

The Power of Optimism

Category: Bereishis, Noach

*What gives someone the strength to survive two days in a home with terrorists?
It's a power we inherited from Abraham, our forefather.*

Think Good

The Rebbe always said, “Think good, and it will be good.” I once heard from the Rebbe himself, “*zagt Nesi Doreinu, tracht gut, vet zicher zein gut*, think good, and it will certainly be good!”

Well, this week, I read a story which demonstrated the power of positive thinking.

Kibbutz Be’eri is the kibbutz closest to the Gaza border, and also the largest kibbutz among the eleven in the area. It was founded in 1946; on Friday night, the night before the terrible attack that earned the name “The Black Shabbat,” they celebrated the kibbutz’s 77th anniversary with a big party. Until that day, there were 1,100 residents in the kibbutz. It was always a very secular place, like most kibbutzim; the first synagogue on the kibbutz was established in 2006.

On the day of the attack, more than a hundred terrorists infiltrated and over 110 people were killed—ten percent of the kibbutz’s residents. It was an absolute catastrophe.

But this story is about a 75-year-old resident named Perach Pilo. Her parents were Holocaust survivors from Hungary who came to Israel in 1957 and settled in the kibbutz when she was only 13. Her parents came from traditional homes, but due to the Holocaust, they distanced themselves from Judaism and she received no Jewish education. Somehow, however, her daughter discovered Judaism and joined Chabad, and her grandson today serves as a Chabad Shliach in Berlin. This is all background to understand what happened on the morning of the attack.

At 6:30 in the morning, when the siren went off, Perach was sitting on the couch. In that kibbutz, there were only fifteen seconds to make it into the “safe-room” of the home, so she grabbed a half-filled water bottle and a thick blanket and raced to safety.

At first, she was very scared. She heard the sound of rockets passing overhead, and it didn't take long before messages started coming through the kibbutz app reporting that there were terrorists in the vicinity. Then she began hearing gunshots and shouting in Arabic. The terrorists were very close by.

But then she composed herself. One of the things that she learned from her Chabad grandchildren, was the power of positive thinking. She grabbed a notebook and wrote herself a note: "I am protected. My parents are Holocaust survivors, and I know that G-d is watching over me. Thank you, G-d, for everything you do for me. Thank you to the Rebbe for praying for me, and for all the Chasidim who are surely praying for me as well. I am safe."

Then she remembered that inside the safe room, there was a small kit with a picture of the Rebbe and a Chitas. She placed the picture of the Rebbe and the Chitas on her heart and said, "Rebbe, you are now responsible for my heart; I know I will be okay."

All of this was happening as she sat in the dark, because she was afraid that light would attract the attackers. As she groped around in the darkness, she also found some cookies; realizing that she could be holed in the safe room for a very long time, she rationed the cookies, designating two for breakfast, two for lunch, and two for dinner. Since she only had half a water bottle, she sipped two sips for each meal to make it last.

In the meantime, she managed to contact her son Oren, who lived not far from her. He told her, "Mom, I'm coming to rescue you." She was relieved to hear that. Some time passed, and he asked her to send her location on WhatsApp. She didn't understand why he needed it, but soon he informed her, "Mom, I've joined the Duvdevan unit (one of Israel's elite units). They have three tanks, and they're coming to save you."

However, salvation didn't seem to arrive. Time passed, and she didn't hear from them. In the meantime, she kept repeating her mantra: "I am protected, I am safe. Thank you, Hashem, thank you, Rebbe. Thank you to all those who are praying for me." Her phone battery soon ran out, and she was alone in the dark, without a phone or any contact with the outside world.

It soon started to get even worse; she heard the terrorists entering her house. Fortunately, after a terrorist attack about ten years earlier, she had realized that

without a good lock, the safe room wouldn't protect her, so she had decided to install a strong lock on the door. The terrorists tried to open the lock but failed; they shot at the door, used various explosives, but for some reason, they couldn't get it open. They went to the window, trying to break in, but they were unsuccessful. She sat inside the entire time, huddled in a corner, repeating her mantra thousands of times, as hours and hours passed. She kept her faith strong.

Suddenly, she started to worry. Why hadn't Oren come to her rescue? Maybe something had happened to him? Her confidence began to waver, but she tried to stay hopeful, telling herself again and again that she was protected, and that everything would be okay.

Soon, the situation deteriorated further. The IDF was battling the terrorists as they were holed up in her own home! She later found out that 12 terrorists had been in her house, and the soldiers couldn't figure out how to subdue them, so they decided to bring a bulldozer to demolish her home—with the terrorist, and her, inside! She sat there as she heard them breaking through her ceiling, destroying her house; soon, the pressure created a crack in the safe room's door and dust began flooding the room—and she suffers from difficulties with breathing and diabetes... To her luck the terrorists didn't see the crack.

My friends, she sat in that safe-room for 48 hours, two full days! On Monday morning, when it seemed quiet, she decided to open the window to get some fresh air. She tried to climb onto something to get closer to the window, but she stumbled and fell and collapsed unconscious. She doesn't know for how long, perhaps for an hour and a half, but when she woke up, she had more strength. This time, she decided she was going to jump out of the window. She didn't have any shoes, only her robe, so she threw her thick blanket out of the window, climbed onto a chair, from there onto an old sewing machine, and jumped out. She thought she'd land on the grass, but it was covered with concrete debris from the broken ceiling and she got injured. Still, she managed to get up and limp away.

The kibbutz was deathly silent. The destruction was so severe she couldn't recognize it at all. Soon she found a bottle of mineral water to quench her thirst, and a golf cart with the keys inside—a real miracle. All the while, she kept saying, "Thank you, Hashem, for all the miracles..." She drove to the kibbutz gate where she saw soldiers stationed, but she was still unsure if they were the IDF or the

enemy, so she approached cautiously. Finally, they noticed her approaching, and rushed to help her with the injuries.

Her first request was to call her son, Oren, who had worried for so many hours. It turned out he had been waiting outside the kibbutz; the army hadn't allowed him in due to the ongoing fighting there. A few moments later they were reunited, and you can imagine the joy of reuniting with family...

Between Trust and Belief

What's the story here? What lies behind that Chassidic saying, "Think good, and it will be good"?

The dollar bill famously says, "In G-d we trust." One time, Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv Cohen, then Chief Rabbi of Haifa, came to the Rebbe's dollar distribution, and the Rebbe pointed out to him that the dollar says "In G-d we **trust**," not just "believe." It's a fundamental difference. One can believe in G-d, and therefore think that everything that happens comes from Him—both the good and the not-so-good. Trust, on the other hand, means you trust that He will do the very best for you. It's like couples trusting each other that they'll do the best for their children. You entrust your child only to someone you know will do everything and the very best for them. Similarly, a person needs to *trust* that G-d will do the best for them.

True trust in G-d, the Rebbe explained, means that even when there's no hope in the natural course of things, one still trusts that G-d will make things right. And that very trust creates the vessel for a miracle that is above and beyond the natural order (Likkutei Sichot vol. 3, p. 883 and onwards).

This is precisely what happened with Mrs. Perach.

From a natural perspective, there was no path to survival. The terrorists entered her home, tried to break into the saferoom, barricaded themselves there for two days, and the IDF tried to destroy the home with her inside! After the army killed the terrorists, they didn't bother looking for survivors; they never expected anyone to come out alive.

What saved her was her trust in G-d - her faith that she was protected, and that

no harm would come to her. The Almighty was watching over her, and the Rebbe was praying for her.

This is the power of positive thinking. She admitted that she never knew that she had such a strong trust in G-d, but somehow, during the most critical moment of her life, her soul shone through and she taught us all what “think good, and it will be good” truly means.

The Power of Optimism

This week, we read Parshat Noach. When we compare Noah to Abraham, we see that where Abraham succeeded, Noah failed. Abraham managed to achieve what Noah could not, even though they lived more or less in the same era. Noah tried for 120 years to make people believe in G-d and improve their behavior, yet he couldn't influence a single person. In contrast, Abraham managed to spread a belief in G-d which eventually conquered the entire world.

So, what's the secret to Abraham's success? One thing is clear - Noah was a pessimist; he didn't believe that people would accept his message. Rashi described Noah as “believing and not believing” (Genesis 7:7). Abraham, on the other hand, was optimistic. He was a visionary. No matter what he faced, he never lost his faith in G-d. It didn't matter how much time passed, how many obstacles he encountered, or how much the world ridiculed him. He remained optimistic and confident that G-d would fulfill His promise.

Through decades of waiting, with the world laughing at him and always asking, “where's your promised child?” Abraham didn't complain or doubt G-d. Instead, he stayed optimistic, believing that G-d would keep His word. This optimism was Abraham's key to receiving the incredible miracle of having a child at an old age.

We, the Jewish people, are not called the children of Noah, even though we are technically his descendants. We are called the children of Abraham. Why? Because we inherited his optimism and trust in G-d that everything will turn out well. So, during this challenging time, we need to remember that we will emerge stronger, not only politically but, more importantly, spiritually and emotionally. We will come together, and be united and strengthened as one people!