

Hashgacha in the Face of Amalek

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The terrible suffering, *rachmana litzlan*, that has been, and to a degree continues to be, inflicted upon *acheinu Bnei Yisrael*, asks for reflection on so many different levels, with so many different foci. Given the current slot and venue, *tafasta merubah lo tafasta*, so we'll try *b'ezras Hashem bli neder* to focus on one aspect.

When I was first reading about what happened in *Eretz Yisrael*, I saw that some of the survivors were comparing it to the Holocaust. And in my first round of reading, where all I saw were statistics—horrifying statistics—I didn't understand why they were drawing that comparison. With the second round of reading, which wasn't limited to statistics, but already included descriptions of what was inflicted and how it was done, the unspeakable savagery, I began to understand the comparison to the Holocaust. And in my third round of reading, I now think that the savagery displayed by the Amalek of 5784—obviously not in terms of numbers and quantity, but in terms of the savagery—actually exceeds many of the Holocaust accounts that one reads. And the question which some of you very sincerely are asking, others perhaps are on the receiving end of the question. We understand that the perpetrators are Amalek, that they chose to abuse their *bechira chofshis*, to extinguish the humanity within themselves, to extinguish

¹ Note: this adapted transcript was not reviewed by the speaker

the *tzelem Elokim* within themselves, and transform themselves into monsters—we understand that. The question is: How does *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* allow it to happen? I'd like not to *answer* the question, but to provide perspective on the question.

When this question, known as the question of theodicy, arises, it's crucial to first understand how thinking about this should be approached. And one cannot—it's wrong and will yield wrong results—if a person begins with a question of “how this could happen”. The question one needs to begin with is from within: Given our conception of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the belief system which surrounds it, can we—should we—expect to understand all *darchei habashgacha*? Can we—should we—expect that all *darchei habashgacha* will be comprehensible to us?

So, *mashal l'mah hadavar domeh*: Imagine you have parents that adopt the following policy: Because they don't want their baby to ever be frustrated by their actions, they'll only do what the baby—the newborn, the neonate, the three-month-old, the six-month-old, the toddler—can understand and appreciate. But if the baby won't be able to understand it or appreciate it, they won't do it. What emerges is that a baby is not going to understand why the guy in the white coat is sticking him with needles at his periodic visits, so they won't give him any inoculations. Our reaction to that is: that's not compassion, that's cruelty; that the parents limit themselves in their parenting in looking out for the welfare of their child, that they limit themselves to the infantile—literally infantile!—understanding of the baby, is child abuse! How can it be? There can't be an expectation that we, with our puny, finite intellect, are going to understand the *darchei Hashem*. *Hakadosh*

Baruch Hu is infinite; He is omniscient, and we're finite and have a puny intellect. So take the *mashal* and multiply it by a factor of infinity. So there clearly is no expectation that we can or will ever understand all *darchei bahashgacha*, because that would mean that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is exercising *hashgacha* in a way that's limited and constrained by our futile understanding.

Now, a little bit of an *omek* to maybe—a little bit—deepen our understanding of this point. Again let's begin with a *mashal*. Let's say you have someone who has some disability, *rachmana litzlan*, that he can only see the world in two dimensions. When he looks at a person, he sees a cutout, a paper cutout figure. He only sees the world in two dimensions. If he wants to analyze, he can only analyze the world in two dimensions. Others who are not limited by this disability, they see the world in three dimensions. So it's not only the case that the one who sees, experiences, and—therefore—analyzes the world in three dimensions sees more, but that individual sees a different reality. It's not just a question of *kamos*, and maybe not even *aichus*, but it's an entirely different reality. To see something in two dimensions or to see it in three dimensions is not to see more of it, it's not even just to see qualitatively differently, it's an entirely different reality.

If one wanted to oversimplify the Rambam's teachings about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, one would reduce it to the following: we have the tendency to think of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as—I don't mean this facetiously, it's not a time for humor and it's not intended to be humorous—we think of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as a superman. What does that mean? We think that “well we're mortal, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s more, he's immortal. And we know only so much, and

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is omniscient; He knows everything. But basically we think of Him in human categories, but since He surpasses us, He's superhuman. The Rambam says no, that's fundamentally wrong; *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* existence is entirely different, *sui generis*, and has nothing in common with our existence—“*ein amitaso ke'amitas echad mehem*” (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:3). Everything about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is entirely different—entirely different from us—and the same way the Rambam says that the reality of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has got nothing in common with our reality—*ein amitaso*—so too when we speak of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's yedi'ah*, it has nothing in common with our *yedi'ah*. And that's what the *Navi* means when he, speaking in the voice of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, says “*Ki lo machshevosai machsbevoeichem*” (*Yeshayahu* 55:8). So when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “sees” the world, he sees a different reality. Again back to our *mashal l'mah badavar domeh*—obviously any *mashal* whenever you're talking about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by definition the *mashal* is inadequate, but nonetheless helpful—to that one person whose sees, experiences, and analyzes the world in two dimensions, and another person who sees, experiences, and analyzes, the world in three dimensions.

So the answer to our first question of “can we, should we expect to understand all *darchei habashgacha*”, is obviously and very compellingly: no, of course not. Of course that's *min ha'nimna*; of course there have to be mysteries of divine providence. Yes, there are some *parshiyos pesuchos* in the *sugya* of *hashgacha*, but obviously there are going to be *parshiyos setumos*. It couldn't be otherwise. It's ludicrous to think that it would be otherwise.

There's another element of perspective on the question—again, we're not looking to answer the question, we're looking to have a perspective on the question. Let's again begin with a *mashal*. Let's say you have an adult and he's looking back on his childhood, and he's looking back on how his parents engaged in parenting. And the objective track record is that his parents were wonderful parents, always, even in terms of his subjective experience— always nurturing, always doing what was best for him. Once, when he was eleven years old, they disciplined him very harshly. Neither then nor subsequently could he ever make sense of why they acted that way. It just... it doesn't add up. It didn't add up when he was eleven and experienced it, and even now when he's twenty one, thirty one, forty one and looking back with an adult perspective, it still doesn't add up. So if he's going to reflect on his parents and their parenting, obviously he can't have tunnel vision and hone in on that experience—that Monday evening when he was eleven years old—and draw inferences and conclusions from that to characterize how his parents parented. Without ignoring it, without denying it, honesty requires that if he wants to have an accurate perception, he needs a panoramic vision. He has to reflect on his entire childhood. When he does so, that episode remains a *parshah setumah*. He still doesn't understand it; maybe he never will. But he knows—*davar ha'lamed mei'inyano*—in conjunction with the first *yesod* that obviously there have to be things in *hashgacha* that we won't understand. There has to be; it has to be that way; it can't be otherwise.

But given what we do understand, there is a pattern. There's a pattern of our miraculous existence, there's a pattern of incredible *chassadim al gabei chassadim*. Who's life here hasn't been changed by

the *bracha* of being able to spend time in *Medinas Yisrael*? The reason you were able to spend time in *Eretz Yisrael* is because there's a *Medinas Yisrael*. So yes, there's an indescribably, excruciatingly painful episode which defies our understanding. We don't understand it, we're not going to understand it. But it doesn't shake a person's *emunah* because a person knows going in that he can't— shouldn't, that it's absurd to think he'll understand everything, and that there is a broader context in which a person needs to think. That's the basis for *Tziduk Hadin*. That's how a person when it's literally applicable *rachmana litzlan*, when a person has to make the *bracha* of *Dayan Haemes*, that's the mindset which allows for it, and that's what we need to be aware of as we reflect upon the current *matzav* in *Eretz Yisrael*.