

Then you retreated and wept before Hashem, but Hashem did not listen to your voice and He did not hearken to you. (1:45)

When you offend someone and all he wants as penance is to see that you are remorseful – is that too much to ask? What if, instead of remorse, you ignore him, thereby compounding the pain: would you be upset if he became angry with you? Would you think less of him if he punished you as a way of getting you to acknowledge your transgression? If so, why is Hashem any different? We act inappropriately; we offend; compound our sin by ignoring our infraction; then we become upset when He punishes us. Obviously, I am leading up to something. Let us look at the above *pasuk*.

The *meraglim* debacle takes up much of the first *perek*, chapter, of our *parsha*. Moshe *Rabbeinu* is rebuking the people and reviewing the odiousness of their sin. He recounts Hashem's reaction to the nation's ingratitude, swearing that the entire generation would end their lives in the wilderness. These people shunned *Eretz Yisrael*. They would never live to see it. Understandably, the nation was brokenhearted. In an attempt to demonstrate their willingness to go into battle, they attempted to force the issue by ascending the mountain and waging war with the *Emoriim*.

Hashem "stood His ground." He was not helping them, because He had said that they were no longer welcome in *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Emoriim* came at them, pursuing them until Chormah. The people now cried (too little too late). Hashem refused to listen, because they had catalyzed this themselves. It was their fault. In addressing Hashem's reaction to *Klal Yisrael*, *Rashi* explains, "You made Hashem's attribute of Mercy as if it were cruel." In other words, it appeared as if Hashem were turning a deaf ear to their pleas. Rather than show them mercy, it appeared as if He were acting to them in the opposite – totally atypical – manner.

Rashi's statement has powerful implications. *Horav Avraham Pam, zl* (quoted by *Rav Sholom Smith* in *Messages from Rav Pam*), spoke about these implications in a pre-*Neilah* address. When a person sins, he must perform *teshuvah*. There is no avoiding it. To ignore the fundamental principle of *teshuvah* is a gross error. Rather than receive Hashem's blessing, he has compounded his previous sin. As a result, his punishment will be magnified, making it appear as if Hashem is acting cruelly towards him, when, in fact, he brought it upon himself by not expunging the sin when he had the opportunity.

Everybody makes mistakes; nobody is perfect. When we sin, we force Hashem to punish us. We cause Him to hold back on His infinite mercy, because we do not deserve it. When He punishes us, however, our immediate reaction is: How cruel! How could He do this to us? In reality, we are the cause of this punishment. The punishment is only a reaction to our misbehavior that was compounded by our ignoring the sin.

It is a common mistake in life. We work for a boss. We play games at work, shirk our responsibility,

ignore our obligations, etc. The obvious reaction of a responsible boss is to punish in some manner. The boss, however, is a kind-hearted, decent, benevolent man who understands that workers will play games at times. He allows time for him to acknowledge the error, to show some form of remorse, and, in some manner, to repent. The worker continues with his immature, nonsensical behavior, shirking responsibility, showing his boss that he does not care. Now – when the boss becomes fed up and fires the worker, he suddenly becomes heartless, cruel, etc. We have all been witness to such a scenario. The only one who is heartless and cruel is the worker – to himself – and, by extension, to his boss, because now the boss looks bad for taking action against the “beleaguered” worker.