

Sermon/Drasha Parshas Tzav/Zachor "Make a Lemonade Stand"
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In 2700 B.C.E, the Emperor of China had a problem. Something was damaging his precious mulberry trees. So what does a smart man do when he has a problem? He asks his wife for help.

The Emperor asked his wife to try to find out what was damaging his mulberry trees. The empress noticed that a drab colored moth was laying tiny eggs on a mulberry leaf. Each egg, she saw, hatched into a caterpillar that ejected a thread which it wrapped around its body until it formed a cocoon. She dropped the cocoon into hot water and saw a single thread begin unwinding itself. And what a thread it was!

The empress observed the fineness and beauty of the thread. She unwound it completely and found it to be a half mile long from that single cocoon. And she thought that these fine threads might be made into cloth. You've probably already guessed that the empress had discovered the material we now call silk.

Soon the Chinese developed a loom on which the silk could be woven. And that silk became very big business for the Chinese.

Their silk cloth was in such demand that later, the Romans are said to have weighed the silk before buying it and then paid an equal weight of gold for it. Chinese silk became so valuable, and was in such high demand, that something fascinating happened: Quickly, the Chinese began growing mulberry trees only for the purpose of providing moths with leaves on which to lay their eggs so that the production of silk could be increased!

Many great discoveries in history, like that of penicillin, were serendipitous; although guided by Hashem, they seemed to 'have just happened.' However, some discoveries -- like that of silk -- came while trying to solve a problem.

There are two ways of dealing with problems. One coping strategy is disengagement. Avoid the problem and hope a solution comes -- but in the meantime, sweep the problem under the carpet, and hope it will go away.

Engagement, an active coping strategy, means: Take the bull by the horns. I have a problem, but my problem isn't really a problem. It's an opportunity. And, as the saying goes, I'm going to take that lemon and make it into lemonade.

In the Purim story the Jewish people had a giant, sour lemon; faced with Haman's evil threats of annihilation, they were terrified of their impending doom. But with guidance from Mordechai and Esther, the power of their return to Hashem not only reversed the evil decree, but was so complete that it brought them to new spiritual heights and was the impetus for renewing their acceptance of the Torah (*kimu v'kiblu*).

They had gained a new appreciation of the Torah and mitzvos, as the verse from *Esther 8:16* is explained: "*The Jews had **light**, happiness, rejoicing and splendor.*" Light refers to the Torah; After being forced to turn inward and perceive Hashem internally, the Jewish people attained profound Divine knowledge and were able to tap into the most inner recesses of the Torah.

Do we have problems, or opportunities? It all depends on your perspective.

Many years ago, a large American shoe manufacturer sent two sales reps out to different parts of the Australian outback to see if they could drum up some business among the Aborigines. Some time later the company received telegrams from both agents.

The first one said, "No business here. Natives don't wear shoes."

The second one said, "Great opportunity here -- natives don't wear shoes!"

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade" is a proverbial phrase used to encourage optimism and a can-do attitude in the face of adversity or misfortune. Do you know where the phrase comes from?

It was first used in a 1915 obituary that was published for dwarf actor Marshall Wilder. Marshall Pinckney Wilder was a famous actor, humorist and sketch artist who was one of the first persons with a disability to become a celebrity on his own terms. In 1883 Wilder traveled to London where he became a favorite of the British Royal Family. While still the Prince of Wales, King Edward VII became an admirer of Wilder and over the years would attend nearly twenty of his performances.

Though nearly forgotten today, Wilder was heralded in his lifetime and did not let his dwarfism be an excuse for cheap entertainment. Wilder shunned offers by showmen like P.T. Barnum to instead become an established legitimate stage actor and sketch artist.

And in his obituary, it was written:

He picked up the lemons that Fate had sent him and started a lemonade-stand.

Start your own lemonade stand. And the first of three ingredients is to start living by stop worrying.

Mark Twain said: *My life has been filled with calamities, some of which actually happened.* There seems to be nothing more fictitious than the worry that goes on in our heads -- and there's a study that proves it. Researchers at the University of Cincinnati found that eight-five percent (yes - 85%) of what we worry about *never happens*. Moreover, the study found that 79% of us handle the 15% that does happen in ways that surprise us with our ability to turn the situation around.

Psalm 37 begins with the words : *L'David, al tischar ba'm'ray'im Of David, don't fret.*

Verse 8 repeats the advice: *Al tischar, ach l'ha'ray'ah Do not fret -- it only causes harm.*

The English word fret comes from the a Middle English word meaning 'to devour' -- similar to the Old High German *frezzan*, to devour (like the Yiddish, 'to fress'). The Hebrew is *charah* --

which has at its root the idea of burning or blazing up. Little blazes of distress, eating away at your heart.

King David says something like this in Psalm 37:25 *Na'ar hayisi gam zakanti I was once young, now I am old*

King David is saying, "I've seen many things, suffered many burdens, and learned many lessons. Based on a lifetime of experience, my advice is: 'Put out the fire. Stop eating yourself up (don't be a fress face!) and don't fret. It only causes harm.' "

Two friends, Joe and Sam, who hadn't seen each other for some time, met on the street.

Joe: 'How are things?'

Sam: 'I have a mountain of credit card debt, I've lost my job, last week my car was stolen, and now our house is about to be repossessed, but I'm not worried about any of it. You see, I've hired a professional worrier. He does all my worrying for me, and that way I don't even have to think about it.'

'That's fantastic!' Joe said. 'How much does your professional worrier charge for his services?'

'Fifty thousand a year.'

'Fifty thousand a year? Where are you going to get that kind of money?'

'I don't know. That's his worry.'

Ingredient #1 in your lemonade stand is to make a choice: Let go of worry. As hard as it may be to imagine, you have the potential to not only ease your worrying, but to move past it altogether.

A second ingredient: All Olympians have outsized athletic talent and event-specific skills. What separates the medalists from the non medalists, however, often comes down to psychology.

Basketball legend Michael Jordan said:

I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.

What an amazing statement! Jordan said, "I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Succeeding by failing? How does that work? Through Healthy Perfectionism.

Is perfectionism good? It depends. Perfectionists come in two flavors: maladaptive (unhealthy) and adaptive (healthy).

Unhealthy perfectionism, being haunted by past and future mistakes, is a huge handicap. But

healthy perfectionism is associated with greater success in many of life's arenas, including but not exclusive to top-level sports.

Healthy perfectionists are conscientious people with high standards for themselves and, often, for others as well. But these standards do not preclude them from rolling with life's punches. And not only do they roll with life's punches -- but they learn from the punches they absorb, and avoid the same punch the next time around.

In the Book of Proverbs, King Solomon said: "*The righteous person falls seven times and gets up. The evil person falls just once.*" We see that the righteous person is not defined as someone who never makes a mistake. Rather, the person who achieves greatness is one who keeps trying again and again. He sees frustration as only a passing nuisance and therefore never gives up. In fact, his falling seven times *is precisely* how he became great!

As an African proverb says, *Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.* Healthy perfectionists have VERY high standards -- but at the same time, aren't haunted by past mistakes but learn from them. So, the second ingredient in your lemonade stand: Become great from your mistakes

The third and final ingredient.

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for G-d to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements and to store his few possessions.

But then one day, after scavenging for food he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke billowing up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stung with grief and anger. "G-d, how could you do this to me!" he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him.

"How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man, of his rescuers.

They replied, "We saw your smoke signal."

It's easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because Hashem is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering.

When she was just a little girl, Esther became an orphan when her father and mother died. Mordecai, her cousin, raised Esther from childhood, as if she were his own daughter. Esther was later selected as one who would be introduced to the king.

Why didn't Esther have parents?

Haman told Achashvarosh that they would be successful in killing the Jews because Haman descended from Esau who excelled in *Kibud av va'aim* (the mitzvah of honoring parents). Esau

put on his Shabbos clothing every time he fed his parents! In honor of Esau's outstanding fulfillment of this mitzvah, Haman believed his efforts would proceed unimpeded.

Esther, however, cried every day because she couldn't take upon herself the mitzva of *Kibud av va'aim*. Esther was transformed through her tears and pain in not having the ability to honor her parents. In the great merit of her longing to do the mitzvah, Esther became extremely close to Hashem; and so, her longing to do the mitzvah was considered on a par with Aisav's fulfillment of the mitzvah -- and she was able to counteract and nullify the merit Haman had through Esau!

No one wants to be stranded on a desert island, or to grow up without parents. But a key 'ingredient in our lemonade stand' is to realize that even with the bad things, the potential for good exists; an unexpected rescue ship, or a difficult lot in life resulting in a personal transformation.

We mentioned that the phrase 'taking lemons and making a lemonade stand' originated with the obituary of Marshall Wilder, the dwarf actor. In 1940, a poetic rendition of the phrase appeared in *The Rotarian*:

*Life handed him a lemon,
As Life sometimes will do.
His friends looked on in pity,
Assuming he was through.
They came upon him later,
Reclining in the shade
In calm contentment, drinking
A glass of lemonade.*

Everyone experiences bad situations at some point. Adversity can happen as a result of a death, loss of financial stability or other factors beyond our control. Making lemonades of the lemons handed to you requires:

- 1) Letting go of worry. High a professional worrier, if you need to. We have one -- Hashem! It's OK to fress on hamentashen, but don't fress on yourself. Make a decision to let go.
- 2) Realizing you can become great *through* your mistakes and setbacks. Michael Jordan said he succeeded because he failed. More significantly, King Solomon said that a tzadik rises precisely because he falls.
- 3) When presented with a lemon, have awareness that Hashem is 'at work.' You know those signs on the road, 'Men at Work'? Hashem is at work, preparing good things and giving us the chance to change for the better.

Like Esther, your silkworms aren't problems; they're beautiful silk.