

A Walk in the Woods

By Ariel Bar Tzadok

I was walking through the woods one day when I saw a large poisonous snake coming right for me. I knew that if it bit me I would be in serious trouble for my life. However, I thought, if I am meant to die, then I will. So I did nothing. The snake approached me and bit me for no reason. I became very sick very quickly. I almost died, but I was saved at the last minute.

After this I was exposed to a terrible contagious illness, I very quickly became very sick. I came very close to death. However, I thought, if I am meant to die, then I will. Therefore, I did nothing. I did not see a doctor, nor follow the doctor's unsolicited advice. After not too long, I went unconscious. If not for the intervention of others, I would have died, but I was saved at the last moment.

After this, I took a walk along a very busy highway. There were many cars and trucks going by at great speeds. I wanted to cross the highway and play in the traffic, so I did. The traffic was heavy and at any moment I could be hit by a passing car, one that is not expecting an idle walker to be in the middle of the road. I could have avoided traffic, but, I thought, if I am meant to die, then I will. Therefore, I avoided nothing. I did not even see the truck before it hit me. I was struck so hard that I only woke up in the hospital hours later. I was told I was going to die from my injuries.

I thought to myself, this must be the Will of G-d that I am to die this way. Therefore, I surrendered myself to death. In that state I dreamed a dream and saw myself standing before the Throne of Heaven. Upon it was the Great Judge. I was there for judgment to see whether I would live or whether I would die.

I told the Great Judge, that I surrender to the Will of Heaven and that if Heaven wished for me to be hit by the truck, then Heaven can also take my soul.

The Great Judge looked upon me with anger and wrath. "Fool of a human," he called me. "Why did you go out to play in traffic? Why were you so careless for your own safety?"

I responded and said, "I do not believe that safety is in my hands. That is the job of Heaven. I prefer instead to enjoy life and do whatever it is I wish. If Heaven objects, then Heaven can mercifully show me a better way."

"Fool of a human" the Great Judge called out. "Heaven did show you a better way, three times now. It was Heaven that saved you from the poisonous snake; it was



Heaven that allowed you to be healed from your illness. Yet, in spite of Heaven's interventions trying to teach you to care for yourself you still go out and play in traffic. You have no regard for Heaven's most precious gift: your mortal life. You are such a fool that you are totally blind to your own obligation to protect yourself and do what you must to safeguard yourself."

I looked to the Great Judge and said, "why should I do all this? It is your job to look after me, not mine." At this, the Great Judge was outraged. He said to me, "you are not worthy of life. The most basic lesson of life is to seek its preservation. If you did not learn this as a human being, then you will have to learn it elsewhere." With those words I died.

Almost immediately I awoke. I felt like I was in a dream. However, now things seemed strangely different. My sight, my hearing, my body, my shape was no longer mine. I had become something else. It dawned on me that I was no longer human. I was now an animal, I was a snake.

I slithered down a forest path, when I happened to see another human being. I was desirous to make contact to tell this person, that I was just reincarnated into this snake. Is that not great news? Yet, the moment the person saw me, he picked up a heavy stick and hit me on the head, over and over again. The pain was terrible and I lost consciousness.

I again awoke to find myself in strange surroundings. This time, I had no sort of body that I could imagine, yet I was aware of myself and my surroundings. Somehow I intuitively knew that I was a microorganism inside some body, somewhere. I thought how amazing this was to be an entirely different life form in an entirely different environment.

Just then I could sense something penetrating me, as if eating me alive, piece by piece. It dawned on me that I was a germ, a virus of some kind and that I was being killed by some sort of a medicine. I tried to tell the invading entity that I meant it no harm, but this was to no avail. In a moment I again lost consciousness from the pain and awoke again in yet another entirely new form.

After the past two experiences, I began to wonder what was the point in all this. How come I cannot share my feelings and desires with others. How come others out there view me as a threat and want to kill me? Just because I was a poisonous snake did not make me dangerous. Just because I was a virus did not mean that I wanted to kill.

Yet, I was killed nonetheless, not just once, but twice. Moreover I had fading memories of this happening other numerous times that I no longer remembered. What was the



point in all this? What did that Great Judge do to me, what was he trying to get across to me? I did not have much time to ponder the thought, for again I felt a sharp pain and again lost consciousness. Again, I had been killed.

Getting killed all these times has been a very painful experience. I need to stay alive for a bit so that I may ponder my circumstances. Yet, every time I begin to think, I am killed. Maybe I need to take precautions to protect myself. Maybe there is something I need to do, in order to stay alive, so that I can make the time to consider my circumstances.

However, I thought, if I am meant to die, then I will. Therefore, I did nothing. And indeed, I died, over and over again.

Then it dawned on me, I am not getting anywhere thinking this way. All I get is pain and misery and I never come to the conclusions that I need to consider. This time has to be different. I thought that if I am meant to die, then this time I would not! I will do something about it, to avoid it, so as to give myself sometime to consider my plight.

Yet, what about Heaven I thought. What about what is meant to be should be? Deep inside me, I said, forget that! I do not know what is meant to be, but I sure know what needs to be. Next time I am in danger, I am defending myself. Next time, I will not place myself in harm's way. Next time I am going to decide what is to be and take proper actions accordingly.

All of a sudden I felt strange again. Again I lost consciousness. This time I awoke in pain. I felt like many of my bones were broken. Yet, I could speak, I could see and I could hear. I was human again. I was in the hospital. I was told that I was hit by a truck as I was playing in traffic.

I thought to myself what a fool I had been to do such a stupid thing to endanger Heaven's most precious gift, my life. I resolved from then forward not to allow this to happen again.

Weeks later when I was healed I again took a walk in the woods. Again, I came upon a poisonous snake across my path. The snake headed straight for me. I thought to myself, not this time, I am no longer willing to endanger myself. I picked up a large stick and hit it on the head over and over again until it was dead. I saved my own life that day. I felt proud, as if I had learned and applied a great lesson.

Some time after this, I again became ill. Rather than do nothing I immediately went to the doctor who gave me an injection. He said that I was fortunate that I came to him so quickly because the illness I contracted, if left unchecked, could prove fatal. Over the



next few hours I could feel my body getting stronger as the illness was being killed off inside me by the doctor's medicine. I felt relieved that I would recover and be able to live another day. Again I felt a sense of accomplishment, that I had learned and applied a great lesson.

Some time after this, I dreamed a dream one night. I saw myself standing in Heaven before the Throne of the Great Judge. This time, his face was absent of anger. He rather had a pleased demeanor to him. I inquisitively asked. Why did it look like he had a smile?

He said to me, "because my son, you have learned your lesson. Go now and teach others that while Heaven bestows life upon you, we also bestow upon you the responsibility to safeguard it. Anyone not fulfilling their responsibilities will be judged harshly when the Moment of Accounting comes."

This was a most profound revelation. I was never taught that along with a gift also comes a responsibility. I always thought I could do what I wished and that whatever needed to be done would be done by others, so I could be left alone to do what I wish and to have fun. How wrong I was. How deadly wrong I was!

With great privilege comes great responsibility. Focus, care, a love for life and the need to fight to protect it; these are lessons that we all need to learn. All this dawned upon me, as if spoken directly into my mind as I stood before the Great Judge and Throne of Heaven. The Judge smiled and said to me, "now, go and teach this to your fellows."

And that is what I am doing right now.