My anger will flare against it...And many evils and distress will encounter it...It will say on that day, "Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?" (31:17)

Klal Yisrael's sins incurred Hashem's wrath, as well as His consequent concealment of Himself from them. The *pasuk* goes on to state that even after *Klal Yisrael* acknowledged that they were suffering as a result of Hashem's removal of His Presence from their midst, Hashem continued to conceal Himself from them. While this may be a particularly severe punishment, we are told later that regardless of our sins, the *Torah* will never be forgotten from our People. If we have the *Torah*, we still can maintain hope for ultimate reconciliation after we have fully repented. In addressing the meaning of "many evils and distresses," in the *Talmud Chagigah 5A Chazal* suggest that this is a reference to evils which become antagonists to each other. An example is the bites of a wasp and a scorpion. While hot water must be used to ease the pain of a wasp's bite, cold water is prescribed for a scorpion's bite. Hence, the victim just cannot seem to relieve his discomfort. This stern form of disciplinary reaction constitutes the compensation for our sins against the Al-mighty.

The *Talmud* recounts that when Rabbi Yochanan encountered this *pasuk*, he wept, saying, "A slave whose master brings many evils and distresses upon him, is there any remedy for him?" Rabbi Yochanan seems to have been concerned by the idea that our punishment will pursue us. He compared this to a master who seeks out his servant with the intent of disciplining him. What is unique about this form of punishment that do distressed Rabbi Yochanan?

Horav Eliyahu Meier Bloch, zl, explains that the *Torah's* concept of reward and punishment is different from that found in the secular world. A person who is judged by a court of law receives a punishment that is unrelated to his actual transgression. In other words, when he sins, the court imposes a punishment for his violation after ascertaining his guilt. The *Torah*, on the other hand, is different. When one sins, the actual sin creates a blemish within. It is as if he ate spoiled food and became sick. The deed causes the illness. Just as one's entire being is imbued with a virtue that effects reward when he perform a *mitzvah*, so, too, is one filled with a strain of evil which in itself results in punishment when he performs an *aveirah*, sin.

Rabbi Yochanan wept over the imminence of punishment. This can be likened to a king who sent his servant to perform a task that was fraught with danger, demanding extreme vigilance and dedication. He warned his servant, "Be careful, for any mistake would result in grave punishment--even death!" While the warning is compelling, the servant still knows that if he errs, he can still beg the king's forgiveness and hope that his years of dedicated service will save him. If the king, however, has sent along an officer with the understanding that if the servant failed, he should be punished immediately -- or if he was working with a highly volatile combustible chemical

which could explode at the slightest inaccuracy -- undoubtedly, the servant's attitude would change.

When one sins, it is not the master who punishes. Rather, it is the sin that produces the evils and distresses. The punishment will find him, because it is the direct result of his transgression.

Horav Bloch supplements this explanation. The greatest tragedy of punishment is that a person does not realize why he is being subjected to distress. We tend to look for excuses to justify the things that happen to us. We fault everything and everyone, but never do we acquiesce to the truth: We have sinned, and Hashem is punishing us. Rabbi Yochanan wept over perceptions and responses of human nature. If a person would only realize that Hashem was communicating with him, the punishment would not need to be as intense. Instead the punishment would be completely effective.