

## ***Klal Yissurim* – Understanding Communal Difficulties & Challenges – Part 2**

### **Rambam on the *mitzvat ase* (positive commandment) of *tza'akah* (crying out to G-d)**

While the Rambam and the Ramban argue about the mitzvah of *tefillah* (prayer), with the Rambam holding it to be a Torah obligation, and the Ramban saying that it is Rabbinical, when it comes to crying out in response to a communal catastrophe, they both agree that this is a Torah obligation.

### **The Rambam describes this mitzvah in the opening chapter of *Hilchot Ta'anit* (1:1–3,9):**

***Aleph*** — *Mitzvat ase min haTorah lizok u'l'haria b'chatzotzarot al kol tzarah sh'tavo al hatzibur* — There is a positive obligation from the Torah to cry out and to blow with trumpets at all times of difficulty that come upon the community. Every difficulty — for example, famine, plague, locusts, etc., [we need to] cry out upon them and sound the trumpets.

***Beit*** — This matter is part of the **path of *teshuva***, because when difficulties come, and the community cries out upon them and blows the trumpets, everyone will know that it was because of their bad deeds that [these things] happened to them, as it says (Yirmeyahu 5:25) — “Your transgressions caused this.” And this will cause the difficulties to be removed from them.

***Gimmel*** — But if they don't cry out and don't blow the trumpets, but rather say — it is the way of the world that this happened to them, and this difficulty is simply random, ***harei zo derech achzariut*** — this is the **path of cruelty**, and this will cause them to cling to their bad actions, and thus bring additional difficulties upon them. This is what it says in the Torah — “If they walk with Me casually, I will also walk with them casually, in fury. That is to say — when I bring difficulties upon them to get them to do *teshuva*, if they say that it is random, I will [then] increase for them a type of fury [which will **appear** as] random.

***Tet*** — Just like the community fasts for their difficulties, similarly a person fasts for the difficulties of an individual. How is this? If a person is sick, or lost in a desert, or locked up in prison, one should fast for him and request mercy in his prayers, and say the *aneinu* prayer whenever he davens (prays).

### **Recognizing that *klal yissurim* came from G-d leads to *kaparah* and *teshuva***

The ***Mabit*** (*Beit Elokim* — *Sha'ar HeTefillah* — chap.16) writes about how we should understand *klal yissurim*:

What the Torah teaches us is that G-d brings communal difficulties upon us only as a result of our transgressions. Therefore, it is fitting to blow the trumpets, cry out, and to return in complete *teshuva*. And if we do *teshuva*, then G-d will have mercy on us.

Some, however, make a distinction when the difficulties happen where Jews are dwelling along with many non-Jews as well. Perhaps the problems are a result of the transgressions of the non-Jews, and not exclusively because of the Jews. Therefore, in recent generations, there is much less of an effort to fast and to cry out unless the issue is [specifically] a lack of rain.

But, in any case, we are commanded by the Torah to cry out and to blow the trumpets upon our difficulties, when any type of difficulty occurs... This is a **miraculous** quality which is specific to the Jewish nation — that difficulties happen to us when we transgress,

and our situation improves when we do *teshuva*. This phenomenon happens most specifically when we are in our own land.

Just as a parent chastises his child, similarly G-d chastises us, to make it clear that both our difficulties and our salvation are all from G-d.

While it is clear that everything is really coming to us from G-d; during the time of *galut* (exile), as a result of *hester panim* (G-d hiding His face), it is possible for one to doubt this relationship, and to think that perhaps the difficulties that are happening to us are actually random. And similarly, the salvation from those difficulties could also be seen as random.

It is, therefore, appropriate for every person to pay attention during *galut* that everything which happens in this world, from pricking one's finger to someone dying, it is all from G-d. His supervision over us actually needs to be **greater** while we are in *galut* than while we are in our own land. He simply behaves towards us with *hester panim*, as a result of our transgressions, in a way that allows the rebels room to doubt, and to claim that this was not really from G-d

I am, therefore, making a point to write that it is 100% true that whatever happens to a person, big or small, is **exclusively** from G-d, particularly in matters of death.

In terms of how we should respond to communal crises, the **Divrei Yirmeyahu** (on Rambam *Hilchos Ta'anit* 1:1) explains that the Torah obligation to cry out and sound the trumpets is not like regular *tefillah* (prayer). *Tefillah* is exclusively between us and our Creator, while this crying out is to arouse the masses. This is in response to such a great calamity that no one person can address it alone. Therefore, we need to [first] return everyone's heart back to G-d, because there is no one else to rely on but our Father in Heaven. "*Tza'akah*" (crying out) refers to gathering the masses for a single goal. The Rambam writes that this crying out in response to a crisis should lead to *teshuva*, since there is no *onesh* (negative consequences) without *chet* (transgressions). And the Rabbis point out that the word *puranot* (difficulties) is related to the word *pera'on* (payment). The message seems to be that the difficulties which the Jewish people have been confronted with throughout their history is the "payment" which has been exacted from them as a result of their transgressions, to ensure that they will improve.

### **Why would viewing *klal yissurim* as random be called cruel?**

We need to understand what the Rambam means when he writes that not crying out to G-d for communal difficulties is called **cruelty**. Who specifically is this being cruel to?

**Rav Shimshon Pincus** (*Vayikra* 26:28) points out that we are used to explaining this as being cruel to ourselves, because this will cause more difficulties to come upon us. But if that is so, then why would only a lack of *teshuva* in response to communal difficulties be considered to be cruelty towards ourselves? After all, every type of transgression results in serious consequences [for us as individuals]! Furthermore, people never consciously cause difficulties to themselves. In general, they [try to] guard themselves very well from problems.

It must be that a type of a sleep had fallen upon them for them to have not responded properly to these communal difficulties. If so, why, once again, should this be characterized as cruelty?

We are not speaking here about a *kofer* (denier), G-d forbid, who does not recognize his Creator. Because, in that case, this person would not be considered cruel, but rather ignorant. So while this person does recognize that this world had a Creator, he imagines that the difficulties did not come from G-d to wake him up, but rather they were random. In other words, he thinks that G-d left the world to function according to chance.

It is specifically this thought, that G-d would leave the world to function randomly, which the Rambam calls the most profound expression of cruelty. For G-d to make a world filled with danger, and then to subject everyone in it to chance, is like taking a thousand people and sending them into a forest filled with wild predators with no protection at all. And, on top of this, He would then allow them to be attacked completely randomly. How is it possible to ascribe this to G-d? Whoever could think this way must necessarily have this *middah* (trait) of cruelty himself, in order to be able to ascribe it to others. If he would not have this trait, he could never ascribe it to others, and certainly not to the Creator Who is merciful and complete.

One who has *rachmanut* (the trait of mercy), however, knows that the world is filled with *rachamim*, and that people would never be thrown into a jungle of randomness. Therefore, if difficulties do come upon us, they must be designed for our benefit, to get us to focus on improving our actions and our path in life.

Just like a *leiv kashe* (hard heart) which will not enter into the situation of another is called cruel, a *leiv kashe* which will not enter even into one's own situation, to do *teshuva*, to humble oneself, and to yearn for a real connection to G-d, is also called cruel.

**Rabeinu Yonah** explains that the *chet* of *imutz haleiv* (being hard-hearted), one of the categories which we mention in the *Yom Kippur viduy* (to do *teshuva* on it), is a warning for us to remove this trait of cruelty from ourselves. (***Ginzei Sha'arei Tzion Bamberger***) Furthermore, this bad trait of *achzariut* (cruelty) is actually the root of the lack of belief. This situation applies not only for outright deniers, it is relevant also for those with some degree of *emunah* (belief in G-d), since there are so many different levels to *emunah*. (***Shirat David***)

The ***Divrei Yirmeyahu*** (on *Hilchot Ta'anit* 1:3) explains that the nations of the world ascribe to their gods only fear, and not love, since love is [also] far from their hearts, while our inheritance is to love G-d, our L-rd. Saying that all is random, and that G-d created a world without any supervision over our actions, would be planting cruelty in our souls, and thereby relating this to G-d, *chas v'chalila* (G-d forbid). This would then cause us to cling to evil, as is known from those who deny Divine Supervision.

The Torah (*Vayikra* 26:14–16) tells us that if the Jewish people don't properly “listen to G-d,” that G-d will then “do to them and designate for them” a series of terrible afflictions.

**HaRav Yerucham Levovitz** discusses the meaning of these very painful responses. At the very moment when Jews are moving further away, these afflictions mean that, G-d is [actually] still reminding them, every step along the way, that He will never abandon them. The more that people transgress, the more desperately they need even more *rachamim* and *chesed* (mercy and kindness), along with even more encouragement.

### ***Achzariut vs. Yedidut and Rachmanut***

**Rav Wolbe**, in his *sefer Olam HaYedidut — The World of Endearment and Relationship* writes about how terrible *achzariut* (cruelty) is. It is the most frightening of the *middot* (character traits) in a person. Rav Hirsch (in the *Shirat Ha'azinu — Devarim* 32:33) explained that *achzar* (cruel) is actually a composite word, and its meaning is *ach-zar* — **exclusively estranged**. This estrangement can completely overpower relationships until each person sees only negative in the other one... And that is true *achzariut* (cruelty and estrangement).

In our modern world, *achzariut* has taken on a whole new dimension... The power of estrangement has clearly been strengthened by the technology which threatens to swallow up the humanity within people, and direct them through machines in every aspect of life... This estrangement which poisons our relationships with others is not limited to the social sphere. Everyone knows situations and times when they even become strangers to themselves.

This is closely related to *zarut klapei Ma'alah* — estrangement from G-d. Our connection to the Power above us is essential to the spiritual make-up of a person... While we all live within the world of *yedidut* (endearment and relationship), this *yedidut* does not fall into our lap as a free gift. The Creator also planted within our hearts the opposite force, the power of *zarut* (estrangement) [to overcome].

This is the characterization [of *ach-zariut* (estrangement)] which we find within the world of the Torah. We can see this from three sources in the Rambam:

**Hilchot Deyot** (6:6) — We need to forgive whoever hurt us if they sincerely ask us for forgiveness. We are considered to be **achzari** if we are not willing to forgive them.

**Hilchot Eivel** (3:12) — Whoever does not mourn the death of a close relative is **achzari**; rather he should be afraid and concerned, search his actions, and return in *teshuva*.

**Hilchot Ta'anit** (1:3) — If we don't cry out and don't blow the trumpets, but rather say — it is the way of the world that this happened to us, and this difficulty is called random, *harei zo derech achzariut* — this is the path of cruelty.

It is clear that in these three *halachot*, there is no way to understand the concept of *achzariut* according to its conventional meaning [of cruelty], but only according to this explanation [of estrangement]. One who will not forgive another who is requesting forgiveness is *achzari* [toward this other person. And one who refuses to mourn the death of a close relative, search his own actions, and return in *teshuva*, is being *achzari* toward himself. And, finally,] a person who is hit with difficulties but unwilling to turn to G-d for mercy, is being *ach-zar* toward G-d. Because, if not for this, he would have found some way in his heart to have davened and to have seen this as G-d's supervision, and not randomness.

It is clear that there is a common root to these three different manifestations, a very deep aspect of estrangement whose consequences are discernible in every area of [one's] life. [And] opposite all of these expressions of *zarut* and *achzariut* stands the world of the Torah in all of its majesty.

**Rav Yechezkel Sarna** writes how desperately we need *rachamim* in today's world which is so filled with *achzariut* (cruelty)! *Rachmanut* is the only shield which is able to protect us from *achzariut*, which is the most severe transgression. This occurs when we don't do *teshuva* in response to communal difficulties, since we view them as random. It is striking that the Rambam describes this as *achzariut* (cruelty), not [simply] *rishut* (evil); since there is no greater evil than *achzariut*. *Achzariut* should have no connection to the Jewish people, as the Rambam discusses regarding *teshuva* (2:10) — "It is forbidden for one to be cruel and to withhold forgiveness from others. [Forgiveness] is the way of the Jews and those with a proper heart." Therefore, when the Rambam writes that not crying out to G-d for communal difficulties is called cruelty, we really need to check ourselves to see if we are responding properly to communal crises. We should do *teshuva* and seek spiritual guidance in terms of how to soften our hearts, so we will be able to cry out to G-d, and be saved from the severe transgression of cruelty.

Similarly, if we are lacking normal feelings of mourning for the *Churban* (the destruction of the Temple), the Rambam writes (*Hilchot Eivel* 13:19) — "Whoever does not mourn like the Sages commanded is considered to be cruel. Rather one should be afraid and concerned, examine their actions, and do *teshuva*."

There is even an opinion (*V'Darashta vChakartah*) which says — as long as a person has a cruel nature, that is how G-d will relate to him, because G-d is merciful only towards those who are merciful themselves.

## Respond to *klal yissurim* by strengthening our connection to the *klal*

**Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz** (*Sichot Mussar — L'Regel Hamatzav*) speaks about how we should relate to *klal yissurim* (communal afflictions). He pointed out that the *mabul* (flood) was called the *mei Noach* (the waters of Noach), even though Noach was *moser nefesh* (tremendously dedicated and sacrificing) for whomever was with him in the ark. This was because he failed to daven for his generation. And this was true even though there were less than ten *tzaddikim* in his generation, which means that his *tefillot* would not actually have been effective. If so, why then was he blamed for not davening? If he didn't cry out while his generation was being destroyed, then it must be that it didn't pain him. One who is in pain cries out over his *yissurim* even if he knows that his crying won't accomplish anything at all. Therefore, the *mabul* was called in his name — the *mei Noach* (the waters of Noach). And this is all the more true when it comes to davening for the *klal*, since that is always able to accomplish something. The obligation to daven for the *klal* is, therefore, enormous.

This obligation to daven for the *klal* has two sources:

**First** is a principle within *tefillah* itself — “Whoever has the ability to request *rachamim* (mercy) for another and doesn't do so is called a *chotei* (a transgressor).”

**Second** is the obligation to feel the pain of others, which is actually able to help the situation of the other person.

The Torah tells us that Moshe “went **out** to his brothers and saw their burdens.” Rashi explains that he “placed his eyes and his heart to feel their pain.” And there is no way that he would have been able to have felt this from a distance.

The Rabbis (*Ta'anit* 11a) teach – “Whoever separates from the community and does not share their pain, will not see their consolation; while whoever pains himself with the community will merit to see the consolation of the community.”

The **Pri Megadim** (*Orach Chaim — 574*) illustrates this with a practical application — Whoever is able to help the community with their *tefillot* and separates from davening with them, is also included among those who “will not see the consolation of the community.”

One should never say — “I have already davened enough.” Moshe Rabeinu davened 515 *tefillot*, [to be allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel)] and if not for the fact that G-d told him to stop, he would have davened even more, and possibly been successful, to accomplish his objective. In fact, Moshe criticized the Jewish people for not joining to daven for him, since the power of *tefillat rabim* (communal prayers) could have accomplished even more than his own 515 *tefillot*.

The final point which we need to appreciate is that any particular *tzara* (difficulty or challenge) we are facing is not really the point. The *tzara* is ultimately the means for us to daven to G-d, and it is those *tefillot* which are the true purpose [of the *tzara*]. We need to recognize that it is only our *tefillot* [and the deeper relationship with G-d that they create] which are able to save us, nothing else. And once we appreciate this, then even if we are facing an overwhelming difficulty, our *tefillot* will be completely different.

The battle against Amalek [serves as a prototype for all future examples of communal crises]. The *Gemara* (*Rosh HaShanah* 29a) tells us — “When Israel was focusing above and subjugating their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were victorious; and when they did not do this, they would fall in the battle.” Once the Jews do cry out to G-d, and thereby fulfill their purpose, and the purpose of their challenges, they are victorious. And this is the power of communal prayer.

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — pp. 246–9) also explains that *teshuvat hatzibur* (communal *teshuva*) is much more powerful than individual *teshuva*. Even an individual with tremendous dedication may not achieve *teshuva gemura* unless it is during the ten days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. However, the *tzibur* (community) is always able to achieve this complete *teshuva*.

There is also a dramatic difference between an individual and the community in terms of their ability to accept *yissurim*. An individual is in danger of having negative thoughts about G-d's attributes and how He relates to him. When it comes to the community, however, we can rely on them to learn from G-d's attributes and, therefore, we can hope that the *yissurim* will return them in *teshuva*. Furthermore, when an individual sees his own *yissurim* within the *yissurim* of *Klal Yisrael*, it is easier for him to accept them, and he is, therefore, much closer to learning from them, and returning in *teshuva*.

Not only is there a major difference between the *tzibur* and the individual when it comes to *teshuva*, the *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 8) points out a significant difference between the *tzibur* and the individual when it comes to *tefillah* as well. While the *tefillah* of an individual is heard only if it is sincere, the *tefillah* of a *tzibur* is heard even if the hearts of all are not complete.

### **Conclusion — The striking difference between *prat yissurim* and *klal yissurim***

Within the *halachot* of the first chapter of *Hilchot Ta'anit*, there is a very striking difference between *beit* and *gimmel* which speak about *klal yissurim*, and *tet*, which discusses *yissurim* of the individual. Both *beit* and *gimmel* take for granted that the *yissurim* which are devastating the **community** are happening because of the ***ma'asim ra'im*** (negative actions) of the community. When it comes to the afflicted individual, however, the Rambam says nothing at all about why the *yissurim* are happening.

In fact, when it comes to individual *yissurim*, there are many possibilities which the classical sources say could have caused them. Some of the most well-known are:

***Onesh*** (negative consequences due to transgressions),

***Kaparah*** (spiritual rectification and repair),

***Nisayon*** (a test meant to actualize some dormant potential),

***Yissurim of love*** (afflictions that purify and cleanse *tzadikim* to help to prepare them for the world to come), or simply

**Messages from G-d** which we had previously been ignoring.

Furthermore, the Ramchal says that *yissurim* which afflict the individual are usually some combination of these or other different factors. Therefore, while the *Gemara* (*Brachot* 5a) does say that the initial response of an individual with *yissurim* should be to search his or her deeds in order to do *teshuva*, there may be many other dimensions in terms of why this individual had these particular *yissurim* as well.

With *klal yissurim*, on the other hand, there is only one possible explanation — ***ma'asim ra'im*** (negative actions) of the community. To determine exactly **which** *ma'asim ra'im* (negative actions) the community has done or is doing to have caused these *klal yissurim* to occur, however, is not at all a simple matter.

We asked at the beginning, how it was possible that no one but G-d Himself could see the seemingly crystal-clear relationship between our abandonment of the Torah and the destruction of *Eretz Yisrael*?

Some may answer that this causal relationship has not always been so straight-forward in Jewish history. First of all, the communal consequences of our transgressions in this world often seem quite out of proportion to us. Secondly, there is almost always some time-lag between the transgressions and their negative consequences to the community.

Nevertheless, there may be a different and quite simple answer to this question. The very clarity of this relationship, both in so many classical sources, as well as throughout Jewish history as a whole, is what paradoxically makes it so difficult to see and accept. Why is this? Because it is so incredibly threatening. To see it and to fully acknowledge it would force us to dramatically improve our behavior, both individually and in terms of our relationship to the *klal*. Therefore, just like everything else which is significant in a Jew's life, recognizing this connection between our communal transgressions and our communal calamities comes down to a basic free-will decision.

One final issue to consider is the distinction between *klal yissurim* and individual *yissurim*. While all *klal yissurim* necessarily involve individuals, some cases of individual *yissurim* may also end up involving the *klal*. When people are sick or in a difficult situation, their *yissurim* will initially impact their own family as individuals. However, through their extended family, their connection to the community, *Tehillim* lists, and especially the internet today, the numbers of those impacted by these *yissurim* can grow very quickly. Within a short period of time, many thousands may end up feeling connected to these *yissurim* on a very personal level. Perhaps what began as individual *yissurim* could ultimately become transformed into *klal yissurim*.

In any case, we see a striking dichotomy within the words of the Rambam, based on how the community relates to their *yissurim*. They can acknowledge that they came from G-d, which *halacha beit* tells us will lead to a **path** of *teshuva* and salvation. Or, alternatively, they can choose to deny G-d's role in their *yissurim*, which *halacha gimme* tells us will lead to the very different **path** of cruelty and destruction. Just as the community will have these two diametrically opposed paths of either *teshuva* or cruelty based on how they relate to their *yissurim*, we will also have them as individuals. And while we may not see the same physical consequences in this world of either salvation or destruction, the spiritual consequences will certainly be dramatically different.

G-d should give all of us, with both our individual difficulties as well as our communal *yissurim*, the *siyata d'Sh'maya* (Heavenly assistance) to avoid the path of cruelty, and to respond instead with the path of *teshuva*.

**This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat* Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun**