

LIVE  
LIKE A  
WARRIOR



Inspiring the Jewish Future

## Discussion:

Have you ever experienced challenges and adversity? If so, what kind?

Why do we have challenges and struggles?

Look below at challenges these famous people had. What is the common theme between them all?

How do these challenges make you feel about your challenges in life?

### Michael Jordan

Did not make second cut when trying out for his High School basketball team

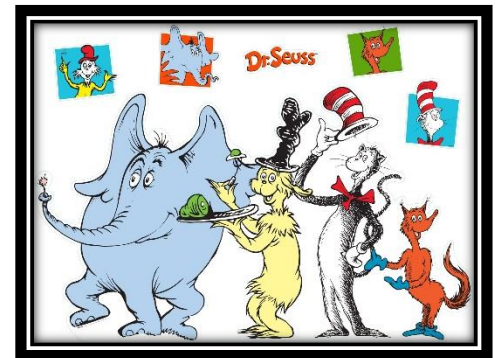


### Eminem

Experienced severe struggles with drugs and poverty, which culminated in an unsuccessful suicide attempt

### Dr. Seuss

His first book was rejected by 27 publishers



### Oprah Winfrey

Was fired from her job as news anchor because she “wasn’t fit for television”



### Steve Jobs

At 30 years old he was fired from the company he founded

### Walt Disney

Was fired from a newspaper as cartoonist, because he “lacked imagination and had no original ideas”

### The Beatles

Rejected by Decca Studios who said “we don’t like their sound.... They have no future in show business.”



## Challenges Help Us Build and Refine Ourselves

Challenges often present us with a trial to overcome. These struggles are part of Divine Providence that guides us toward actualizing our potential. By overcoming the trials that come our way, we discover hidden talents that might otherwise never surface. After overcoming the specific hardship, an individual will also be equipped to help others who encounter similar circumstances, and to serve as a role model for others to follow.

### Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

A lobster is a soft animal that resides within a rigid inflexible shell. As it grows, the shell becomes very confining. When it becomes oppressive, the lobster retreats to an underwater rock formation where it is safe from predatory fish, sheds its shell, and forms a larger more spacious one. Eventually this new shell becomes oppressive as the lobster continues its growth, and the process is repeated several times until the lobster reaches its maximum size.

The stimulus for the lobster to throw off its restraining shell so that it may grow is **discomfort**. This may be true for human beings as well. If we are comfortable, we are unlikely to do anything to advance ourselves. The greater the discomfort, the greater the stimulus for personal growth.

### Pirkei Avot 5:22

The reward is directly proportional to the struggle. (i.e. the more difficult the challenge is that we overcome, the more spiritual reward we will receive)



### Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5a

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: G-d gave the Jewish people three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through challenges. These are: The Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come.



#### Points to Ponder:

*Why do you think G-d made it that we need to struggle to grow?*

*Have you ever overcome a struggle or challenge? If not, do you see others that have as role models?*

*Have you ever experienced this type of spiritual growth?*



## The Response to Challenge is up to You

### Story: The Elephant Rope

As a man was passing a group of circus owned elephants, he suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from their bonds but for some reason, they did not.

He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," the trainer said, "when they are very young and much smaller we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free."

The man was amazed. These animals **could** at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were.

Like the elephants, how many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed at it once before?

### Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 33b Rashi

Everything is in the hands of Heaven – everything that occurs to a person is from G-d. For instance, (whether the person is) tall, short, poor, rich, smart, dull, light, dark, all of this is from Heaven. But how a person responds to the lot he has been given is not from heaven – this is the responsibility entrusted to the individual. There are two paths presented to each person – with the intention that he should choose the path of using his experiences and circumstances to better themselves.

#### Points to Ponder:

*What is the message of the story?*

*Do you think people have a similar mentality to failure?*



### Rambam, (Maimonides), Hilchos Teshuvah, (The Laws of Repentance) 5:1

The ability is given to every individual to choose his or her path in life. This means that a human being is unique in creation in that he personally understands the nature of good and bad and can choose to do either and there is no one who can prevent him from doing either.

#### Points to Ponder:

*What do we learn from Rashi and Rambam about responding to challenges and adversity?*



## Failure is the Catalyst for Success

Although we generally view the challenges of life in a negative light, challenges can, in fact, perform several positive roles. The achievement gained through struggle cannot be compared with that which came easily. In a certain sense, the “no pain no gain” motto seems to be right on the mark! Challenges can serve as a catalyst for self-improvement. They can open new avenues for personal growth that would otherwise never be achieved.

Judaism teaches that each individual has free will to reach his potential and is accountable for his decisions and actions. We may not be able to control the circumstances in our lives, but we will always be able to control how we respond to those circumstances.

### Rav Yitzchak Hutner Igros #128

*This letter (Letter of R. Hutner #128) was composed by Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906-1980). Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, to a student who, in a letter to R. Hutner, had conveyed his pessimism regarding his potential for spiritual greatness and his faltering spirit:*

There is a common misconception in our midst regarding our attitude to the appreciation of our great individuals. We tend to focus on their current elevated status, neglecting to recall the many mistakes and hardships they encountered on their path to greatness....

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, has said “a righteous man falls seven times and rises again” (Proverbs 24:16). Fools believe that the intent of this verse is to teach us something remarkable: the righteous man has fallen seven times and yet he resiliently rises. But the knowledgeable know that the source of the righteous one’s ability to rise again is precisely through his seven falls. “

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#### *Points to Ponder:*

*Rav Hutner mentions a common misconception we have about great individuals. Have you ever held similar misconceptions? Why?*

*How does Rav Hutner reinterpret the verse “A righteous person falls seven times, yet rises again”? Have you ever experienced this in your own life?*

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NEVER LET  
A STUMBLE IN  
THE ROAD  
BE THE END OF  
THE JOURNEY



We all experience difficult situations in life. Things happen that we are not happy with. Sometimes we can solve the problems or overcome the obstacles in front of us. However, sometimes we cannot fix those challenging situations. When that is the case, our job is find a power and strength within us to approach the challenges of life with a positive attitude and decide to use these experiences to strive higher. It says in Gemara Berachot 60b “everything G-d does is for the good.” This is the same idea in why we are given challenges and struggles in life. G-d gives us these challenges not to make us miserable, but to enable us to reach our true potential.

Ramchal, Derech Hashem, Part II,  
Ch. 8, Part 1

We know that, in truth, G-d's only desire is to bestow good, and He loves His creation like a father loves his child. However, the love itself can justify the father bringing challenges to his child for his ultimate benefit, as is it written, “As a parent disciplines his child, so too does G-d discipline you” (Devarim 8:5).

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shor,  
Volume II, p. 301

G-d knows everything that happens to all of His creations every moment in time – even when a leaf falls from a tree.

G-d fills the entire world like the soul fills the entire body; there is no place where He is absent.

G-d guides the world. He wants the continuity of the world and of every individual (See Shmuel II, 14:14).

Ramban: Bereishit 22:1

The matter of “trial,” in my opinion, is as follows: since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of the one who is tried it is called a “trial.” But on the part of G-d, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone. Furthermore, G-d only tests the righteous. He does so knowing that the righteous will do His will and therefore tests him in order to make him more upright. G-d does not test the wicked because he knows they will not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.



**Points to Ponder:**

***How do challenges help us reach our ultimate potential?***



## **“A Candid Appreciation for Life’s Challenges” – Conan O'Brien’s Commencement Speech at Dartmouth College**



Eleven years ago, I gave an address to a graduating class at Harvard. I have not spoken at a graduation since because I thought I had nothing left to say. But then 2010 came. And now I'm here, three thousand miles from my home, because I learned a hard but profound lesson last year and I'd like to share it with you.

In 2000, I told graduates "Don't be afraid to fail." Well now I'm here to tell you that, though you should not fear failure, you should do your very best to avoid it. Nietzsche famously said "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." But what he failed to stress is that it almost kills you. Disappointment stings and, for driven, successful people like yourselves it is disorienting...

Now, by definition, Commencement speakers at an Ivy League college are considered successful. But a little over a year ago, I experienced a profound and very public disappointment. I did not get what I wanted, and I left a system that had nurtured and helped define me for the better part of 17 years. I went from being in the center of the grid to not only off the grid, but underneath the coffee table that the grid sits on, lost in the shag carpeting that is underneath the coffee table supporting the grid. It was the making of a career disaster, and a terrible analogy.

But then something spectacular happened. Fogbound, with no compass, and adrift, I started trying things. I grew a strange, cinnamon beard. I dove into the world of social media. I started tweeting my comedy. I threw together a national tour. I played the guitar. I did stand-up, wore a skin-tight blue leather suit, recorded an album, made a documentary, and frightened my friends and family. Ultimately, I abandoned all preconceived perceptions of my career path and stature and took a job on basic cable with a network most famous for showing reruns, along with sitcoms created by a tall, black man who dresses like an old, black woman. I did a lot of silly, unconventional, spontaneous and seemingly irrational things and guess what: with the exception of the

blue leather suit, it was the most satisfying and fascinating year of my professional life. To this day I still don't understand exactly what happened, but I have never had more fun, been more challenged—and this is important— had more conviction about what I was doing.

How could this be true? Well, it's simple: There are few things more liberating in this life than having your worst fear realized. I went to college with many people who prided themselves on knowing exactly who they were and exactly where they were going. At Harvard, five different guys in my class told me that they would



one day be President of the United States. Four of them were later killed in motel shoot-outs. The other one briefly hosted Blues Clues, before dying senselessly in yet another motel shoot-out. Your path at 22 will not necessarily be your path at 32 or 42. One's dream is constantly evolving, rising and falling, changing course.

So, at the age of 47, after 25 years of obsessively pursuing my dream, that dream changed. For decades, in show business, the ultimate goal of every comedian was to host The Tonight Show. It was the Holy Grail, and like many people I thought that achieving that goal would define me as successful. But that is not true. No specific job or career goal defines me, and it should not define you. In 2000, I told graduates to not be afraid to fail, and I still believe that. But today I tell you that whether you fear it or not, disappointment will come. The beauty is that through disappointment you can gain clarity, and with clarity comes conviction and true originality.

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***Points to Ponder:***

***What do you think about Conan O'Brien's commencement speech?***

***How will you use your next challenge to make yourself a better person?***

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