

G-d said to Noach, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them.” (6:13)

Chazal focus on the word *mipneihem*, “through them,” written in *lashon rabim*, plural, implying that Hashem was weary with the actions of the *gazlan*, thief, and the *nigzal*, victim. This is enigmatic. While it is understandable that the actions of the thieves were at the point of disgust, what blame can be placed on the hapless victims? Is it my fault that someone decided to rob me? Apparently, the Torah has a dim view of the victim. Perhaps he is not as blameless as we would be led to believe.

Horav Arye Leib Bakst, zl, explains that we are all aware of the laws that apply to the robber/thief. We know that it is prohibited to steal; we understand the punishment and the reasons behind the laws. We do not realize, however, that some laws apply equally to the victim. Yes, a victim has to act with rectitude becoming that of a Torah Jew. When we think of the word “victim,” it conjures up an image of a poor, broken-hearted individual, who was violated by another person. The thief is a scoundrel; the victim is a hero. It is not always like that. The victim remains a “victim” as long as he does not take advantage of his predicament. He does not have the right to do whatever he pleases vis-à-vis the thief. He may not take revenge. He may neither curse him, nor wish him any ill; nor is stealing from him permitted. He may not humiliate the thief – publicly or privately. The victim has to go literally against his human nature to transcend his feelings of vengeance and accept what has happened as G-d’s decree.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* goes so far as to suggest that the laws applicable to the *nigzal* are more compelling than those which apply to the thief. The robber must pay the principal, and, under certain conditions, be fined double or even four or five times the principal. It is a “money thing.” He stole; he must make reparations. Concerning the victim, however, the laws are much more demanding. We require the victim to look away, swallow his pride, overcome his feelings of animosity, and forgive and forget. He has to go so far as to pity the thief who has devastated him! Regrettably, all too often, victims of a theft or a scam feel that concerning the swindler, anything goes. He may be abused, humiliated, reviled, his children subjected to scorn and derision. Well, it is not so. This is not the Torah way. The *nigzal* also has laws. The Torah teaches that when Yosef *HaTzadik* finally revealed himself to his brothers, they trembled with fear, lest he seek vengeance for the ill treatment he had received at their hands. Yosef proved them wrong. Not only did he not seek vengeance, he did not humiliate or scorn them; rather, he went out of his way to appease and comfort them, to persuade them that they had done nothing wrong, that he was not angry. It was all part of Hashem’s plan. He made them feel good concerning their selling him to the *Yishmaelim*, which led to his incarceration in various dungeons and the life of misery that is intrinsic to the prisoner’s lot.

Rav Bakst observes that one should not counter that it is only someone who is on Yosef’s spiritual plateau who is capable of acting so humanely; that this is not to be expected of the average Jew.

The Torah does not just write stories. Everything in the Torah is written for us all. Thus, Yosef's behavior is the type of behavior expected of each of us. If the Torah records it for posterity, it is to be taken as a Divine message: This is how you are supposed to act. The victim has an awesome responsibility.

This was Hashem's critique of the *dor ha'Mabul* – both thief and victim. The thief should not steal. Let him show respect for others. The victim also has a moral obligation to himself. He must transcend his innate desire to exact vengeance. Both the thief and the victim have deferred to their base instinct. The thief saw, wanted and took. The victim should not have pursued the case. What was done was done – it is over. It is G-d's device. He must live with it.

Regrettably, this is a disease that affects us all. Who does not despise the fellow that violated and humiliated “me” by taking my money – either through blatant theft or through what was purported to be an innocuous loan for a short time, an investment in a “sure thing”? It is done – over with. Hashem wanted you to lose the money. The thief was the “messenger.” Cursing him, his family, his children, will neither recover your loss nor will it really make you feel better. You are hurt; you are in pain. Swallow it and move on. The *dor ha'Mabul* did not. Thus, they were removed from the earth.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that the feeling of being victimized finds its parallel in one's relationship with G-d. One may subconsciously harbor “questions” concerning Hashem's direction of the world. Sadly, there are “still” those who feel that they have to understand what Hashem does; that everything which He performs in the world must come under the rubric of their conception and comply with their own distinction between right and wrong. Furthermore, the individual who considers himself an “innocent” victim of Hashem's fury hypothesizes that he is now permitted to act with impunity, following his heart's desire with total disregard for Hashem's *mitzvos*.

Man must come to the realization that he is in this world for a purpose – Hashem's purpose. The Almighty determines right and wrong and who is deserving and who is not. Hashem provides every Jew with his needs. This does not mean that one may not want more. He just may not say that he needs more. If Hashem has not provided it, then he does not need it. “Want” does not equal “need.” We often see instances, situations, occurrences which appear nonsensical to our little minds. This presents us with a challenge to our *emunah*. A Jew whose *emunah* is intact and running on “full” has no challenges. He believes that not everything Hashem does must make sense to him. He recognizes that he is not capable of determining what makes sense, since he is not privy to the whole picture. There is a Divine plan, and many considerations are factored into Hashem's decision. If man's plan does not coincide with Hashem's plan – it is unfortunate, but it does not mean that there is something questionable about Hashem's plan. Man is not privy to more than he can see, and, even then, that he can understand. We are limited people with limited faculties. How can we expect to understand Hashem Who is Omniscient? The following episodes, related by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, is a classic example of how little we know, and how much less we understand.

One of *Eretz Yisrael's* distinguished philanthropists visited with *Rav Zilberstein* and shared the following story with him: "A number of years ago, the head of one of *Yerushalayim's chesed* organizations appealed to me to help defray the expenses of a wedding he was preparing for a poor orphan. The bride hailed from a large family whose mother had just passed away. The father was strapped with debt from which he had no way of extricating himself. The wedding expenses, along with the bridal trousseau and apartment, were far beyond his capabilities. Could I help?

"After listening to the story, I wrote out a check to cover the expenses of the entire wedding, including the apartment and furniture. I was especially moved by the man's appeal. This was a family that truly deserved my assistance. In fact, when the wedding day arrived, I participated personally. Upon seeing the abject poverty of the bride's family, I understood the value of the *mitzvah* I had performed. At the end of the wedding, one of the distinguished *ziknei Yerushalayim*, elders of the community, an honorable man who had been around for quite some time, came over to me and whispered, 'Since you merited to help this family in their time of need, I will share with you their incredible story.

"The parents of the *kallah*, bride, are descendants of an esteemed *Yerushalmi* lineage of righteous Torah scholars. They personally have undergone much misery and travail. At one point, they were very wealthy. They lacked nothing, and their home was the address for *chesed* for Jews from all over. One thing hung over their heads; one source of pain and anguish did not leave them: They had not yet been blessed with offspring.

"The wealthy man petitioned the **Tchebiner Rav, zl**, for a blessing. The *Rav* had recently emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* and did not grant blessings. The man was relentless, begging, entreating, almost demanding a blessing that he and his wife be granted children. Finally, the *Tchebiner Rav* submitted to his request, but there was a contingency that first must be addressed. 'If you want to be blessed with children you have to give up all of your money. You cannot have it both ways: either children, or wealth. It is one or the other – not both. Additionally, loss of wealth does not mean middle class. You will be very poor, at times not having what to eat in your home. Perhaps, you should go home and think about it. Are you willing to give up all of your comforts, to literally become a beggar, so that you will have children?

"*Rebbe*, I do not have to think it over. We want children and we are prepared to relinquish everything for this blessing." The *Tchebiner Rav* blessed him, and the following year the couple was blessed with a child. This went on for a number of years until they were a family of thirteen children. The other part of the blessing was also fulfilled, as they became so terribly impoverished they were forced to subsist on whatever food they could gather. Yet, they raised their children with dignity, accepting Hashem's Divine decree with love. This acquiescence continued on even after the man's wife became ill and died shortly after giving birth to their thirteenth child.

"At this point the elderly man turned to me and said, 'The bride whose wedding you paid for was their thirteenth child. You have a tremendous *z'chus*, merit. Heaven will certainly reimburse your

kindness.”

The philanthropist continued to relate to *Rav Zilberstein*, “I was truly blessed as a result of my act of *chesed*. Shortly after the girl’s wedding, I became ill with an incurable disease from which I should not have survived. Yet, Hashem added years to my life, and the surgery to remove the tumor was successful. Two years later, it came back—this time with a vengeance. The doctors had little hope for a recovery. After consulting with the medical assistant organization, *Ezrah L’Marpeh*, I was told to have another surgery in New York. Apparently, there was one doctor who was willing to do the surgery on me. *Rav Elimelech Finer*, who is the director of *Ezra L’Marpeh*, insisted that I be accompanied by a young man who volunteers at the organization. He knew the various doctors and the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ of the system. He would be an invaluable resource for me.

“We met at the airport, and, after speaking with the young man, I discovered that he was the brother-in-law of the young orphaned girl whose wedding I had paid for. Her husband was this man’s younger brother. When I heard this, I realized that Hashem was conveying a message to me: It is all going to be fine. I left encouraged, filled with hope, that in the merit of my *tzedakah*, I would survive this ordeal.”

Now let us return to the beginning of the story. We see a family whose lineage is distinctive, suffering the effects of abject poverty. We wonder, “Hashem, how could You do this to them? They are such special people who have contributed so much to *Klal Yisrael*.” Little do we know that this family’s poverty was a “trade” for their thirteen children. They joyfully accepted the poverty because of the “fringe benefits” it catalyzed. How little do we know, how much less do we understand?