

Stephen Neuwirth a"h remarks | Yom Kippur 5783

I have one request to make, and that is that no one feel sorry for me. While I certainly wouldn't wish my illness on anyone else, through this illness Hashem, in his Greatness and Mercy has rescued me. Before I became ill, I had allowed my life to be filled with noise, distractions, and pressures, and focus on things that didn't matter.

But since I have faced this deadly illness of stage 4 pancreatic cancer, all of the noise, distractions and pressures have disappeared. I have realized in a way that I never could have imagined before that I am completely dependent on Hashem's Merciful Greatness. Only Hashem, our Father and King, can save me and all of us. And this realization has filled me with more simcha than I have ever had in my life. I genuinely spend every day filled with happiness. I have no fear. I only have the comfort of believing that the King of the World, in his Loving Mercy, has placed me where I am, and that this is where H- wants me to be. I don't know what will happen, and I take this situation day to day. But what I believe is that whatever happens is what Hashem has determined is for the best. Gam Zu LeTovah.

I woke up on Rosh Hashanah morning so filled with happiness that I would have an opportunity to attend the coronation of the King of the World. I put on my finest clothes on both days of Rosh Hashanah, to show my joy at this occasion.

One of the great gifts that Hashem has bestowed on me through this illness has been to have the clarity to see that all Jews are great and have greatness within them. We are all connected. We all have different capabilities and talents, but in the end we all are equal as foot soldiers in Hashem's army.

There is a beautiful gemara in Masechta Rosh Hashanah that discusses at some length how all the Jews are in a single file line for judgment on Rosh Hashanah. The gemara describes how it isn't possible for any two or three people to be at the same place on the line – each person is judged separately, one after another. But then the gemara points out that Rabbi Yehudah taught that at the same time, Hashem looks at the entire line at once, and sees all of the Jews together as one. I understand the Gemarah and the Mefarshim don't interpret Rabbi Yehuda to be disagreeing that each of us is judged individually, but rather to be adding that at the same time Hashem in H-s Merciful Greatness views all of us as one.

In the Sepher Tomer Devorah, the Ramak, may his memory be blessed, explains, as I understand it, that when the Jewish people suffer, Hashem also suffers with us. And that we need to emulate this quality of Hashem by recognizing that all of us are connected. When one of us suffers, we all suffer. And when one of us is successful, we shouldn't feel jealousy or resentment, but instead should rejoice that this brings good to all of us.

I thank Hashem for helping me, through this illness, to see all of this so clearly.

The Ramak also explains that when we confront difficulty, or pain, or illness or other suffering, Hashem is not using intermediaries, but is caring for us H-mself. As our Selichot highlight every day, Hashem has told us : “I shall pour pure water upon you and purify you, of all your contaminations and of all your abominations I will purify you.” “I have wiped away your willful sins like a cloud and your errors like a mist – repent to Me, for I have redeemed you.” “I, only I, am the One Who wipes away your willful sins for My sake, and I shall not recall your errors.”

I thank Hashem for cleansing me, and for providing me with the opportunity to be close to H-m. I can only be filled with Simcha, and I hope this is a Simcha we all can celebrate together.