

## **“I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and thus, I will be honored before the entire people.” (10:3)**

*Rashi* offers the accepted interpretation of this *pasuk*. When Hashem imposes His attribute of Strict Justice, even on those closest to Him, He is feared and honored.

People say, if this is how Hashem punishes those who are close to Him, surely the punishment in store for those who disobey Him is far worse. Well, at least this is how it should be – how the world should react when tragedy strikes Hashem’s intimate ones. The Torah expects an intelligent person to derive a positive lesson from an act of G-d which appears to the human eye to have a negative connotation. Regrettably, this is not the usual reaction.

*Horav Baruch Saffrin, zl*, the *Komarner Rebbe*, interprets this *pasuk* homiletically, as referring to the issue of critical questioning. The *Rebbe* expresses his concern for the simple and unlearned Jew, who lacks acuity in Torah and, therefore, is less spiritually acute. He says, *B’kerovai ekadesh*, “I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, (and thus) I will be honored before all the people.” Those who are close to Hashem, who are deeply committed and learned and consequently have some understanding of His scale of Justice, sanctify Him. They are able to understand the depth of the punishment effect – its purpose in purifying a person and catalyzing his spiritual reward in the world of Truth. It concerns the *kol ha’am*, the entire people, the unschooled, the not profoundly committed, who do not possess the spiritual fortitude necessary to withstand the pain and misery; it concerns those who *echabeid*, “My actions weigh down.” They cannot understand why the *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice, would strike the righteous. It is just too much for them to deal with. They will “burden” G-d with many questions. In his rendering of the word *echabeid*, *Rebbe* employs the root *ka’vod* to mean heavy, burden (*ka’vaid*) as opposed to its alternate meaning, glory, honor (*ka’vode*).

In any event, we acknowledge that we cannot readily expect the average person to accept Divine judgment. It takes someone special – someone close to Hashem. We say every day in *Ashrei*: *Tzaddik Hashem b’chol d’rachav, v’chasisid b’chol maasav*, “Righteous is Hashem in all His ways and magnanimous in all His deeds” (*Tehillim* 145:17). We believe that Hashem does not manifest iniquity in His judgment. Everything He does is for a purpose, an objective that is inherently good. The pain and suffering that we experience may be attributed to *yesurin shel ahavah*, troubles resulting from Hashem’s love for us. Indeed, when the not yet observant Jew notices his observant brother accepting and acquiescing Hashem’s decree, he feels an inner pang of jealousy. He is not able to accept Hashem’s decree lovingly. It is above and beyond the level of his spiritual functioning.

Yet, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, zl*, notes that although the average Jew is unable to grasp the love behind Hashem’s decree, one must express to him the Torah’s perspective on tragedy. It is not what it appears to be. Not everything that we see in black and white is absolute. While things

happen, tragedies do occur, one should not interpret them as they appear, but acknowledge that some things are beyond his grasp. *Rav Zilberstein* cites from *Seder Tanaim V'Amoraim*, that the great *Tanna* *Bar Kapara* had twelve wives. The commentators are bothered by this. *Horav Reuven Margolis* gives the following explanation. He cites the *Yerushalmi Yevamos* 28b which states that there was a family in which there were thirteen sons, twelve of whom died young, leaving no progeny. The surviving brother was a distinguished Torah scholar who was willing to offer *chalitzah* to each of his twelve sisters-in-law. These women all demurred, claiming that they each wanted to be his wife. This was despite the fact that each one would have eleven *tzaros*, co-wives.

The scholar attempted to circumvent the situation, saying that he did not have the means to support twelve women. Each one responded that she would take it upon herself to sustain the "family" for one month. This solved the problem during a regular year. What were they to do during a leap year when there were thirteen months? Rabbi *Yehudah HaNasi*, the Prince, said he would support the family that month.

Rabbi *Yehudah HaNasi* prayed that the family be blessed with children. Every year each one had a child. Three years went by, and it was a leap year. The scholar came to Rabbi *Yehudah HaNasi's* house at the beginning of the second *Adar* with his wives and thirty-six children. He was coming to collect on Rabbi *Yehudah HaNasi's* promise. The sage took care of all their expenses for that month.

*Rav Margolis* posits that the Torah scholar who now had twelve wives and thirty-six children was none other than *Bar Kapara*. This is why he had twelve wives. Life threw him a curve, and he accepted his twelve sisters-in-law as wives. This was an incredible *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name. The mere fact that each wife wanted to marry him, knowing full well that she would have eleven co-wives, was an indication of his exalted nature. In addition, everyone around was witness to the incredible example of Divine Providence manifested in the support of this family.

*Rav Zilberstein* now asks the question that is probably on everyone's mind: Anyone privy to this story will immediately express shock and disbelief, sorrow and grief, concerning the tragedy that befell this family. Imagine, to have twelve children perish! It is a tragedy beyond belief. How is one to reconcile oneself to this?

*Rav Zilberstein* explains that the Heavenly Tribunal viewed this tragedy from a different perspective. Prior to when these twelve pure *neshamos*, souls, descended to this world, there was a Heavenly announcement calling for "volunteers" who were willing to come to this world for a short time and who would be called to return "home" under circumstances that might be painful. The flipside was that their being here would ultimately be the catalyst for an immense *Kiddush Hashem*. These twelve souls gladly accepted the opportunity to be a vehicle for elevating the glory of Heaven and were ultimately placed within the bodies of *Bar Kapara's* twelve brothers.

We see from here, explains *Rav Zilberstein* that what appears to us to be a tragedy is viewed

differently in the World of Truth. Those *neshamos* who lamentably leave this world suddenly, or after suffering great pain and misery, are holy souls that had “volunteered” for the mission of sanctifying Hashem’s Name. It is not what it seems, but then, nothing in this world is really what it seems.