

“Please show me now Your Glory”... “You will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” (33:18, 23)

The question: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” has plagued man from time immemorial. To the individual who does not believe in an All-good, Omniscient, and Omnipotent G-d, this question remains unanswered. If Hashem is not All-good, He could do evil and even enjoy inflicting it on others. If the Almighty is not Omniscient, bad things could easily occur, since He does not know everything that is taking place in the world which He created. And, if G-d is not Omnipotent, then bad things could just happen, because forces exist in the world which are beyond His control. So, clearly, the believing Jew does not question things of this nature, because for him the Thirteen Principles of Faith, the *Ani Maamin*, is a reality – a verity of verities – which remains the bedrock of Jewish Faith. As the famous dictum goes, “For the believer, there are no questions. For the non-believer, there are no answers.” With this premise in mind, we can take an **intellectual** approach to suffering, tragedy, and to all events which are beyond our ability to comprehend. The answers remain theoretical, since we truly must understand that no human being is able to understand Hashem’s ways, nor should any human being expect a cognitive appreciation of Hashem. That idea undermines the very basis of humanity with its limited vision, versus the spiritual with its unlimited scope.

This does not mean that questioning is not good. On the contrary, one should question – himself. Events in our life are not random accidents. Indeed, the word coincidence does not belong in the lexicon of the believing Jew. The very notion of coincidence is heretical. If one believes in an All-knowing, All-powerful, All-good G-d, nothing, as the popular contemporary cliché declares, “just happens.” Let me take a moment to share with the reader a fundamental truth expounded by *Horav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, zl*, in his *Daas Tevunos*. I paraphrase:

“One who believes in G-d’s Oneness and understands its implications must believe that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is one, single, and unique Being, subject to no impediment or restraint whatsoever. He alone dominates all; there is no other beneath Him who exercises any dominion in the world. He alone supervises all of His creatures individually, and **nothing** transpires in this world except through His will and agency. There is no chance, no nature, no constellation. It is Hashem Who governs all of the earth and all that is in it. He alone decrees all that is to be done.”

This perspective gives our life meaning, as it grants us the ability to accept that Hashem’s guiding hand is an active part of our life. We are never alone, nor does something just happen. It is **all** from Hashem. Why? That is a question that, for the most part, we are unable to answer. The need to understand, demanding answers to every ambiguous situation, every question, suggests that the individual considers himself great enough to impose what he feels is his inherent right to be privy to G-d’s Divine plan for the world. It does not work that way. Hashem owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. It is as simple as that. Our brains lack the capacity for understanding the ways of the Creator Who created us. As the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, was wont to say, “I could never believe in a G-

d whom I could understand.”

Living a life where everything is based upon good fortune, chance, or coincidence, reduces the meaningfulness of life. When we ignore Hashem's Divine messages, relegating them to coincidence, we are robbing ourselves of meaning, inspiration, and the ability to maximize our potential. Hashem “talks” to us constantly. At times, it is a subtle message, while at other times it is a powerful wake-up call. When we ignore His call by saying it was bad fortune, we waste our greatest opportunity for spiritual growth and closeness with Hashem.

We are all here for a purpose, to carry out our own personal mission. We are part of a large picture, a collective destiny, all fitting together in one tapestry of events as a component of Hashem's Divine plan for the perfection of the world. One day we will all be privy to clarity of vision, when the veils of ambiguity will be lifted, and we will see that what we thought was “bad” was inherently “good”, and what was perceived as chastisement and tribulation were actually the precursors and evolution of blessing.

It is with the above in mind, that I return to our stated *pasuk* in which Moshe *Rabbeinu* asked Hashem, *Ha'reini na es Kevodecha*, “Show me now Your Glory,” to which Hashem responded, “Behold there is a place near Me; you may stand on the rock. When My glory passes by, I shall place you in a cleft of the rock and I shall cover (shield) you with My hand until I have passed. Then I shall remove My hand – *V'ra'issa es Acharai, u'panai lo yei'ra'u* – “and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen” (33:21-23).

The *Chasam Sofer* explains Moshe's request, and Hashem's reply, allegorically: Moshe was asking the age-old question – “Why are there righteous who suffer and wicked people who prosper?” This question has befuddled the minds of many as they seek an answer to a question that can only be explained from a vantage point beyond the human realm of cognition. Hashem replied, “My face cannot be seen – I can only be seen from the back.” What does this mean? *Chasam Sofer* explains that seeing Hashem's face up front is an allusion to understanding life's events as they take place. Man is incapable of understanding an event while it is happening. Thus, the idea of the righteous suffering while the wicked prosper is an anomaly beyond man's ability to grasp. Only when man “stands with G-d” and has an all-encompassing perspective of the entirety of history – from the beginning of time, until the End of Days – will he have the ability to comprehend things in context, and then appreciate **everything** that Hashem did. “Seeing from the back” is a reference to hindsight. Only in retrospect can man have the clarity of vision to see and understand. To expect it all **now** – in the present – is nonsensical. To make theological decisions based upon one's current perspective is heretical.

Horav Yissocher Frand cites the *Kol Aryeh* in the introduction to his *Teshuvos, Responsa*, where the author elaborates on this subject, providing greater insight and inspiration: As Yaakov *Avinu* was about to descend to Egypt, Hashem appeared to him and said, “I am G-d, G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I

shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up; and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes" (*Bereishis* 46:3,4). The *Zohar* makes a cryptic comment concerning the words, "And Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes." He says, "This is what the secret of *Krias Shema* is all about."

In order to give meaning to the *Zohar*, *Kol Aryeh* cites *Chazal* in the *Talmud Pesachim* 50a who make the following statement: *Rav Acha bar Chanina* distinguishes between This World and *Olam Habba*, the World to Come – the world of truth. In This World when one hears good news, he recites the blessing of *Ha'tov u'meitiv*, "Blessed is the One Who is good and does good." If he hears bad news, he blesses, *Dayon HaEmes*, "the True Judge." In the World to Come, regardless of the tidings, the blessing is always *Ha'tov u'meitiv*, "Who is good and does good." This, explain *Chazal*, is the meaning of the *pasuk* in *Zechariah* 14:9, *V'ha'yah Hashem l'Melech al kol ha'aretz; ba'yom ha'hu, y'he'yeh Hashem Echad u'Shemo Echad*, "And Hashem will be King over the entire world; on that day His Name will be One and He will be One."

In his commentary *Tzlach*, to *Meseches Pesachim*, *Horav Yechezkel Landau*, explains that life in This World is fraught with what appears to us as "bad" or conversely, as "good" tidings. While we pray for events that are filled with joy and hope, nonetheless, we are privy to events that are tragic and heartbreaking. A Jew must believe that ultimately everything is for the good. Indeed, *tzaddikim*, the righteous, throughout the millennia have uttered the words *Gam zu l'tovah*, "This is also for the best." We underscore the *tzaddikim*, because this is not the attitude of the average Jew. For most of us, we see "bad" and "good." It takes enormous conviction to view what clearly appears as "bad" through the prism of optimism and positiveness. In the World to Come, it will make sense as our perspective broadens and deepens, creating a clarity of vision that in This World, with its restrictions of time, make it impossible to perceive. Then, it will all be good, allowing us to declare, without reservation, the blessing of *Ha'tov u'meitiv*, for **all** occurrences.

The belief that Hashem always does good is the underlying message of the *Krias Shema*. Our most seminal prayer, the prayer which connotes our *kabbolas ol Malchus Shomayim*, acceptance of the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom, and the last words a Jew utters prior to leaving This World, is the *Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*. This declaration of the unity of G-d, tells it all. How?

The Name Hashem – *Yud, Kay, Vav, Kay* – has a different connotation than the name *Elokim*, with the latter reflecting the Almighty acting as the Divine Judge, applying the Attribute of *Din*, Strict Justice, and the former reflecting *Middas HaRachamim*, Divine Mercy. Thus, the *Shema Yisrael* prayer expresses the belief that: Hear O' *Yisrael*, Hashem

= Mercy and *Elokeinu* = Justice are one, *echad* – one and the same! We have one G-d. He sometimes appears merciful, and other times acts like a strict judge. But, how do we ignore the bad, the tragic, the painful? How do we overlook the depressing, the heartbreaking, the nerve-shattering experiences of life? We cover our eyes. We do this so we will not see the various

troubles appearing right before our eyes; so that we can affirm our faith – attesting to our full conviction in the unity of G-d – without any impediment. At least symbolically, we do not see the tribulations before us.

The *Kol Aryeh* uses Yosef's experience as an example of this verity. His life, albeit miserable for many years, ended on a high point. In retrospect, Yosef was able to say, it was all "good"! Thus Hashem told Yaakov, "Do not fear descending to Egypt, with the doom and gloom of the upcoming exile overshadowing your every move. Yosef will place his hands over your eyes." This is the secret of the *Krias Shema*. We see from Yosef that it all works out – that "*Hashem*" and "*Elokeinu*" are One. But, regarding the present tragedy – "cover your eyes."

After all is said and done, what does the individual who is not yet on the spiritual plateau of belief that everything is inherently good – do? If one cannot believe – he should attempt to at least learn from the experience. Transform tragedy into hope. When bad things happen, apply them to sensitize yourself to the plight of others. Rather than live with the compelling question of "Why?" one should say, "I will not succumb to this misery. Instead, I will reach out to others." Everything that occurs happens for a purpose. There are no spiritual vacuums. Seize the opportunities to turn tragedy into triumph and hope, and to strengthen one's affirmation of belief in Hashem.