

Sparks

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When the Loser is a Winner

The Talmud teaches that King Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes after he saw prophetically that his kingdom and the Temple that he worked so hard to build would be destroyed. Imagine what a devastating realization that must have been to know that what you invested your entire life will be destroyed. We can understand why he bemoaned, “Futility of futilities ... what profits does a man have from all his work under the sun.”

However, his ultimate resolution was “Revere G-d, live by His commandments -- for this is all man is.”

King Solomon realized that our real accomplishments in life is not building the kingdom or the temple on earth, but what we make of ourselves -- the kingdom and temple we build in our inner world.

This does not mean that you should not build in this world but rather that you should recognize that what you build on the outside is not the goal but the means to what you build on the inside.

The early pioneers who courageously came to re-settle the land of Israel would often sing, “We have come to build this land and to be built by it.” What is real and lasting about what you build on the outside is how it builds you and others on the inside.

When you live with this understanding you will not be devastated when your kingdom or your temple is destroyed. You will realize that you did the will of G-d to build the kingdom and the temple and although they are destroyed what you built inside yourself can never be destroyed. It is not as if the past was all for naught and you will have to start all over again. Rather you now have new opportunities to continue to build yourself through the challenges and choices the destruction creates. We were not put on earth to build this world but to build ourselves into the living image of G-d. We can always be growing, even -- and sometimes, especially -- when the world around us is falling apart.

Sometimes the winner is truly the loser and the loser the winner. If the winner learns nothing from his victory and doesn't grow into a better person, if he simply becomes haughty and obnoxious, then though he holds the trophy in his hands, he is actually the loser. However, if the loser accepts his loss humbly, overcomes feelings of anger, self-pity and chooses to be happy with his lot, then he actually walks off with the greatest victory -- an evolved self. He is the trophy.

The Talmud teaches that whatever happens to us is always for the best. People assume that means that if I lose this job it must mean that an even better job is about to come my way. But I am not sure that this is always the case. Losing that great job may be for the best because the next job, which pays less and throws you into a company of very difficult people, gives you a better context for some very life changing choices to know G-d and do good. In this new lousy job you will make less money but become more. In the end, what is best is not what happens on the outside but what happens on the inside.

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