

## Word for Word

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## Having This World and the World-to-Come

 THE BAAL SHEM TOV ONCE SAID TO SOMEONE, "IF YOU RECEIVE EVERYTHING that happens to you with love for God, you'll have both this world and the World-to-Come." The man answered, "May God, blessed be He, help me to receive everything with love." "Well spoken," said the Besht.

When a person accepts everything that happens to him, even what seems bad, with love, he has "this world"—he enjoys his life now. Because of his piety, he also inherits the World-to-Come. The Besht taught his followers to have faith and rely on God in all things. If so, this man was right—as the Besht acknowledged—to ask God's help to attain faith and trust. One must certainly train oneself by saying, when bad things happen, "Everything God does is for good." But one must also pray to be able to take this to heart and actually receive everything with love. One can only learn to rely on God by relying on God's help in attaining this precious, pious quality.<sup>44</sup>


## Trusting in God's Goodness

 TWO GREAT DISCIPLES OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV, RABBI YAAKOV YOSEF OF Polnoye and Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, were once traveling from Nemirov to Medzibuz, to spend the Sabbath with their master. On the way, they came up behind a carriage that was having problems with its wheels and moving very slowly. When the two rabbis saw that a high government official was inside, they were afraid to pass it on the side of the road, so they also had to travel slowly behind it. "Oy, oy," said Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, "This is causing me grief. If this keeps up, we won't reach the Baal Shem Tov for the Sabbath." Then, remembering his piety, he muttered, "Everything God does is for good." Rabbi Nachman said, "I trust that this is good and for good. It's not only 'for good' later, it's 'good' now too, you'll see!" "God-willing," said his friend.

As they traveled on, they came to a narrow section of the road where there was no place to go off to the side on the right or left. One wagon had broken down and many others—all loaded with barrels of milk—had backed up behind it unable to pass. But when the official's carriage reached the spot, he yelled at them to clear the way for him, and the gentiles had to unload the milk barrels from the disabled wagon and push it to the side. Then, immediately, all the other wagons were able to travel, including the official's carriage and the rabbis' carriage. A short distance farther on, the official turned off onto another road and the two rabbis were able to speed ahead on their way to Medzibuz. At that moment, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef also realized that the earlier delay of getting caught behind the official's slow-moving carriage was "for good," because the men had only moved the broken wagon out of the way because of him; who knows how long they would have been delayed otherwise?

When they recounted the incident to the Baal Shem Tov, he told them that they were on different levels in their belief in divine providence. "You," he said to Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, who had been upset, "felt that the delay caused by the official's carriage was bad now, bad in itself, though you reminded yourself of your trust that it would be for good later. But you," he said to Rabbi Nachman, "trusted that it was good at that very moment. Although the good would only be revealed later, your trust was so strong, you felt certain that what happened was good now. There are different levels in faith and trust," said the Besht. "In the story of Rabbi Akiba with his donkey, the rooster, and the torch, he said after each seemingly bad event, 'Everything God does is for good.' He trusted that what seemed bad would eventually be for good. Yet, though he trusted that good would come of it, he felt upset as it occurred. When a person has this kind of belief, God fulfills his faith and trust by turning the bad to good. But there's an even higher level of faith and trust, as in the story of Rabbi Akiba's master, Nachum Ish Gam-Zu\*, who always said, 'This *also* is for good'—that is, what happened is *itself* good; there's nothing bad about it. He didn't just console himself that in the future good would come of it. He felt at the very moment the seemingly bad event occurred that *this also is good now* and that what seems bad is really *better* than it would be if there were revealed good. When a person has this great faith and trust, God does more than in the other case: He changes what seems bad to be even better than if it had been revealed good. It's like what happened to both of you with the official's carriage. Not only wasn't it bad, it was very good, because if the official hadn't been there, the broken-down wagon wouldn't have been cleared from the road. If something that seems bad happens to a Jew, God-forbid, he should consider it right then and there to be actually and certainly good. Then, God, in the merit of his strong faith and trust, will help him by turning what seems bad to the best good possible. But what is the very highest level of faith and trust? The truth is, the thought that something is bad should never even occur to us at all. It's not enough to say: 'This *also* is for good.' Why should we even have to say 'also'?—since *there isn't anything bad at all. What is bad is good.*" After pausing, he looked at both of his disciples one after the other and said, "*There is no bad or evil.*" They then realized that this was the exalted level in faith of their holy master.<sup>45</sup>

### *This Is Not for Good*

 RABBI NACHMAN OF HORODENKA'S PIOUS CUSTOM WAS TO SAY ABOUT everything that happened to him, that it was "good and for good." His faith was as strong as an iron pillar. Once, when the Polish army barracked soldiers in Jewish homes in Medzibuz, which caused great inconvenience and suffering, the Besht told Rabbi Nachman to pray for this to stop. Rabbi Nachman answered piously, "This too

\* Nachum "This-also."

## The Leaf

EXT. BST IN A CARRIAGE WITH DISCIPLES, INCLUDING SHIMON. ONWARD THEY TRAVELED THROUGH THE DAY UNTIL THEY STOPPED, GOT DOWN AND THE BST LED THEM TO SIT UNDERNEATH A LARGE TREE.

BST

Look at this field. Do you not think  
that Hashem's hand is present in  
every little thing that happens?

They look out for a few moments. In front of them, a leaf floats down and lands just a few feet away.

SHIMON

Holy Besht, I don't doubt that Hashem  
plays a role in everything, but can  
Hashem be bothered with little things  
like that lowly leaf that the wind  
has just blown our way?

BST

Absolutely, Shimon, even that leaf.  
Did you see how it twisted and turned  
in the breeze before it came to rest  
in front of us?

SHIMON

Yes?

BST

Well, every turn was ordained by  
Hashem. And the place it has come  
to rest. That too!

SHIMON

But doesn't Hashem have more important  
things to concern himself with? I  
mean, does it matter that the leaf  
lands here, or there, or anywhere?

BST

Nothing matters more! There is a  
divine order in everything, especially  
the leaves. The Talmud clearly says: He provides  
sustenance for every creature, from  
the long-horned wild ox to the tiniest  
insect eggs. Everything in this

field is ordained just as it is to  
ensure that every living being here  
can sustain itself. If you don't  
believe me, watch that leaf closely.  
Very closely.

They all focus on the leaf. Slowly a worm crawls out of a hole and begins to feast on the leaf.  
The BST smiles.

BST  
If Hashem has foreseen the needs of  
the smallest of his creatures, do  
you not think that all of our needs  
are not also provided for?

## *The Remarkable Horse*

*Long ago, an old, sickly man and his son lived in an impoverished village. Luckily for the older man, his son was healthy and robust; otherwise, they would have surely perished. One day while they were working in their barn, a magnificent wild horse unexpectedly rode into their stable. The father motioned to the son to quickly close the gate. For such a poor farmer, this was an incredible stroke of good luck. No one in the village had ever seen such a brilliant animal, and it would fetch a very high price at the market. A neighbor stopped by to visit, remarking to his elderly friend how fortunate this was. Yes, the gods were smiling with favor on him this day. The older man's response surprised him. Stroking his beard, he said, "Perhaps this is good fortune. Perhaps it is not. Only time will tell."*

*Sure enough, three days later, the horse jumped over the fence and was gone. The neighbor stopped by to commiserate with his friend and commented on how unlucky the horse had escaped. But the old man just echoed his words of a few days earlier, "Perhaps this is bad fortune. Perhaps it is not. Only time will tell."*

*A week passed. While the older man and his son were repairing their house, they heard what sounded like thunder. It was a whole herd of wild horses led by the magnificent horse that escaped only a few days before. He led the others into the corral, and the older man's son quickly closed the gate. When the neighbor heard of this miraculous event, he stopped by and commented to his friend on his good fortune. The old man just shook his head, muttering, "Perhaps this is good fortune. Perhaps it is not. Only time will tell."*

*The next day his son was attempting to break one of the new horses and was thrown, his leg shattered in two places. The village doctor was hopeful in his diagnosis, saying the young man would walk again after fitting a tight brace around his thigh and shin. But he warned it would require many months of healing and rest. Given his arthritis and fragile back, this was terrible news for the older man. He depended on his son for help with many of the more arduous chores on the farm. What was he to do now? As you might expect, the neighbor visited to express his regret about the accident and to declare what an unfortunate turn of events this had been. But the old man patiently replied, "Perhaps this is bad fortune. Perhaps it is not. Only time will tell."*

*Two weeks later, a regiment of soldiers rode into the village. A war was brewing with a northern province, and they conscripted every young man to fight, except, of course, the older man's son who was convalescing. Not one of those men returned alive from the war. The older man's son eventually healed and was once again able to help his father. And, as the wise father often said after his son was spared the fate of so many other young men, "We never know whether a thing is good or bad until the story is finished."*

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[1] Jennifer Lin, "Chinese Folk Tales: The Lost Horse (A Blessing in Disguise)," *The Daily China*, April 16, 2018, [www.thedailychina.org/chinese-folk-tales-the-lost-horse-a-blessing-in-disguise-%E5%A1%9E%E7%BF%81%E5%A4%B1%E9%A6%AC/](http://www.thedailychina.org/chinese-folk-tales-the-lost-horse-a-blessing-in-disguise-%E5%A1%9E%E7%BF%81%E5%A4%B1%E9%A6%AC/).