

The Rock--Perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice. (32:4)

Hashem's judgment is meticulous and fair. Our inability to comprehend His justice is not a reason to disdain those areas of Heavenly justice to which we do not relate well. Hashem has reasons for every Heavenly act and decree. Most are not within our scope of comprehension. Therefore, we need *emunah*, faith. We are to trust in Hashem that everything He does is good--even though we do not necessarily understand His decree. Life is all part of one great continuum. Everyone has his "day in court." We are not on this world long enough to see or comprehend everything that occurs. We accept Divine justice with a deep trust in Hashem. To paraphrase **Horav Chaim Brisker, zl**, "Faith begins where human reason ends."

Yet, we have questions that challenge our faith. We encounter difficulties in life, both of a personal and national nature, which we accept with faith in the Almighty. **Horav Chaim Vital, zl**, writes that if a person could open the Gates of Heaven and perceive its deepest secrets, he would clearly perceive the great benefit he will receive as a result of his hardships. Indeed, when *Iyov* found out that he was actually a *gilgul*, reincarnation, of *Terach*, *Avroham Avinu's* father, he immediately became silent and accepted Hashem's judgment. He realized that he had the responsibility to atone for and correct the spiritual damage which *Terach's* idol worship caused.

Yalkut Lekach Tov cites a compelling *Midrash* that gives us insight into the foundation of Hashem's decrees. The *Midrash* relates that when the Jews in Egypt could no longer produce the daily quota of bricks, Pharaoh decreed that their small children be built into the walls to replace the missing bricks. Can we imagine the heartbreak of such a cruel decree? Yet, we have no idea why Hashem issued this decree.

Moshe Rabbeinu implored Hashem, beseeching Him with prayers for compassion that He rescind this decree. Hashem relented, instructing *Moshe* to save one child and see what would become of his future life. *Moshe* immediately rescued a little child that had already been built into the mortar. Years passed and the little child, who was named *Micha*, grew up. This child was the one who retrieved the gold plate with the words "*Alei Shur*" inscribed on it, which *Moshe* had thrown into the Nile River to locate *Yosef HaTzaddik's* coffin. When *Moshe* was "late" in returning from *Har Sinai*, this same *Micha* threw the gold plate into the fire, creating the Golden Calf!

Moshe Rabbeinu questioned Hashem's decree. After much prayer, he succeeded in altering the course of events. *Moshe's* act of mercy catalyzed a chain of events which resulted in the greatest sin of the Jewish People--the Golden Calf. We have no idea of the countless tragedies that have befallen us as a result of the *Chat Ha'eigel*, the sin of the Golden Calf. Indeed, we are taught that the Golden Calf is the partial cause of every calamity that has befallen the Jewish People! This is the result of misplaced compassion, of questioning the Almighty. Hashem is all merciful, the source of compassion. Due to our limited perception, we are hindered from comprehending this

truth. If we could only know the root cause of every decree, we would see the true compassion behind them. Hashem's ways are perfect. It is our vision which is myopic.

At times it seems that regardless of our conviction, our faith notwithstanding, Hashem seems to impede every step. Indeed, it becomes like a challenge, "How much can you handle before you give in?" This is Hashem's way of demonstrating to us that no power can take away our ability to love Him. *Ahavas Hashem* is innate within the Jew. While some individuals attempt to conceal it, each *neshamah* has in it a minute component which emanates from Hashem. We and Hashem are one! He tests us to see if we are prone to sever that relationship. We have the power to persevere--if we only have the motivation.

There is a very poignant story told over by **Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita**, which emphasizes how Hashem challenges our resolve and commitment--knowing fully well our ability to sustain our belief in Him. The Marranos were Spanish Jews who had publicly converted to Christianity under the threat of death. They maintained, however, a clandestine commitment to Hashem and His *Torah*. If they were discovered, death in the most cruel manner was imminent. The story relates that one distinguished Marrano family, who secretly observed *Torah* and *mitzvos*, was about to be investigated. A friend of theirs had forewarned them of their fate. They decided to take their chances and attempt to escape. They managed to flee empty-handed, wandering for weeks until they found their way to a refugee camp in Morocco. The conditions in the camp were terrible at best; poverty, sickness, and depression pervaded, but at least they were with others like themselves.

Suddenly, one day, the camp was hit with the plague. Death was everywhere. Within a few weeks, the proud parents were crushed by the loss of all of their children. To escape the fiery death of the auto-de-fe, only to die from a dread disease, was a crushing blow, both emotionally and spiritually. Yet, their *emunah* in Hashem remained resolute. The parents remained as strong as they could under the circumstances and accepted their fate. Then finally one day the wife, who had accompanied her husband as the shadow of death hung ominously in their midst, herself succumbed to the plague.

The husband and father was left alone in a cruel world. He was now bereft of his life's partner and the children who represented his future. Yet, he did not fall apart. He did not give up his *Yiddishkeit*. Instead, with unparalleled faith in Hashem, he lifted up his eyes to Heaven and said, "*Ribbono Shel Olam*, I know that all along You have been challenging me to see if I will cease to love You, if I will relinquish my faith in You, to see if I would break from the pressure. Hashem, what is left for You to take away from me? What more can You do to me to break me away from You?

"When they forced us into Christianity, we remained committed to you. While we lived in constant fear, our devotion to you never waned. When we had the choice of accepting certain death, or running away so that we could continue living and serving You, we chose life. Then You tested us

with our children. First one died, and we continued to believe. Then, one by one all of our beautiful children died--and we still maintained our faith. You could not shake us. Then You took my wife. I am now left without my family. What else can You use to destroy me?

"The way I look at it", he continued, "only two things are left for You to take from me. One is my life; the other is my faith in You. If You want my life, take it, since it really is not mine anyway--it is Yours. If You want my faith, however, if You want to break the love that I have for You--that, *Ribbono Shel Olam*, You cannot have. No, not even the Almighty can shake my love and faith. They are mine--and only mine. I will never give them up!"

The lesson is clear. Nothing can take away our ability to love Hashem. That is the essence of a Jew. Surely, everyone faces situations in life in which he asks, "What does Hashem want from me? How much can I take? Why does He challenge me so?" Hashem is clearly engaging us--testing us--only to teach us this lesson. Regardless of how many years pass, or how distant one has become from Hashem, the Jew is really never far away. "*Kudsha Brich Hu V'Yisrael Chad Hu*" - We are one with Hashem. We can never separate ourselves from Him.