

In the Desert – Part 2: Transforming Sources of Irritation

This is part 2 of a mini-series I have entitled “In The Desert”, since the Torah portions for June are all in *Bamidbar* which is replete with real life lessons—things that we *must* conquer in our faith-walk to be successful in the Lord. However, *Bamidbar* is loaded with principles that we must pay close attention to, in order to avoid great pain.

Principle Number 1 – We Must Learn to Limit What Comes Out of Our Mouth

Rebbetzin Marilyn developed a teaching back in 1991 (before *KS* existed) based on last week’s *Parashat* (*Shelach*) called *Without Murmuring or Complaining*. In it she shared that the Holy Spirit revealed to her that (among other relevant things she taught on that message) we must honor the Lord in the authorities He has placed over us by limiting our words and focusing on the Lord, not on the people and circumstances around us.

Principle Number 2 – We Must Learn to Transform Sources of Irritation

Life is full of sources of irritation. Both insight and discernment are needed to identify and transform sources of irritation into spiritual motivation. The benefits or harm of these can be compared to a grain of sand: in the eye, it will cause an irritation, infection and loss of vision; but in an oyster, it will cause an irritation, secretion, concretion and then a very valuable pearl. Many of our attitudes and actions are influenced more than we realize by that which irritates us. Which one will it be for us?

Identifying & Responding to Irritations

A source of irritation is a frustration-producing agent over which you have little or no control. If it is a mosquito, just kill it, but if it is a mother in law, then what? Three wrong ways to react to irritations are: to defend ourselves (Ecc. 3:7), to blame something or someone else (Prov. 30:10) and to yield to anger (Ecc. 7:9).

Example: A son has been asked by his dad to help with the dishes and he is doing it out of obedience but his heart is far from it (he figures it is better to dry dishes than to get into it with dad again). Then while he is robotically drying a dish he drops it and it brakes into hundreds of pieces. The son has a far away look in his eyes as he says, “Sorry mom it slipped” bending to pick up the pieces. The mom replies: “you are such a klutz...you are always breaking things up.” {In her mind this is another entry into the list “Things My Son Has Done and Never Made Right” kept in her computer (mind). Her list just overflowed!}. “It was an accident, its Billy’s fault”; grumbled the son trying to defend himself {He blames his little brother who irritates him and who can do no harm as far as mom is concerned. Of course, Billy irritates the dog, who irritates the father, who irritates the mom, who irritates the son...} Suddenly he stops picking the glass and throws the drying towel down leaving the premises in visible anger slamming the front door on his way out while the mother exclaims: “just wait until your dad gets home!”

There are three major sources of irritation: people, the environment and self. Firstly, the personality traits, idiosyncrasies and inconsistency of others provide an ever-present source of potential irritation. (*Example: Irritating Roommates. A serious-minded student working his way through college has to get up daily to go to work at 5:30a but his roommates routinely stay up late with often loud boisterous discussions in the surrounding rooms.*) The deficiencies, inconveniences, undesirable elements and pressures of our environment constitute a second source of potential irritation. (*Example: A family of six has outgrown their home with only one full bath. The inconvenience of everyone having to get ready for Shabbat at the same time provides a weekly source of irritation for everyone.*) Finally the defects, weaknesses, illnesses and personal deficiencies, which we are not able to remove, constitute a third (and a BIG) source of potential irritation. (*Example: a teenager slipped on a wet surface and fell hurting his lower back. Ever since then he suffers from pain in his back and legs and no amount of chiropractic visits seem to eliminate it. These pains are a source of continual irritation to him.*)

There are many irritations we experience which we can and should remove: a squeaky door can be oiled; an angry neighbor can be appeased; and a personal habit can be changed. There are other irritations, however, which are beyond our power to correct or remove. These “irresolvable irritations” provide the basis for a significant process that the Lord intends to take place within each of our lives, i.e., a type desert experience.

Irresolvable Irritations

The unavoidable irritations which come from other people, from our environment (or situation) or from our own selves are extremely significant. These irritations are often the Lord's way of increasing our sensitivity to the needs of others or expanding our world of opportunity or developing the inward qualities, which are so essential to successful living. If we react wrongly to these irritations, we destroy their potential benefits. But if instead we respond to them with insight and proper reaction, we allow the Holy Spirit to achieve His highest purpose in us – to reshape our lives as closely as possible to the ideal He has given to us in the life of His Son: ("*...because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the image and pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers*" Ro. 8:29). When a specific purpose is achieved through certain irritation, the Lord is then free to remove that irritation from our lives: "*When a man's ways please ADONAI, he makes even the man's enemies be at peace with him*" (Prov. 16:7).

On the other hand if we continually retreat from these irritations, we force the Lord to choose between rising up new irritations or setting aside His highest plan and purpose for our lives. I do not think there is much of a choice here: I cannot imagine the Lord setting aside His purpose for us! Therefore, if some irritations seem to be rather permanent or irresolvable, we can be confident that they have a permanent benefit in our development, life and ministry. This was the purpose of Rabbi *Sha'ul's 'thorn in the flesh'*: "*7Therefore, to keep me from becoming overly proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from the Adversary to pound away at me, so that I wouldn't grow conceited. 8Three times I begged the Lord to take this thing away from me; 9but he told me, 'My grace is enough for you, for my power is brought to perfection in weakness.' Therefore, I am very happy to boast about my weaknesses, in order that the Messiah's power will rest upon me... for it is when I am weak that I am strong.*" Sources are the *file* that *sharpen* our sensitivity to the Lord and develop a higher level of *Yeshua's* character in us; "*to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Messiah Yeshua in you, the hope of glory*" (Col. 1:27).

Right Response to Irritations

Based on the discussion above, there are three correct responses to sources of irritation, mainly: thanking the Lord for the irritation, identify possible causes, and determine the Lord's ultimate objective in allowing the irritation in the first place. The first step in anything dealing with the Almighty is always to "Thank God in all Things" which is a Scriptural command: "*In everything give thanks, for this is the Will of God in Messiah Yeshua concerning you*" (1 Thes. 5:18). Because we belong to Him and we are His children we should have a total dedication to God and a personal commitment to His objectives. The response of thanking God for every situation ("*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*" Ro. 8:28) frees our spirit to be creatively objective in evaluating every situation and discovering ultimate benefits in every irritation that comes our way. "*I belong to God, and therefore, I am His responsibility. His work and reputation are affected by my responses and I know He wants the very best for me. He is bigger than my source of irritation and He can stop it whenever He wants. He has allowed this irritation for my ultimate benefit.*"

The second step is to try and identify possible causes for these irritations: "*Did I cause this irritation by something I did or failed to do?*" or "*Did this irritation reflect a personal fault or lack of character development in me?*" Since we tend to forget unpleasant events, we often neglect to correct or gain forgiveness for the offenses, which caused those unpleasant events. Those we offend, however, tend to remember and review them. Then, when they have an opportunity to irritate us, they quickly do so. These are irritations caused by the reproofs of life. Also those around us tend to reflect the attitudes and character deficiencies, which we have. Since we are already sensitive to these deficiencies, they become doubly irritating when we see them in someone else (especially our close family). Our tendency is to react to those who point them out in us rather than use their reactions as motivations to change or improve. These are irritations caused by reflectors. Finally God wants us to live in the freedom of a clear conscience. Therefore, He uses sources of irritation, as painful but helpful and effective reminders to clear up past offenses, which He sees, will hinder future relationships with Him or others. Finally God's ultimate purpose is that we should become like *Yeshua*, and the process is that "all things work together for good..." therefore *we should determine which character goals He is working on in us*. The steps of responding to sources of irritation are clearly defined in: "*For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Messiah Yeshua also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*" (1 Pet. 2:19-21)

IRRITATIONS	QUALITY TO BE PRODUCED
From one who is hard to love	Genuine love based on mature insight (1 Cor. 13)
From circumstances of sorrow	Continuous joy even in the midst of tribulation & pain
From conditions of confusion	Inward peace and steady confidence in the Lord
From irritating inconveniences	Sympathetic flexibility (“ <i>I can do all things...</i> ”)
From obvious needs of others	Wise generosity (“ <i>more blessed to give...</i> ”)
From unwelcomed responsibilities	Consistent trustworthiness (Gal. 5:22-23)
From people who intrude upon personal rights	Surrender of personal rights to God
From temptations and wrong desires	Self-Control (Gal. 5:22-23)