



MAINTAINING FAITH AMID NATIONAL AND PERSONAL SUFFERING

Why do some tzadikim suffer? The Gemara (*Brachos 7a*) relates that Moshe asked Hashem this question, and that Hashem answered: an incomplete tzadik suffers.

The Maharsha explains that an “incomplete tzadik” suffers to atone for his few sins, become pure, and merit greater reward in Olam Haba.

Crisis is a Call for Repentance

Earlier (5a), the Gemara charges one who suffers to investigate his deeds, as it says (*Eicha 3:40*), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to

Hashem.” We must recognize that evils decrees come from Hashem. We should not complain, but attribute our punishment to our sins (3:38, 39), recognize them, and repent (40). (Rashi)

The Rambam (*Taanios 1:1-3*) discusses a Torah commandment to cry out to Hashem when trouble besets a community:

שבזמן שתבוא צרה ויזעקו עליה ויריעו ידעו הכל שבגלל מעשיהם הרעים הורע ... וזה הוא שיגרום להסיר הצרה מעליהם. אבל אם לא יזעקו ולא יריעו אלא יאמרו דבר זה ממנהג העולם אירע לנו וצרה זו נקרה נקריית. הרי זו דרך אכזריות וגורמת להם להדבק במעשיהם

הרעים. ותוסיף הצרה צרות אחרות. הוא שכתוב בתורה והלכתם עמי בקרי והלכתי גם אני עמכם בחמת קרי.

When they cry out they will all realize that evil befalls them because of their misdeeds. They will repent ... and this causes the crisis to end. But if they attribute the problem to chance, it is a way of cruelty and causes them to cling to their evil ways, and suffer even greater troubles, as it is said (Vayikra 26:27, 28), “If despite this (punishment) you will not listen to Me, and you relate to Me if it is by chance, I will relate to you with fury.”

Fasting is a rabbinic extension of this mitzva (1:4) and applies to

an individual's crisis as well (1:9). Tisha B'av, and the three other fasts (Zecharia 8:19), remind us of our sins and the sins of our ancestors that resemble ours, which caused the tragedies which took place on those days. These fasts must awaken our hearts and lead us to teshuva (5:1-4).

Apparently, our sins cause the continuation of the state of destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, which took place, twice, on Tisha B'av. The Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 1:1) states that every generation in which the Bais Hamikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed then. Presumably, if we would correct the sins that caused the churban, the Bais Hamikdash would be rebuilt. Hence, we fast over our sins, as well as the similar sins of our ancestors, which perpetuate the state of churban.

The Neviim, and later Chazal, named specific sins that would, and did, cause the Bais Hamikdash to be destroyed. The Gemara (*Yoma* 9b) names *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) as the cause of Churban Bayis Sheni. If so, we must correct this sin to merit the third Bais Hamikdash.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 39b) interprets the rewards of a long and good life for fulfilling mitzvos (D'varim 5, 16; 22, 7) as referring to Olam Haba, not this world. Failure to recognize this led Acher, once a great sage, to question reward and punishment and this put him on a path towards heresy. Remarkably, the Yerushalmi (*Pe'ah* 1:1) states that there is no automatic correlation between mitzvos and immediate reward, in order to compel us to perform mitzvos with faith. Instant reward and punishment would curtail the exercise of free will. Tragically, Acher lacked this faith and became a heretic.

Understanding National Tragedies

National tragedy led to the loss of faith as well. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 105a) records a conversation in the aftermath of Churban Bayis Rishon. "The Navi says repent, and ten people respond: A servant who was sold by his master, does the master still have a claim on him? Since Hashem sold us to Nevuchadnetzar and banished us, can He still demand that we serve Him?" (Rashi). Hashem responds (*Yechezkel* 20:32, 33): "What enters your minds will not be. That you say we will be like the nations to worship wood and stone ... I will rule over you with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured fury." The term "fury" echoes the fury of the *tochacha*, rebuke, when Am Yisrael views tragedy as a coincidence, or, in this case, as an abandonment. The proper response is to recognize Hashem's Providence and call to teshuva.

Tisha B'av commemorates subsequent national tragedies (Rashi, *Divrei Hayamim* 2:35:25 see Artscroll *Kinnos* p. 270 quoting R. Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik). R. Soloveitchik's nephew, R. Yosef Dov, quoted the same source and reached the same conclusion, namely, that Tisha B'av is the day to commemorate the Holocaust as well.¹ Indeed, in many shuls it is included in the *Kinnos* (see Artscroll p. 384-388).

At the beginning of *Kol Dodi Dofek*, the Rav zt"l views speculation about suffering as futile and counterproductive. We cannot know why the righteous suffer.² Instead, we must ask what we should do in response.³ Woe unto the person who suffers and does not grow from the experience.⁴

Of course, growth and teshuva demand introspection. Both individuals and nations must examine their deeds and find ways to improve.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 26:11) notes the repetitive reference to the land in both the blessings and curses. They apply to the nation as a whole. When a catastrophe strikes an individual, it does not evoke wonderment, which is normal for all nations. But when all of Am and Eretz Yisrael are cursed, all will wonder:

וְאָמְרוּ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם עַל מַה עָשָׂה ה' כְּכֹה לְאַרְץ
הַזֹּאת מַה חָרִי הָאֵף הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה. וְאָמְרוּ עַל
אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּ אֶת בְּרִית ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר
כָּרַת עִמָּם בְּהוֹצִיאָם אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם. וַיִּלְכוּ
וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּם וְלֹא חָלַק לָהֶם. וַיַּחַר אֵף ה'
בְּאַרְץ הַהוּא לְהַבִּיא עֲלֶיהָ אֶת כָּל הַקְּלָלָה
הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה.

"Why did Hashem do so to the land? Why this fury?" They will say "because they forsook the bris ... they served other gods ... So Hashem was furious and brought about the curse."

D'varim 29:23-26.

The curses of *Vayikra* and *D'varim* refer to the Churban Bayis Rishon and the Churban Bayis Sheni, respectively (Ramban *Vayikra* 26:16). They reflect the behavior of the masses (Ramban *D'varim* 11:13). Countless tzadikim perished during each Churban and during the subsequent tragedies commemorated on Tisha B'av, many of which took place or began on Tisha B'av itself.

Beitar was conquered on Tisha B'av (*Ta'anis* 26a), and millions were killed. The expulsion from Spain occurred on Tisha B'av, 1492, and many gave their lives then and during previous Inquisitions. World War I began on Tisha B'av, 1914, costing many Jewish lives, and ultimately leading to the Holocaust and six million martyrs.⁵

In each case, rabbinic leaders exhorted the survivors, local and global, to strengthen their faith and observance. Often, they suggested teshuva for specific sins,⁶ while recognizing that many of the martyrs were tzadikim. Presumably, they followed the aforementioned Ramban that national tragedies are punishment for shortcomings of the masses, but claim innocent lives as well. The righteous and/or innocent children are caught up in the generation (*Shabbos* 33b), i.e. punished for the sins of the masses.

Moreover, as the Rav, zt"l, explained, our introspection is not for the purpose of determining *why* the national tragedy took place, but for the purpose of discovering *what* we can do to improve ourselves and what areas require teshuva:

על האדם לפתור לא את שאלת הנימוק
הסיבתי או התכליתי של הייסורים בכל
תסבוכתה הספקולטיבית כי אם את שאלת
תיקונם בכל פשטותה ההלכתית על ידי
הפיכת הגורל ליעוד והעלאת עצמו מאובייקט
לסובייקט מחפץ לגברא.

Man must solve, not the question of the causal or teleological reason for suffering with all its speculative complexity, but rather the question of its curative role, in all its halakhic simplicity, by turning fate to destiny and elevating himself from object to subject, from thing to man.

Kol Dodi Dofek pg. 16

Tragedy as a Source of Emunah

Often, a subsequent event was viewed as a message from Hashem that He has not, and never will, abandon Am Yisrael. When the corpses of the Beitar massacre were preserved and buried, Chazal instituted the bracha of *Hatov V'Hameitiv* into Birkas Hamazon (*Brachos* 48b). The

political and military miracles in Eretz Yisrael in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and beyond must be viewed as Divine Providence, enabling Am Yisrael to survive and thrive after unspeakable and unprecedented calamity.⁷

The idea of *hester panim*, the concealment of Hashem's face, is invoked as early as the period following Churban Bayis Rishon (*Chulin* 139b). This in no way detaches tragedy from sinful behavior (see *Yoma* 9b). In context (D'varim 31:18), Hashem hides His face because of the sins of Am Yisrael; again, many tzadikim suffer in such tragedies.

Our introspection is not for the purpose of determining *why* the national tragedy took place, but for the purpose of discovering *what* we can do to improve ourselves.

The eternity of Torah commandments and their binding nature was questioned as early as the time of Yechezkel, when we were "sold" to Nevuchadnetzar, and as recently as the Holocaust when we were "sold" to Hitler and the Nazis. Hashem's aforementioned response, that He rules over us forever, and therefore that Torah and mitzvos are binding forever, must be taught and reinforced.⁸

When individuals suffer, if they "kick,"

their pain doubles (*Tana D'be Eliyahu* 2), just as Am Yisrael's travails increase when they attribute their curses to chance. But if we view suffering as Hashem's calls to teshuva, it atones for our sins (*B'rachos* 5a) and enhances our Olam Haba (*P'nei Yehoshua*). As the Rav writes (*Kol Dodi Dofek* p. 13-14), pain should elevate us, purify and sanctify us. From the crisis itself we are saved, awakened to repent and renew ourselves.

When many *ra'os* (evils) and *tzaros* (troubles) befalls us, we respond, "Because Hashem is not in our midst, these evils befall me." (*Devarim* 31:17) When we recognize that evils come from Hashem, they are no longer considered troubles (Rav Schach, *Avi Ezri*: Introduction to *Nashim*, written in besieged Yerushalayim in May, 1948).

As the Rav writes (*Kol Dodi Dofek* p. 11), human comprehension is limited. We see only snippets of history. Only seeing the whole picture enables us to understand suffering and its purpose.

The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe* Shemos 33:23) writes that the Torah hints at this idea. "You will see My back, but My face cannot be seen." In real time (My face), we cannot understand, and we wonder, "Why did Hashem do this?" Only in retrospect (My back) can we see the purpose of events. Sometimes, as in the story of Purim, it becomes clear a few years later. Until then, we must have faith that everything has a purpose. Often, the purpose of suffering, personal and national, remains a mystery, to be revealed only at the end of days. Until then, we must have faith that what seems bad comes from the Judge of the Truth and that ultimately the good will be revealed.

In this world, therefore, we bow our

heads when confronting death and bad tidings, and recite Baruch Dayan Ha'emes, expressing our faith that Hashem's judgment is true. In the next world, however, we will say on bad tidings, as on good ones, "Hatov V'hameitiv." (*Pesachim* 50a) Only then can and will we understand that all we perceive now as bad, is, and retrospectively, was for the good.

The *Be'er Yosef* (*Parashas Vayelech* pg. 308) illustrates this idea with a moshol. A city boy thought that bread grew from the ground. He visited a farm, and saw the field being plowed. How destructive, he thought. Then he saw seeds being buried. How wasteful, he felt. When vegetation emerged, he realized his mistake. The purpose was to plant a beautiful garden. But then, the farmer cut down all the wheat. Now he was really confused. His confusion increased as the grain was threshed, ground, kneaded and thrown into a fire. Only when the bread emerged did he realize the positive purpose of all the apparently destructive acts.

The *Me'am Loez* (*Shoftim* 6:12) cites a story of a disciple of the Ramban who was dying. The Ramban requested that he inquire in Heaven about the suffering of Am Yisrael, and relate the answers to him in a dream. When the disciple appeared to the Ramban in a dream, he said: "When I wanted to ask your question, I saw that there are no questions in the world of truth, as all is done with righteousness and justice."

Yerushalayim: Truth and Peace

As we remember and bemoan the trouble and calamities that Am Yisrael suffered with the destruction of the Batei Mikdash on Tisha B'av, and are mindful of the tragedies, national and personal, we await and pray for the final redemption, when Tisha B'av will become a holiday. As Zecharia (8:19) prophesied, the four fasts that mark the four stages of Churban Bayis Rishon will be days of joy, happiness, and good holidays.

The pasuk ends: Love truth and peace, as conditions of redemption. Yerushalayim is a compound word. Shem, Malki Zedek (B'reishis 14:18) called it Shalem. Avraham called it (Hashem) Yir'eh (22:14). So neither should complain; Hashem combined both names and called it Yerushalayim (B'reishis Rabba 56:16).

The *Meshech Chochma* (B'reishis 22:14) explains that Shem, who witnessed the theft and evil character that caused the mabul, focused on interpersonal improvement. Hence, he called his capital Shalem, to emphasize perfecting character and peace. Avraham discovered Hashem and His Providence, and focused on spreading monotheism to others. Hence, he called his capital (Hashem) Yir'eh, to emphasize the existence and omniscience of the Almighty. Therefore, Hashem called His capital Yerushalayim, to emphasize the need for both *bein adam lamakom* and *bein adam lachavero*.

If either of the fundamental principles of Yerushalayim is violated, the city cannot stand. The first Bais

Hamikdash was destroyed because of *avoda zara* (*Yoma* 9b), the opposite of truth. The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (*ibid.*), the opposite of peace. It is, therefore, no wonder that the condition for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash is that we love truth and peace.

Each of us can advance the *ge'ula* by adhering to these sacred and eternal values. May we thereby merit the final redemption, and, ultimately, understand the role of personal and national suffering as part of Hashem's goodness. May Tisha B'av become a Yom Tov — *b'mhera b'yamenu Amen*.

Endnotes

1 *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways* p. 213, 289, 299, 300.

2 *Divrei Hagut VeHa'aracha* p. 11, 12.

3 *Ibid*, p. 13.

4 *Ibid*, p. 14-15.

5 See *Artscroll Tisha B'av* p. 157, 158.

6 For example, *Or Hachaim*, end of Chap. 5, attributing the expulsion from Spain to improper philosophical study. The Crusades were linked to viewing Germany as a permanent Home. *Meshech Chochma* (*Vayikra* 26:44) predicted catastrophe, since many thought that Berlin was the new Yerushalayim (see *Artscroll Kinnos* p. 271). Subsequently, R. Avigdor Miller (*A Divine Madness*) links the Holocaust to 150 years of secularization which engulfed the majority of the Jews in Europe by 1939.

7 See *With Fury Poured Out* by R. Bernard Maza.

8 See *Tradition* 39:2 Summer 2005 p. 66, 67.



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