

If I sharpen My flashing sword and my hand grasps judgment I shall return vengeance upon my enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution. (32:41)

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* derive from the words, *v'socheiz ba'mishpat Yadi*, "and My hand grasps judgment," that Hashem's meting out of punishment is unlike that of human judges. A human being who lets the arrow leave the bow, or allows the bullet to exit the chamber, knows that there is no turning back. Once the arrow/bullet is released it is "deadset" on reaching its target. There is no pulling back, no reprieve. It is too late. For Hashem, it is never too late. The Almighty can retrieve His arrows, call back His bullets at any time. Hashem is always in control.

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl, asks a practical question and employs the above *pasuk* with its accompanying Rabbinic commentary to elucidate and resolve his query. In the *Talmud Taanis 29a*, *Chazal* record the process leading up to and including the *Churban Bais HaMikdash*, destruction of the Temple. On the seventh day of *Av*, the Romans entered the *Heichal* and proceeded to desecrate it for the next two days. On *Tisha B'Av*, shortly before sunset, they set fire to the edifice. It continued to burn throughout the next day. Rabbi Yochanan said, "Had I been alive during that time, I would have declared that the fast take place on the tenth of *Av*, since that is when the majority of the Temple was destroyed."

Rav Yosef Zundel points out that Rabbi Yochanan's statement is not consistent with his opinion in *Meseches Bava Kamma*, that *isho mishum chitzo*, the fire set by a man which continues to burn, is considered the work of his own hands. Although the fire burns on its own, the one who ignited it with his hands is considered as if he is directly involved every moment that it burns. It is not merely something for which he is responsible. It is something that he is actually doing. The *Nimukei Yosef* questions this *halachah*. How is one permitted to light candles *Erev Shabbos*? According to the opinion that *isho mi'shum chitzo*, the candles which are burning on *Shabbos* are considered the direct action of the one who lit them *Erev Shabbos*. He explains that *isho mi'shum chitzo* means that the moment he lit the fire it is considered as if he completed the entire fire. It is like one who shoots an arrow. The moment it leaves the bow, the action is complete and attributed to the archer.

If this is the case, how could Rabbi Yochanan have established the fast on the tenth of *Av*? When the fire was lit on *Tishah B'Av*, it was considered done. The entire process which would continue on for the next 26 hours was complete on *Tishah B'Av*! The explanation quoted by a number of commentaries is that the *Nimukei Yosef* attributes the resulting conflagration to the person who started the original flame. This does not mean that the object which is destroyed was immediately consumed. We blame what will happen on the one who ignited the fire. The *Bais HaMikdash* was ignited on *Tishah B'Av*. The destruction, however, did not take place until the next day. This is why Rabbi Yochanan would have declared that the fast take place on the tenth of *Av*.

In an alternative explanation, *Rav Yosef Zundel* quotes the above *pasuk*, which intimates

Hashem's ability to halt a punishment at the very last moment. This would give rise to an interesting difference between the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*, which is the work of Hashem, and a fire started by a human being. Hashem can stop the arrow/fire at any time; a person cannot. Once the fire is ignited, it will burn on until the structure is consumed. Hashem "set" the fire that destroyed the Temple using the Romans as His agents. At any given moment, if it would so be the will of Hashem, the fire would end. In such an instance, Rabbi Yochanan would not hold *isho mishum chitzo*. Until the very last moment, there remained hope that the fire would not destroy the Temple. With Hashem on our side, we always have hope.