

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi David Nakash

Difficult or Impossible?

What's the difference between something that is difficult and impossible? Impossible means that no matter how hard you try or how hard you push, it never can happen nor will happen. Difficult means that it's not going to be easy and it's not going to be comfortable, but if you push enough and you persevere enough, you will be successful.

Life is difficult, for sure. It's not easy, but if we only knew what we're capable of, and that we could do it, we'd push some more.

In the Creation of Man, Hashem said, "Let us make man" (Bereishis 1:26). Hashem is the only Creator of the world. Who does "us" refer to?

The Baal Shem Tov explains that Hashem was referring to "Me and you," Hashem and man. G-d and man together will create man. Hashem will give a person everything they need—personality, physical capabilities, inner potentials—and you will be capable of overcoming any test. But Hashem needs us to be His partner. He needs us to reach those potentials and pass those tests.

Hashem gave us those powers with which we can extract the potential we have within and realize ourselves as the human being we are capable of becoming. It's not impossible. It's just difficult.

Charlie Harary was once on a basketball team and there were just

a few seconds left when the coach put him in the game. It was an important game, and with one more shot, his team would win. Lo and behold, he was passed the ball and he had an open shot. But then he had second thoughts. "Maybe I'm going to miss," he said to himself. And with that, he passed the ball along to a teammate. His teammate, with barely any time left, chucked the ball toward the basket, missed, and with that came the buzzer. They had lost the game.

After the game, the coach approached Charlie. "Why didn't you take the shot?" he asked. "I didn't think I'd make the shot," he replied, simply. "I've been a coach for thirty years," went on the coach. "I have a knack for picking up on the strengths of each player. If I put you in the game, the means that I believe you can take the shot and make the shot. If you were on the court and you got the ball, that means I trusted you."

That is the exact way it is with Hashem. He understands us, believes in us and sees our strengths. He puts us in challenging circumstances, exactly where we are at a certain place and a certain time, because He knows that we can overcome those tests. The fact that we are there is proof that we can do it. It's not impossible; it's difficult. But we can be successful.

The TorahAnyTimes is a publication of



Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik

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L'iluy Nishmat
 R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel Pinchos
 Manish ben Esther
 Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov
 Bechor ben Rivkah
 Shlomo Zalman ben R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi
 Esther bat haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l
 Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber
 Miriam bat Yeshayahu
 Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim
 L'refuah Sheleima
 Deena bat Shoshana
 Chaya Raizel bat Dena
 Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva
 Reuven ben Rochel
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Rabbi Yosef Palacci

Don't Rush

Within the first month of a young man's marriage, he once brought his wife a cup of water. Suddenly, though, the entire cup ended up spilling on her. But his wife remained unreactive, entirely. Shocked, the husband asked his wife how she had restrained herself so well from saying even a word. "How are you not upset at all?" he asked her.

"Obviously, you wouldn't just come and pour a cup of water on me. There's something behind what happened. So why would I get upset?"

Sometimes, our reactions are automatic and don't account for any pause between the incident and our reaction. If we can take a moment to

pause and think why someone acted a certain way, we'd more often than not draw the conclusion that there was something unaware to us that prompted their behavior.

On another occasion, I was at my nephew's wedding, and someone I didn't know began opening a bottle of soda. Instantly, it started bursting and went all over me and my suit. What would you do?

The fellow who had opened the soda didn't apologize, but rather turned to me and said, "Gam zu l'tovah—It's for the good." On my end, though, what should I do? I judged him favorably. Should I get angry at him? It's not that he shook the bot-

tle and then opened it. It probably fell on the floor sometime before, he was unaware of it, and he simply went to open it. The bottom line is that I needed to think about some ways this could have happened without jumping to conclusions that he was to blame.

When you look at another person as an elevated person and someone to respect and admire, then you don't come to the conclusion that he wishes to cause you any distress or harm. When you do this, you're a step closer to giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Las Vegas Story

David was the owner and CEO of the Supersized Kitchen, a company that sells commercial kitchen supplies. At great personal expense, he decided to attend a trade show in Las Vegas to boost his client base. He took out a \$50,000 loan to buy expensive radio ads in the Vegas area, and rented a billboard to advertise his products.

A day before his trip, he went to consult his Rav about the logistics of spending Shabbos in Las Vegas. "David," said his Rav, "I wish you'd come to see me earlier, because I would have advised you not to go. But if I understand correctly, you've already got tickets and reservations for the show."

"More than that, Rebbe," said David. "I took a loan out on my house to pay for advertising in the Las Vegas area. I put up a billboard

with my business name and phone number. If I don't go, I'll lose a small fortune." "That makes things much more difficult," said the Rav. "I think this trip could be spiritually harmful for you, David."

David knew exactly what the Rav was talking about. During a more difficult period in his spiritual life a few years before, he'd work through it with the help of mussar seforim, lots of prayers, his Rav, and siyata dishmaya. But by spending time in Las Vegas, a place not known for its elevated morals, he knew he was putting himself in harm's way.

"Think it over," said the Rav. "You're stronger than you were a few years ago, and I'm not telling you what to do. Sometimes, when we make a great sacrifice for kedusha, the reward is many, many times over from Above."

David cancelled the trip.

The radio ads, however, were still running and the large billboard was suspended over one of the major freeways near the show. But with no physical presence at the show, it was a colossal waste of money. Or so he thought.

The phone rang. "Hello, is this Supersized Kitchen?" asked the polished voice. "It is," David replied, reluctantly. "This is Susan from NBC News. We are working on a project highlighting small businesses across the United States. We'd like to highlight your niche and speak about your business and where it is heading, and how our team of experts can help you grow. This will give your business exposure and free advertising throughout the country. I've researched your business online and I like what I saw. Your products are unique and well made, and your prices are very competitive."

David was dumbstruck. “How did you get my number?” he asked. “Well, actually it was a coincidence. I was in Vegas on an assignment and I was driving back to the airport and I saw your billboard. A few seconds later, I turned on the radio and I heard a jingle: ‘Supersized Kitchen is the only way to go.’ I thought, well, this is a really strange coincidence. Maybe it’s a sign which business I should choose.”

The effect was immediate. David had two new business employees who were kept busy from morning until night, and before long, his fledgling business doubled both in size and profit.

One of the most difficult nisyonos that we face regarding kedusha involves situations to which we must expose ourselves in the pursuit of a parnassah. But ask yourself this, every time: Do I really need to do this?

Do I really need to be there? Maybe there’s a different way. And if you have to go, say to yourself as you head out to work: “I will be on guard and vigilant to the extreme to protect my eyes and myself from the tumah (impurity) out there.”

Once you have done so, give some tzedakah, say some Tehillim, and Hashem will protect you on your travels.

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

A Divine Gift

The Sefer Avoda She’balev by the Skulener Rebbe zt”l comments on the blessing, “Pokeiach Ivrim—Hashem opens up the eyes of those who cannot see.” How interesting it is that during the night, our eyes are closed. We cannot see. In the morning, we open our eyes and magically we are able to see the entire world. There is no greater kindness from Hashem, writes the Skulener Rebbe, than being able to see in this world.

Some time ago, I had the tremendous merit to dance with a chosson,

groom. But not just any chosson. A chosson who does not have the gift of sight. Lavi Greenspan. I danced at that wedding with such joy, knowing that I am dancing with a tzaddik. We learn every Thursday night, when Lavi calls me and we delve into one particular point on the Parsha. One night, about a year ago, after we finished learning, Lavi said, “Rebbe, I want to buy you a sefer.” “Lavi,” I said, “thank you very much, but Baruch Hashem, I have a nice seforim collection.” “You don’t understand,” said Lavi. “Rebbe, after 120 years, I’m going to go to Shamayim and they’re going to ask me which seforim I

looked into and read. But I can’t see. So I’m going to say, ‘I bought a sefer for Rabbi Goldwasser and he did the learning with his eyes for me.’”

I hung up the telephone that night and I thought to myself, “Master of the World, what a gift we all have.” How careful we have to be with that precious gift of sight, of seeing all the good things in this world, of seeing the good in others, of seeing pages of seforim, of seeing the Daf Gemara, of seeing all the mitzvos that we can look at. Those are for our eyes. And of course we will be very careful not to see the things that we shouldn’t.

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Their Side of the Story

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter zt”l used to say, “Before I learned about Mussar and self-improvement of our moral and ethical character, I used to get upset with everyone except myself. Once I began studying Mussar, I realized that

I was angry at everyone, including myself. After a while of learning Mussar, I realized that I was angry at myself and no one else.”

The harder it is to judge someone favorably, the more reward we earn. But it’s not a zero sum game. It’s not that you must look

at someone else who’s doing something wrong and say, “He’s doing a mitzvah!” That’s judging someone one hundred percent favorably. Even if it’s sixty percent or forty percent or twenty percent. “He’s not doing something right, but he doesn’t know better.” Or, “He knows better,

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but the pressure he's under must be unbelievable," that too is judging someone favorably.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Celebrate the Opportunity

The Baal HaTanya in his masterpiece (Tanya, Ch. 27) discusses the verse in the Shema: "And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, which you stray after" (Bamidbar 15:39). Sometimes, writes the Baal HaTanya, people are so perturbed by the fact that they have to deal with and struggle with instincts, proclivities, cravings, challenges, and trials, both internal and external. They feel that it is below them, as the Yiddish expression goes, "Ess past nisht." How can this happen to me? It makes them feel so guilty and horrible about themselves. This, of course, only contributes to our downfall because once we feel that we are disgusting and despicable, we'll

do anything to feel good about ourselves or we'll just think to ourselves, "Who cares? If I'm garbage, so garbage can pursue garbage."

The Baal HaTanya says that this is a form of misplaced arrogance. The feeling that it can't be that we'd be dealing with this unless we are completely messed up or we are just pure evil or we must repress the urge and deny it is misunderstanding what a human being is. The fact that the Torah tells us, "And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, which you stray after" means that our heart and our eyes can go astray. That is inherent in the fabric of the human condition and the Jewish condition, specifically part of the personality the Baal HaTanya calls the 'Beinoni,' the ordinary human

being.

On the contrary, the Baal HaTanya writes, celebrate the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of, "And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, which you stray after." When you experience such a deep instinct, and at that moment you can fill it and acknowledge it, you can say, "I'm going to choose to follow my values and my truest, deepest calling and the path that is going to bring me closer to the people and the life that I really cherish."

Celebrate that moment. Celebrate that opportunity. Don't get upset at yourself that you have this struggle. Celebrate the fact that you have the opportunity to introduce moral clarity, holiness, and infinite power into a world of fragmentation and temptation.

Rabbi Binyomin Weinrib

A Good Chevra

The Gemara (Succah 52b) gives us the ultimate strategy that one should use when he finds himself in a nisayon (test):

"If this degenerate (i.e. the evil inclination) meets you, drag him to the study hall." In this way, you will be able to overcome your temptation to sin.

The Gemara, however, does not tell us that a person needs to go to the beis midrash, study hall, and learn. The Gemara strictly states that you should drag him to the beis midrash.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l ex-

plains that when a person is alone, the yetzer hara has the capability of attacking them with a vengeance. The angel of Eisav wrestled with Yaakov Avinu specifically when he was alone and apart from his family (Bereishis 32:24). Precisely at that vulnerable moment, the angel of Eisav seized the opportunity. The solution is to therefore bring the yetzer hara to the beis midrash and surround yourself with good people. Even if you are not learning or davening in the beis midrash, just go there. Go to a place where you are going to be surrounded

by a chevra (other people). Be around a good group of friends, and through that, you'll be better able to overcome the challenge.

When you are alone, the challenges are so much greater. Surround yourself with a good circle of friends who will be a positive influence on you and encourage you, and give you the strength to overcome the yetzer hara.

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