

You Don't Say

written by Ozer Bergman

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A friend was upset recently and e-mailed me. He had seen—on a website that attempts to spread the teachings of Rebbe Nachman z”l (Hebrew for *zikhrono livrakhah*, may his memory be for a blessing)—that the Holocaust was good. And, that in order to hasten the arrival of Mashiach, we would need to thank God for that good. The Holocaust was a specific example, but the rule being espoused was: The only way to reach Mashiach/healing/redemption was to thank God for even what seems bad. My friend was beside himself for a few reasons.

One was, how is it possible to say that the Holocaust (or similar cruel, murderous and “malice aforethought” events) were good?! That the wanton spilling of Jewish blood could possibly be good?!

Another reason was: Even if it can somehow be explained that such things are good, how could one state so blatantly, without any explanation? How could one give such a response to a victim of such a tragedy?!

A number of points need to be made, but in a blog only some of these can be addressed, and only somewhat adequately. First, we need to know why God created the universe. The answer given in many of our classic works (*Emunot v’Deiot*, *Pardes Rimonim Etz Chaim* and others) is that God wanted to bestow good on an other. That

being the case, everything that happens is either an immediate expression of good, or will—*ultimately, somehow*—lead to good. (Obviously that postponed good will have to outweigh anyway undesired effect(s) its cause(s) engendered.) Of course, one might well wonder, why pain and suffering were necessary to bring about the good, but that's another way of asking the age old question of why evil has to exist at all!

Rebbe Nachman z"l reformulates the above reason for Creation in a practical, but seemingly provocative way. He teaches (*Likutey Moharan* I, 65:3) that none of the suffering a person undergoes is bad at all, that pain and suffering is a big favor from God. Of course, what's too often overlooked when studying this passage is that the Rebbe says "*chas v'shalom*," God forbid, that a person should suffer. (That means you shouldn't look for trouble!) Furthermore, the Rebbe does not say, and certainly does not expect, that you or I should instantly and automatically absorb and begin to live by this perception.

When did Rebbe Nachman give this lesson? He gave it after his son Shlomo Ephraim z"l died in infancy. The Rebbe *cried*. It *hurt him*. In the overall context of the lesson, one can sense, perhaps even see, that the Rebbe is trying to draw into the world, in a different way, under unsought circumstances, the good he had expected his son would bring.

What should or should not be put on a blog (or web site) is not a new question at all. One has to bear in mind the old adage: Not everything you think should you say. Not everything you say should you write. Not everything you write should you print. When answering a person in the midst of a crisis, one has to know that most people in pain don't need theology or even *emunah* (faith). (Surprised? See what Rebbe Shimon ben Elazer says in *Avot* 4:23.) They are more likely to need caring—for example, silence, some space or a hug.

Finally, from *Shivchey HaBaal Shem Tov* (*Praises of the Baal*

Shem Tov), a story (#111).

Reb Nachman Horodenker z"l [Rebbe Nachman's paternal grandfather, for whom he was named], was the type of person who said about anything he saw or personally experienced, "It's good and it is for the good." His faith was as solid as an iron pillar.

Once, some of the czar's soldiers were quartered in Jewish homes of Medzhibuz (where the Baal Shem Tov lived). The Baal Shem Tov told Reb Nachman Horodenker to pray that the soldiers should move out of the Jewish homes. Reb Nachman Horodenker said to him, "It's for the good." The Baal Shem Tov answered, "It's a very good thing that you weren't around in the time of Haman. You would have said that his decree was also good! It worked out for you only because they hanged Haman, which was also good!"

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