



Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav **Shlomo Aviner** Shlit" a

Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim - #278

Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

Visit our blog: www.ravaviner.com

On the Haftarah...

Sacrificing One's Soul for the Sake of Heaven

[Ashkenazim: Amos 9:7-15

Sefardim: Yechezkel 20:2-20

Yemenite Jews: Yechezkel 20:1-20]

By refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol, Chananyah, Mishael and Azariyah displayed the type of self-sacrifice that we have come to understand as Kiddush Hashem (the sanctification of Hashem's Name). And yet, when they turned to Hashem in order to receive his acceptance, He seemingly refused to listen to them...

"In the seventh year, in the fifth month on the tenth day, some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of Hashem, and they sat before Me" (Yechezkel 20:1). This verse is taken from the Haftarah read by Sefardic and Yemenite Jews (Ashkenazic Jews customarily read from the words of the prophet Amos). Who were these elders who sought Hashem's advice, and what was their request?

The answers to these two questions, surprisingly, are not found in the text. This is what Hashem tells the prophet: "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them: 'This is what Hashem, G-d, says: Have you come to inquire of Me? As surely as I live, I will not let you inquire of Me, declares Hashem, G-d'" (ibid. v. 2). This is

like an ill person coming to his doctor, only to be pushed away before he can even open his mouth. Why are these spiritual giants, the elders of Israel, being ignored?

This strange story is explained by Professor Idra Nahar in his book "Galut Ha-Tzibur" (pp. 217-224). Professor Nahar says that in that period of exile, the Divine covenant seemed bankrupt. The Nation of Israel was detached from the Master of the Universe, and the normal practice was NOT to inquire of Hashem. Even more surprising still is the fact that our Sages revealed the identity of these elders as none other than Chananyah, Mishael and Azariyah, who were prepared to display self-sacrifice for the sanctification of Hashem's Name (Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 7, 13).

To our great distress, after two thousand years of Exile, we have become accustomed to sanctifying Hashem's Name through self-sacrifice, but at this period it was quite new. These three elders in fact were looking to ensure that their path was completely correct, and their sacrifice was not in vain. They wanted to make sure that sacrificing one's life in such circumstances trumped the most precious thing in their eyes: life. They therefore decided to turn to Yechezkel to receive Divine approval for their actions. But Hashem refused to provide an answer. It is human beings' role to decide their path through the Torah with the aid of their conscience, and to take responsibility for their choices and possible risks. Although their request was denied, they still decided to display self-sacrifice. This follows the words of Rashi: "And when one surrenders his life, he shall do so with the intention of dying, for whoever surrenders his life in anticipation of a miracle, a miracle will not occur for him. And we find this regarding Chananyah, Mishael and Azariyah who did not surrender their lives in anticipation of a miracle" (Rashi on Vayikra 22:32). Self-sacrifice is "love not dependent on anything" (Pirkei Avot 5:16). Conditional love is fragile, and crumbles at the smallest test. These three elders became the exemplars of courage and strength in displaying of self-sacrifice for Jews throughout our history. They would not worship an idol of Nebuchadnezzar, whether they were to be saved or not (Daniel 3:18).

This behavior teaches us that despite all difficulties, it is incumbent upon us to preserve our faith in Hashem and continue to cleave to Him with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our might. Even when there are periods of Divine silence, we continue to feel His love, with the understanding that this is a world of trials. Only when our ethical behavior will not render us any benefit, can we truly act for heaven's sake.

Rav Aviner on...
Tragedies and Complaints against Hashem

*From a newspaper interview, Nissan 5772

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shemini 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Two horrifying incidents occurred a week apart, both of them involving small children: Four Jews were murdered, amongst them three children at the entrance to their school in France, and a father and his five children died in the Israeli town of Rechovot when their house was struck by fire.

Why do tragedies like these happen?

We certainly do not know G-d's reasons for doing what He does in this world.

Sometimes the righteous suffer and sometimes the wicked thrive. The Prophets long ago asked why they received no answer to this question. Moshe asked, and the Rabbis of the Talmud differed over whether or not he received an answer (Berachot 4). But even if he did receive an answer, who says that we understand it? The Books of Kohelet and Iyov deal with this question as well.

Yet the underlying principle is what Rabbi Yochanan said whenever he finished reviewing the book of Iyov: "A man is destined to die. Fortunate is he who grows great in Torah, and who toils in Torah, and who brings contentment to his Maker." Some comment that it isn't really referring to his "reviewing the Book of Iyov", but to the times that things happened to him along the lines of what befell Iyov. Rabbi Yochanan had ten sons, and all of them died.

A man doesn't know how long he will live. Some people live more and some live less.

The main thing is to fill one's life with Torah, Mitzvot and good deeds.

One mustn't come to G-d with complaints because of calamities. That is wrong. That is ingratitude. Two incidents such as these are rare in the State of Israel, and in other countries as well.

When was the last time eight children were killed within one week?

We must remember that before the emergence of modern medicine, two thirds of children died of illnesses. Nowadays that is extremely rare. A child's death is absolutely terrible, and the general picture of the statistical spread does not remove a family's suffering. If, based on the statistics, a particular illness strikes one child out of a million, for that child's mother, it's a hundred percent. For her, it makes no difference what happens to anyone else. But we, with a broader perspective, must recognize that our lives are Paradise.

But don't people suffer tragic deaths all the time?

True, but every year more than 350 people, including children, die in traffic accidents, and more than 10,000 die of smoking, with a sixth of them dying from "passive smoking".

Why doesn't anyone get excited about that? And I haven't even mentioned the people who die from heart problems as a result of improper eating, and those numbers are gigantic.

As noted, it is not right to come to G-d with complaints and to ask Him why He does this to us, when almost everything is full of goodness, at least in Israel. There are countries in which people don't have anything to eat. About a million people are starving for a crust of bread. Every day, 30,000 children die of hunger. Have you seen anyone get worked up over this? No. The media doesn't make a big deal out of this.

So it's not a tragedy?!

Certainly it's a terrible tragedy. The mother who lost a husband and five children is miserable, but you don't have to paint the lives of everyone else black because of that. Every death is a tragedy. Yet the private tragedy of one person cannot distort the thinking of everyone else.

For that family, it is truly a tragedy, but, unfortunately, there are other families with tragedies too. If a family is killed in a traffic accident, is that any less sad than deaths from a terror attack or a house fire?! Yet there as well, complaining is wrong, because we are talking about very rare incidents.

And why, within one week, did two such rare incidents as these happen together?

Unfortunately, this is nothing new. People die all the time in Israel. In France, for every 100,000 people, there are fifteen murders per year. In the U.S., the figure is twenty-five, and in Israel it is eight. Unfortunately, as well, there are people who die young.

Yet the public are shocked by the last two incidents. Why?

People's being shocked by something is no measure of the truth. Shock is not a question of faith but of psychology. If someone is told that one person has been murdered, he will be shocked, but if he is told that 100,000 were murdered, he will be less shocked. When someone tells us that six million Jews died in the Holocaust, we move on to our daily affairs, but if he describes to us the murder of one Jew in the Holocaust, we are shocked. Shock is not always an accurate gauge.

These incidents are rare, and the media gives them a lot of coverage, so perhaps that causes shock, but there are a lot of tragedies that occur that don't receive coverage, so people think they didn't happen.

What is G-d signaling to us via these incidents? Perhaps He is informing us that we have to repent?

Certainly we must repent. Rambam at the beginning of Hilchot Ta'anit states that if suffering befalls a person, he must examine his deeds and repent. One time a person told his rabbi that he did not know in what area he should repent. His rabbi answered that he must first repent over that question.

We must repent all of the time, and we have a lot to repent for. All the same, we have to remember that despite these tragedies, our situation is good, thank G-d, and with all the great sorrow of the families, it is forbidden to say that G-d treats us badly, G-d forbid. There is much good, and little bad.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Sneezing in Halachah

Sneezing from Allergies

Q: If one sneezes from allergies in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei, is it still a good sign?

A: Ha-Rav Avigdor Neventzal said that if he feels relief from the sneezes, it seems as if it is a good sign for him (The booklet "Etush Ba-Halachah" 68-70. And Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski said: It is possible. Ibid.).

Blessing Someone During a Meal

Q: Should one say "La-Beriyot" in the middle of a meal?

A: No, lest the food go down the wrong pipe causing one to choke (Taanit 5b. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 170:1).

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet