

May 26 Recognizing That All Things Turn Out for Our Good

Bamidbar In the Wilderness A Spiritually Organized Life

Torah: Num. 1:1-4:20

(1) 1:2. Take the census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, according to their families, according to the houses of their fathers, counting by head the names of all the men. The mixed multitude must have been integrated into the tribes – never hear of it again. They were counted by name, not just by number – G-d knows your name and your number (your place), do you?

(2) 2:2. The children of Israel camped, each one next to his banner, under the ensigns of the house of their fathers; they camped near and all around the tent of meeting. Where are you camping? Have you found your place in the camp of the L-rd?

(3) 3:4. Nadab and Abihu died before the L-rd when they brought strange fire – they had not children. Judaism is generational spirituality. We will always be surrounded by two groups in the L-rd: those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. You remember the first group and receive from them good lessons and recover from bad ones. We pray for the next one and pass on to them good lessons, not the bad ones.

(4) 4:5. At the departure from the camp, Aaron and his sons will come and take down the veil and with it they shall cover the ark of the covenant (of witness). Before they moved, everything was packed, beginning with most important thing – the ark, covered in the veil. How is your packing coming? Do you start with the most important things, or are your heart and life cluttered with things that will get in the way of your journey – and that you will lose at the end of your pilgrimage?

Haftarah: Hos. 1:10-2:20 (2:1-22)

(5) 2:16 [14]. That is why, behold, I want to allure her and bring her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart. Is He speaking to your heart in the wilderness of your life? In the garden or in difficulty, the most important things is that He is speaking to your heart.

(6) 2:13 [11]. I will make to cease her joy, her festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths and all her solemnities. When we are out of sync with the L-rd, all that we do no longer has true meaning and He wants to take us apart, so that we can be brought back to a place where He is central and where nothing else is the centre of our lives. When He is at the centre, everything else fits into place and we can rejoice. Is He your centre, or are you out of sync, where things make less and less sense?

Brit Chadashah: Rom. 9:22-33

(7) 9:24. He has called us, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles. Has He called you? Are you listening? Where we are is not important, listening to His call is. Is your life spiritually organized? As we come to Shavuot, where the camp received its mandate and where it began to get organized for its long walk to the Promised Land, may the L-rd allow us to see our mandate and allow us to become spiritually organize, because often, it is only our spiritual life which we make any sense in this life.

Psalm 122 (Ruth) Jewish Hero: Alastair Brown

As we look at how all things turn out for our good, I want to begin by reading some passages with you

Ps. 119:71 (Hos. 2:14[16]): “It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn Your statutes (That is why, behold, I want to allure her and bring her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart.)”. The most important thing in life is learning and hearing.

Rom. 8:28: “For we know that all things work together for good for those who love G-d and who are called according to His purpose”. Loving G-d and responding to the call of His purposes needs to be the hard drive of our hearts which drives the direction of our lives and how we respond to the vents of our journey.

2 Cor. 4:16-18: “That is why we do not lose courage, and even if our exterior man is destroyed, our interior man is renewed day by day. For our light afflictions of the moment produce for us, beyond all measure and eternal weight of glory, because we look, not at the visible things, but at the invisible – for the visible things are temporary and the invisible are eternal”.

Are you losing courage? Is your outer man being destroyed? We need to see that the greatest affliction this life can throw at us, so that our hearts are smashed and crushed into smithereens, produces for us an immeasurably greater weight of glory, which we cannot yet see, but which is more real and more substantial than the things of this life. Do you understand that the visible things are only temporary (spend some time in a morgue or a dump or a junk yard and find out)? Do you understand that the invisible things of His kingdom are not only more real than anything in this life, but that they are also eternal (permanent)?

Ps. 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the L-rd is the death of His saints”. G-d orchestrates all things in this life to make them all serve His eventual, permanent purposes, be they ever so horrible and unjust or ever so wonderful and righteous. Once our part in this process is over, and we are released from this life, two things travel with us to our Father’s home: our spirit/souls and the contents of our hearts. We leave all the majesty and folly of this life behind and our real, permanent lives begin. This transition from the temporary folly of this withering life into the arms of our living Father is something which is very precious in the sight of the One who is waiting for us.

(Rom. 8:35-39: Matt. 6:19-21)

From these verses, we can see that we need to look first at *final issues*, then *world issues* (hunger, disease, war, injustice, pollution and the ever rising tide of technological advances) and life issues (family, friends, careers, kids, savings, health and what we are going to wear tomorrow) can take on their proper perspective, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

Knowing that all things turn out for good, does not mean that bad things suddenly become good, or that we finally become able to see the silver lining behind every cloud. It means that everything and anything which happens to us in our lives can be used for our good in terms of the final issues, those which are invisible and eternal. Instead of asking, why me, we begin to ask: “how do You want me to respond” and “what is it You want me to learn from this?”

Often the greatest lessons we can learn from the events of our lives is the one which Job eventually learned: G-d can do whatever He wants to whomsoever He wants, whenever He wants to do it.

Probably the next is that so much of what happens is really none of our business, because we cannot be aware of all the multiple factors which went into determining how they turned out. This does not mean we become either convinced optimists or stubborn pessimists. It means that we understand that we are to do our duty and are to seek for righteousness, mercy and judgment, and thus sow to the Spirit, in ways which will have a positive eternal impact in this life. How they turn out in this life, pales according to our understanding of how they will turn out in the next life. It is not so important which good guys finish last in this life, it is more important which bad guys finish last in the life which is to come.

If we measure good in terms of personal or life issues, then whatever does not benefit our lives personally, or whatever does not benefit the lives of those who are important to us, could be seen as a loss and as bad, and many believers feel that because of this, their lives are a disaster, because world and life things keep going wrong. Also, if we look at world issues (abortion, pollution, disease, war, terrorism, politics, hunger and poverty) and do not see improvements, then when bad things happen at this level, or when good things do not happen at this level (civic, provincial, national and international), we could see this as bad and as not good. This is what Paul meant when he said that if we only have hope in this life, we are the most miserable of men.

I look at fashion and at finance and even at science and technology as a series of carts pulled by donkeys who are forever reaching out for the carrot they can never have, if all that we can hope for is in this life. I want to live a good life, safe from alarm and safe from want and from diseases and tragedy, but not because all that I can ever hope for is what I am able to wring out of this life. I want to live a life which is as free of distraction as possible, so that I can apply myself to the things of the life which is to come.

As I pursue this objective, the more I understand about His control – and about the lack of control this fragile life has to offer and when things happen that appear to spin my life, and my world and even the whole world, out of control, I do not lose hope and struggle with all my might to hold back the dike or outrageous fortune back with as many fingers as I can stick into it – and I cling to the invisible life which is to come and I ask myself a series of important “Job questions”.

I first ask myself if I still believe in His ultimate control, both of the events of this life and of the events of my life. Then I ask myself what it is that He would have be do (if anything) in this situation (often you have to hunker down and survive before you can move on to thrive). I want to plan ahead, recover and build for the future, but I also want to supersede this activity by making my building for the eternal future the primary focus of my life. When I do this and as long as I do this, then all things work together for my good. If I ever stop doing this, stop putting the eternal, invisible things of his kingdom first, then world issues and personal issues will only make sense if my personal, temporary agenda is working.

Too many people loss this spiritual, eternal perspective and they lose the ability to understand what is really happening in their life and in the world at large. This is the true meaning of the Book of Revelation – life may appear messy, because of the mess people are making of it, but in the final analysis the divine order of heaven is never disturbed and will one day break forth and cause the mess to disappear and burn.

What do we do in the interim? Principally, we have to understand that the L-rd has both granted all mankind free will and dignity and at the same time retained absolute sovereignty over the final direction of all the affairs of mankind – personal, world and final. So what He allows, He allows so that we can react to it from

a final perspective. When this happens we cannot suffer final loss and this is the only kind of loss that really matters forever – all other loss pales and is temporary in light of eternity.

Also when we are afflicted, we can learn to hold lightly on to the things of this world and we can learn not to be pulled into the value system of this world and this is a valuable lesson. When we apply the values of the world to come into the situations of this world, then that which is both invisible and eternal, grows and prospers, even if that which is physical and temporary diminishes and is lost. It will one day be lost anyway. He is not foolish who gives up that which he cannot keep, in order to gain that which he cannot lose.

When we recognize that all things will work out for our final good, then we understand that whatever loss we suffer will also carry with it a response which will increase our eternal portfolio. This will not always at the expense of our earthly one, but we must live lives where that which is eternal always trumps that which is temporary – where the things of this life are treated in such a way as they are obliged to yield the right of way to the things of the world to come.

If we must suffer loss, we want to learn to suffer loss in those things which do not matter eternally, and so we rejoice and have renewed strength in things which tear apart our world and indeed which tear apart the whole world. We do not passively sit by and smile as Rome burns – we look beyond the flames to the Kingdom and ask the Lord what it is He wants us to do (which ways of escape He has prepared for us) and then with our eyes firmly fixed on the eternal things of His kingdom, with renewed strength we face the things of this life and of this life, peacefully and even joyfully, while we wait for those eternal, permanent things which are to come.

We still see such horrors as the holocaust and the slaughter of the native peoples and natural disasters and the death of innocent babies, as horrific valleys through which we must pass, weeping and in incredible pain, but they remain only valleys through which we pass and not where we truly live. Along the way we can bring comfort and healing and teach others how to be released from the chains of this world (with its hate, lust, anger, revenge and greed) and walk with us through the vales of pain to the house of peace and eternal comfort.

If what we are mourning, or what we are hoping to achieve does not have an eternal shelf life, then we had better only give it the attention and the effort it deserves. We may be mocked and derided for this perspective, as if we were hard hearted and did not really care for the suffering of this life. We may also be mocked and derided for not focusing on the pursuit of riches and fame as the primary focus of our lives, but we know different.

We do not say that all the evil things of this world will bring about good in this life, as if God were somehow disguising good in an evil packet. What we say is that none of the evil which is done in this life will escape the eternal scrutiny of the life which is to come. This is how all things will turn out for our good, both in this life, as our eternal perspective strengthens us and brings us both joy and perseverance (I Corin. 15:58) and in the next life where our invisible spiritual portfolio will finally mature and be ready to cash in.

This life and this world are only places we are journeying through. Whether our journey is easy and good, or evil and difficult, both temporary conditions only have meaning and should only have impact for us in terms of their potential to impact the life which is to come.

Do you realize this wonderful truth? How are you letting all the things in your life turn out for eternal good? It is only as we apply the hope and the values of the life to come that all things turn out for good in the life

which really matters. May we be repeatedly set free from the grass which withers and learn to live for the day which will never end. Let's pray.