways can you play basketball like a Jew, differently from a Gentile?" Because R Moshe knew that to influence, you need rapport, you need to bond. To be Mekarev effectively, you cannot use the "Join Us" method. That one does not work. Effective Kiruv is about getting a person from his own point A to his own point B. From the Jew he is, to the Jew he wants to be. ON THEIR TERMS. Because ***the only way you can connect***, is on their terms.

This reminds me of a story from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. There was once a prince who went through an identity crisis and came to the conclusion that he was really a turkey and not a human being. The king was ready to do anything to cure his son. The finest doctors and psychiatrists tried to cure the prince, all to no avail. The king was at a loss, until a gentle-looking, wise man came to the palace. He offered his help, which the king and queen were ready to accept.

The following day, the prince had company under the table. It was the wise man. "What are you doing here?" asked the turkey prince. "Why are you here?" "I am a turkey" "Well, I am also a turkey," The wise man began to gobble like a turkey and peck at the crumbs on the floor. The prince was convinced. A few days passed in this fashion.

One morning, the wise man signaled to the king to bring him a shirt. He said to the prince, "I don't see any reason a turkey can't wear a shirt." The prince



thought about it and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing shirts. The wise man asked to be brought a pair of pants. He said to the prince, "Is it forbidden for turkeys to wear pants? Of course not!" The prince thought it over and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing pants.

The process continued. The wise man convinced the prince that it was not forbidden for turkeys to eat human food, which surely tasted better. Then came sitting at the table and enjoying human conversation. Within a short time, the turkey prince, although still maintaining that he was a turkey, began conducting himself exactly like a regular person.

So many times, we can't help others because we are so busy with our own spirituality, projects, or just busy being busy. Rabbi YY Jacobson said, in the name of his Rebbi, something very powerful. We know that Reuven saved Yosef from his brothers, by putting him in the pit. Then, the brothers sat down to eat lunch, and during lunch, Shimon and Levi decided to kill Yosef. Yehuda saved Yosef by selling him. Reuven came back to the pit, and Yosef was gone. Reuven tore his clothes, and asked his brothers what they had done. And, now, how was he to face his father?

Rashi asks, where was Reuven at the time of the sale? Why did he disappear when his brothers sat down for lunch? Because Reuven went to do his fasting, sackcloth and ashes, for his hasty act of moving his father's bed next to his mother, Leah's, so many years earlier.

But Reuven! You could have saved us all from 210 years of slavery in Egypt, if you would have just stayed there at the pit and watched over your brother! If you would not have been busy doing

Teshuva, but instead, had kept your eyes on your brother in the pit, you could have gotten forgiveness for your mistake from your father, just by being responsible and saving your brother Yosef's life!!

How many times do we not notice our "brother in the pit", because we are too busy with our own lofty levels of spirituality? How many times in life could we have just said the right thing, or just done the right thing, if we would have not been so busy with our own selves??!!

This reminds me of a sad Mashal. Chaim had been a faithful Jew and was in the hospital, breathing his last. The family called their rabbi and asked him to be with them. As the rabbi stood next to the bed, old Chaim's condition appeared to deteriorate, and he motioned frantically for something to write on. The rabbi lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and Chaim used his last bit of energy to scribble a note before he died. The rabbi thought it best not to look at the note at that time, so he placed it in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as he was finishing his eulogy, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket that he had been wearing when Chaim died. He said, to himself and the crowd, "You know, Chaim handed me a note just before he died. I haven't looked at it, but knowing Chaim, I'm sure there's a word of inspiration there for us all." He opened the note, and read, "Hey, you're standing on my oxygen tube!"

How many times do we not realize that because we are so busy with our own growth, or with our "status", that we are stepping on the emotional oxygen tubes of our loved ones?

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