

“And many evils and troubles shall come upon them, and they shall say on that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because G-d is not in our midst?’ And I will surely have concealed My face on that day.” (31:17-18)

These two *pesukim* begin by asserting Hashem’s anger, followed by the concealment of His countenance as a result of *Klal Yisrael’s* transgressions. Afterwards, when the nation recognizes that its suffering is due to Hashem’s concealment, the next *pasuk* continues with Hashem concealing Himself once again. This is enigmatic. One would think that recognition of sin is a step towards *teshuvah*, repentance. Surely, it should not be followed with more *hester Panim*, concealment of Hashem’s countenance. Indeed, this is a difficult and most tragic prophecy. What could be worse than Hashem removing Himself from our midst? It is softened only with the promise that, regardless of our infamy, *Torah* will not be forgotten from our People. Yet, the question still remains: Why would Hashem continue His concealment after we have taken that first step towards *teshuvah*?

Ramban explains that *Klal Yisrael’s* acknowledgment of their iniquity falls short of genuine *teshuvah*. They realize that they have erred, but they still refuse to confess and repent wholeheartedly. A half-baked *teshuvah* will not effect a completely favorable response from the Almighty. We will have to do better than that. Although the *Torah* does not indicate any new punishment, we still do not merit Hashem’s return.

Sforno explains that while Hashem conceals His presence, He will always be there to protect and preserve our People. We can, and still should, pray to Him, even during moments of *hester Panim*. *Horav Bunim, z.l., m’Peshischa*, addresses this *pasuk* homiletically, maintaining that for a Jew to say that Hashem is not in his midst is in itself a grave sin. No Jew should ever feel alone. No Jew has the right to say that Hashem has deserted him. Even during those moments of pain, terror and affliction, Hashem is with us.

I recently saw another approach towards understanding this *pasuk*. The question that has occupied the searching mind for generations, from Moshe *Rabbeinu* to the contemporary Jew, is, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” – and vice-versa. Moshe *Rabbeinu* asked Hashem, “*Horeinu na derachecha*”, “Let me know Your ways.” Indeed, *Sefer Iyov* focuses on this pivotal question – with the conclusion that there is no logical answer. It is a principle of faith that Hashem is just and compassionate. Those decisions that seem severe and cruel to us are beyond our limited scope of understanding. To believe in Hashem means to place our trust in Him even at those times when doing so challenges our cognitive abilities. Just because something does not make sense to us does not mean it does not make sense. We are limited by mortal parameters; Hashem certainly is

not.

Regrettably, over time, some individuals have postulated that bad things happen to good people because, at times, Hashem “loses control.” He cannot be everywhere all of the time. Therefore, some situations just seem to get away from Him. Such heresy is what we have come to expect from those who have alienated themselves from *Torah* and, consequently, from Hashem. Moshe *Rabbeinu* foresaw this breakdown in Jewish faith when he said, “They will say on that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because G-d is not in our midst?’” We are cautioned not to err and think that tragedy is the result of Divine shortcoming or a lack of Hashem’s Providence or Omnipotence.

While it is true that there is no logical explanation for the bad things that happen to good people, we must depend upon our faith. Does religion always have to be logical? If so, why is it called religion? It is logical! Indeed, as is stated in the *chassidische seforim*, if Hashem would have felt that it was to our advantage to understand Hashem’s ways, He would have availed us the ability to do so. Apparently, the leap of faith required of us to accept and justify Hashem’s actions is a necessary component in our spiritual development.