

***Klal Yissurim* – Understanding Communal Difficulties & Challenges – Part 1**

When we speak about *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges), we usually think about their impact and their justice in terms of individuals, as in the classical question — *Lamah yeish tzadik v'ra lo?* — Why do the righteous suffer? But, of course, just like there are *yissurim* for individuals, there are also *yissurim* for the *klal* (the community). What are the principles of *yissurim* which affect the *klal*, as opposed to *yissurim* which affect individuals?

How are we meant to relate to communal *yissurim*?

We read the ***Shema*** every single morning and every single evening. There is an extremely clear message to us in the second paragraph (*Devarim* 11:13–21): If we listen to the *mitzvot* that G-d commands us, to love G-d and to serve Him properly, then G-d will give rain to our land at the right time, so we will be able to gather in our harvest. G-d will provide grass in our fields for our cattle, so we will be able to eat and be satisfied. But if we are not careful, and we turn towards idolatry, then many difficulties will occur. There will be no rain, the land will not produce its crops, and we will quickly be banished from *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel).

We also read a long section of *tochacha* (rebuke) twice a year.

In ***Bechukotai*** (*Vayikra* 26:3–46) it says — If the Jewish people observe the Torah, they will receive a multitude of blessings, including prosperity in *Eretz Yisrael*. And if they do not follow the Torah, then they will be subject to a horrific series of frightening consequences, including desolation in *Eretz Yisrael*.

And, in ***Ki Tavo*** as well (*Devarim* 28:1–69) — following the Torah leads directly to many blessings, including prosperity in *Eretz Yisrael*; while laxity with the Torah results in a huge number of terrible decrees, including, once again, desolation in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Even the ***mishnayot*** in the fifth *perek* of *Pirkei Avot* (5:11–12) spell out a direct, observable relationship between our transgressions and the devastating consequences which will then occur in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The ninth of the thirteen attributes of G-d is *v'tashlich b'metzulot yam kol chatosam* (And You will cast all their transgressions into the depths of the sea). The ***Tomer Devorah*** (1:9) characterizes this in a positive manner, by focusing on the spiritual achievement of the Jewish people, not the often painful physical process it will take for them to get there. He wrote — “This is [actually] a wonderful attribute of G-d — For if Israel transgresses, they will first be given over to the hands of an evil ruler, and then they will do *teshuva*.”

We see this pattern very clearly numerous times in *Shoftim*:

- a. The Jewish people did evil.
- b. They were attacked and persecuted.
- c. The Jewish people did *teshuva* (a spiritual return).
- d. G-d sent a prophet or deliverer to save them.
- e. Then the Jewish people had peace and quiet for a number of years until, tragically, they chose to do a different type of evil. And then this destructive pattern recurred once again.

Why do *klal yissurim* happen?

In light of all these sources, the prophet ***Yirmeyahu*** (9:11–12) asks a puzzling question — one that would seem to have had an obvious, straightforward answer — “Who is the wise man who will understand this, and who is the one that G-d has spoken to, who may explain this? **Why has**

the land [of Israel] become desolate, and become parched like a desert, so that none pass through?"

The **Gemara Nedarim** (81a) explains that this question was posed to the Sages and the Prophets, but none could explain why *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) had become desolate.

And then Yirmeyahu himself answers — "But G-d has said — Because they abandoned My Torah that I placed before them, and did not listen to My voice, nor follow it."

What could explain this question and answer of Yirmeyahu? How could it be 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*.

Rav Nosson Weiss, a *Rebbe* at *Aish HaTorah*, points out that, all throughout Jewish history, *yissurim* to the *klal* have happened specifically because of *avoda zara* (idolatry) or some other critical *klal* (communal) issue. The most extreme expression of *klal yissurim* is *churban* — total destruction. This comes to address some fundamental problem in the world which cannot be solved except through a complete destruction and then rebuilding from the rubble.

Rav Noach Orlowek explains the phenomenon of *klal yissurim* somewhat differently. When something which is meant to be positive is no longer helping the Jewish people, but may actually be hurting them, G-d then takes it away from them. Examples include — the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple in Jerusalem), *Eretz Yisrael*, and sometimes even one of the *gedolei ha'dor* (greatest sages of the generation).

G-d's relationship to the *klal* and the *prat*

The **Ramchal** in *Da'at Tevunot* explains that there are two different ways G-d relates to the world — ***hanhagat hamishpat*** (through justice) and ***hanhagat hayichud*** (in terms of the unification of His Name):

Hanhagat hamishpat (G-d relating to us with justice) means that everything that occurs to us is a function of justice, although it is tempered with *rachamim* (mercy). G-d acts towards us in terms of what we deserve. (Rashi — *Bereshit* 1:1)

Hanhagat hayichud (G-d relating to us in terms of the unification of His Name) refers to the fact that everything in history is to bring about the goal of *yichud Hashem*. This is not just a response to our actions, but is also bringing the world to its ultimate perfection.

In *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world), perhaps *hanhagat hamishpat* is the primary way G-d relates to individuals, while *hanhagat hayichud* may be the main way He relates to the *klal*, even though the individual plays an important role within *hanhagat hayichud*. The example that the Ramchal gives of *hanhagat hayichud* in *Olam Ha'zeh* is *chevlei Mashiach* (the difficulties preceding the *Mashiach*) which are certainly *yissurim* of the *klal*.

The Ramchal is, however, careful to clarify that, ultimately, there is no contradiction between these two different systems. "We who have the true Torah don't view what happens to people as *keri* (randomness), but rather as *mishpat* (justice), as the Torah (*Devarim* 32:4) says — '*Hatzur tamim pa'alo, ki kol drachav mishpat* — The rock is perfect in His work, for all His paths are just.'"

The lesson that the Torah teaches is that whatever occurs to us, including those *yissurim* which come upon the community, are all complete justice. As the Ramchal himself expresses this — "It is certain that the ultimate *s'char v'onesh* (positive and negative consequences for our behavior) will be in *Olam Haba* (the world to come), to give everyone what is completely appropriate for them."

The **Gra** (at the end of *Megillat Esther* — *likutim*) discusses the relationship between the *klal* and the *prat* (the community and the individual) by questioning why the Torah grants exemptions to some soldiers (i.e., those who built a new house, planted a new vineyard, or just got married within the past year) in a non-essential war. They will thereby return home and not end up fighting. [Seemingly] they had either been decreed to die the previous Rosh HaShanah, in which case this exemption will not save them, even if they do return to their homes; or they had not been decreed to die, and therefore, they should have nothing to worry about, even if they do stay and fight in the war.

The **Gra** explains that, in this world, there is both *mazal klali* (general influence) and *mazal prati* (specific influence). If there has been a decree of death on a particular city or nation with *mazal klali*, it may then affect even those individuals who are physically there, yet had no specific decree on them independently. This is because the *mazal klali* of that place will overpower their *mazal prati* as individuals. And, therefore, it may help someone to leave a battle; since there may have been no *mazal prati* decree specifically on him.

The purpose of *yissurim* is to teach us to do *teshuva*

HaRav Yerucham Levovitz explains that the nature of *yissurim* can be seen from a verse in *Devarim* (8:5) — “*V'yadata im l'vavecha, ki ka'asher y'yaseir ish et b'no, Hashem Elokecha miyasreka* — And you should know with your heart, that just like a parent chastises (gives *yissurim* to) his child, G-d your L-rd chastises you (gives you *yissurim*).” Onkeles, in his classic translation and commentary on the Torah, explains that the word “*y'yaseir*” (referring to *yissurim*) actually means “*limud*” — to learn. Similarly, the *Gemara* (*Megillah* 14a) says — “*Gedolah hasarat taba'at yoteir m'mem-chet nevi'im*” — When King Achashverosh gave his signet ring over to Haman, signifying that he could now attack the Jewish people, that was a greater [benefit for the Jewish people] than the 48 *nevi'im* (prophets).” As much as the Jews attained from the 48 *nevi'im*, they must have attained even more from these *yissurim*. What did they gain from the *nevi'im*? Wisdom, understanding, and Torah. They, therefore, must have gained even more than this from these *yissurim*. (*Da'at Chachmah u'Mussar*)

The **Ran** (*Drashot* 6) writes — Sometimes calamity strikes in distant places and islands. The purpose of this is to arouse the Jewish People to do *teshuva*; they should see and become afraid, lest they suffer the same lot...but when they fail to become moved upon witnessing such things, the calamities continue, drawing closer and closer. Without a doubt, a person who sees these tragic events, which are in fact warning signals sent from G-d, yet still continues in his old ways is compared to a person who committed an offense, and was consequently warned against doing it again...*yissurim* are meant to arouse both the one directly afflicted, as well as the ones all around him, to do *teshuva*. (This Too Is for the Best — Reasons for *Yissurim* — pg. 51-52).

G-d has a personal connection to each of us

Since G-d is so great and elevated above every aspect of the physical world, how could He possibly know or care about what happens here? **Rav Shimshon Pincus** (*Bein haMetzarim* — Deepest love of G-d for the Jewish People) explains that the enormous wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon), so much greater than anyone else, is actually what allowed him to understand the animals. Similarly, G-d is able to know and care about what happens here specifically because He is so much greater and more elevated than we could ever imagine.

Not only does Judaism believe that G-d has a connection to this world, as many other religions also believe, and not only does it say that G-d is supervising and directing the world, it also speaks about G-d having a personal connection; a love and a concern toward every one of His creations.

While the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people is expressed through all of the *chagim* (holidays), the three weeks before *Tisha b'Av* express the deepest concern and the most

personal relationship between G-d and His nation, to the point where the *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 5b) tells us that G-d actually cries on *Tisha b'Av*.

These days also recall the many difficulties throughout the generations... The message of the three weeks is — **the Torah is not merely empty words**. When the Jewish people don't properly follow the Torah, the result is terrible destruction. Why is this situation so severe? Because maintaining the Torah is not a game. Besides this, there is an additional message. The fact that laxity in our fulfillment of the Torah results in such a catastrophe, shows the depth of the connection which exists between G-d and *Am Yisrael*.

Rav Pincus (*Sicha* on *Meah Brachot*) explains this with a principle concerning relationships — Wherever love is greater, like within a family, a split or anger will end up being that much more intense. Therefore, when there is anger and distance between G-d and *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people), G-d forbid, it necessarily results in awful calamities.

Principles of the Holocaust and *klal yissurim* from Rav Avigdor Miller

Rav Avigdor Miller, one of the greatest leaders within American Jewry, wrote and published many different books explaining Jewish fundamentals. The one book which he wrote but never ended up publishing was his perspective on the Holocaust, titled "Divine Madness." It was discovered and published by his family only many years after his death.

The following are sections from his book which explain essential principles of *klal yissurim* (communal afflictions and difficulties).

Discerning Hashem's conduct of history:

Rav Miller writes that it would [seem to] be proper, when considering the misfortunes of... some community, to declare that we are incapable of understanding Hashem's ways... [However,] on the contrary: belief in Hashem's conduct of history demands of us to study His deeds and to attempt to fathom their causes and purposes. As the verse in *Tehillim* (94:10) says — "He who chastises nations, is He not thereby correcting or rebuking? Is He not teaching men knowledge?" [Therefore,] could a believer deceive himself into thinking that Hashem would act without obvious reason?

How much could we discern the purposes of G-d's conduct? Although no human is capable of fathoming His purposes even in the smallest events...even our little minds can discern some reasons, purpose, and explanation of methods.

Every act of G-d has multiple purposes, including the phenomenon of Nature: how much more purposeful are His acts of history. One of the chief purposes of His works is to impart true knowledge and awareness of Him.

Thus the first and most fundamental of all purposes of events...is to awaken men from the lethargy of habit and materialism, and to cause them to think of G-d.

The *Gemara* (*Yevamot* 63a) tells us — "No misfortune comes upon the world except because of Israel." Rashi explains that Hashem brings a misfortune in order to frighten His people and to warn them to improve, to do *teshuvah*, to become better. They should think, "It could have happened to us!" Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to study the events of history...and to see what connection they had with Israel.

The Jewish Nation is not like the other nations of the world; it is a nation whose existence is only for the purpose of the Torah. This was the message which Hashem gave to us just before the giving of the Torah (*Shemos* 19:6) — "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation." Our function in this world is to speak of Hashem and to serve Him, and whatever

happens in the world is for the purpose of reminding us of this great mission. We must listen to history and understand that this is Hashem's voice speaking to us.

This is Hashem's system; He cannot afford to keep quiet, because His chosen people must fulfill their function in this world, whether they want to or not. The prophet Yechezkel (20:33) declared to the Jewish nation — “With a powerful hand, an outstretched arm and poured out wrath, I will rule over you.” Either you choose, or I will choose.

What lessons can we learn from [communal tragedies like] the Holocaust? [There is one] great lesson [that we can certainly] learn: that **what is written in the Torah will come true**. And it's written in the Torah: If you will not listen to Me and you will scorn My laws, then I am going to chastise you, *sheva al chatoseichem* (seven times for your transgressions) (*Vayikra* 26:18), again and again.

[The opening verse in *Megillat Esther* says —] “**And** it was in the days of Achashverosh.” From the [seemingly extra word] “and,” we know that [the decree against the Jews] was a result of events that preceded it. This is important; it did not just happen that suddenly there was a Haman. It was a connection to past events. The sooner we get that into our heads, the more quickly we are going to become Jews, because without understanding that, one doesn't begin to be a Jew. **A Jew, first and foremost, believes that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is in control of the world.**

Anyone who reads *Chumash* could expect [calamities] to happen [in response to communal transgressions]. It's only...where people are ignorant and they're under the influence of propaganda, [that] they're able to be deceived.

The Holocaust was one of the strangest events in history:

Germany had, for 150 years, been the most disciplined and civilized of nations... The transformation of a nation of law and order into a nation of thugs and murderers is one of the strangest events in the history of mankind. It was indeed a manifestation of the Hand of G-d.

This hatred against Israel was especially remarkable in view of the tremendous disadvantages and losses that the Germans willingly undertook in order to still their blood lust... Yet, the Nazis took the trains, which were vitally needed for troop transport and for war materials, and diverted them for the senseless transportation of Jews to the killing centers... The Germans bled themselves white in order to kill as many as possible. This was an open miracle of the most horrible kind, and unequaled in ferocity.

The death trains were packed with Jewish scientists, medical specialists, industrialists, and with armies of free labor taken away from German factories.

In the times of the Kaiser, had someone told a German that someday his people would become such barbarians as to kill innocent Jews, he would have put his hands on his children's heads and sworn by his children that this could never happen in Germany. Germany was the most orderly, law abiding country in Europe and perhaps in the world, and for such a thing to happen was unthinkable.

The Torah (*Devarim* 28:59) foretells, “*V'hiflah Hashem et makotecha v'eit makot zarecha* — And Hashem will make wondrous plagues upon you and plagues upon your seed...” “Wondrous” implies “unexpected” and also “unequaled.” If any part of our history serves as a fulfillment of this, it certainly was the destruction of six million of our people, done by a nation that had prided itself on its superior civilization and highest criteria of good manners. This was the most surprising (“wondrous”) of all the plagues that ever befell our people.

The fact of universal hatred against our people is one of the great miracles of history... These were all miracles. They were the most horrible of events, but we are justified in calling them

miracles, because the idea behind good miracles and these horrible ones is the same. The purpose of a miracle is that people should open their eyes and see that there is something above man: there is a G-d who conducts the affairs of the world.

{Rav Shimshon Pincus says something very similar to this — Someone who doesn't believe that G-d is the guiding force behind all of Jewish history is not called a *kofer* (denier). He is simply called stupid.}

[Rav Miller continues –] Messages in the Holocaust:

Every Jew was required to carry a special identification card, and his passport and ration card bore the word “Jew”... Every man and woman was required to adopt a Jewish first name (unless he had one already).

There were lessons without number. The prohibitions of using exclusively German first names, of patronizing German restaurants and dining cars, and of relations with Aryan women (to cite a few examples out of many), were Torah lessons that were difficult to overlook. But they were ignored. The decrees of Nazi Germany were aimed at separating Jews from Gentiles in every possible manner. There would be no social contact: no business contact, no contact in schools, housing, travel resorts, shopping.

[And] the commandments of the Torah (as well as those of the Sages) aim at separation [as the verses tell us] “I separated you from the nations” (*Vayikra* 20:26); and “You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation” (*Shemot* 20:6); and “Behold a people that dwells alone” (*Bamidbar* 23:9).

Historically, Jews always responded to *klal yissurim* with *teshuva*:

In every previous black hour, the Jews responded with prayer to G-d. In Egypt, *B'nei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem (*Shemot* 2:23–24, 3:7,9, 14:10)... Always, Israel utilized the peril or calamity as an occasion to cry out to G-d. Under the oppression of Aram they cried out to Hashem (*Shoftim* 3:9); also under the oppression of Yavin and Sisera (*ibid*, 4:3); they cried out for succor against Midian (*ibid*, 6:5); they cried out against Ammon (*ibid*, 10:10); when sorely beset by Yaravam, the tribe of Yehuda cried to Hashem (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 13:14); in Shushan they fasted and prayed for three days for Hashem's aid (*Esther* 4:16). In every instance they were rescued from their enemies “because they had faith in Him” (*Divrei Hayamim* I, 5:20). [And] the Maccabees [also] “cried out to G-d” (*Chashmona'im* 3:50, 4:9, 4:27).

At Haman's decree, the entire nation fasted and wept to Hashem (*Esther* 4:3). And thus the entire nation did in every generation when they were faced with some peril. The peril or oppression was sent by Hashem for our benefit.

[And] in every instance the nation improved as a result:

[The verse in *Megillat Esther* says —] “*Kimu v'kiblu hayehudim* — The Jews fulfilled and accepted” (*Esther* 9:27): “they fulfilled that which they had already accepted at Sinai” (*Shabbat* 88a). In most of these episodes, they were either entirely rescued, or the affliction was [at least] partially mitigated. Great catastrophes were visited when many failed to cry out to Hashem, because the people had been influenced by Menashe (*Melachim* II, 24:3), or at the Second [Temple] Destruction when many were demoralized by the *Tzadukim* (Sadducees) and the Herodians.

Such analysis of calamities has always been the distinctive practice of the people of Israel. In every generation the leaders rebuked the people for their transgressions; and in their sermons and in their books they pointed out the...faults of the people. Not only the leaders but the Jewish populace criticizes itself... Three times daily every individual declares his [transgressions]; and also in the Days of *Teshuva*; and constantly all day on Yom Kippur, and at every *Mussaf* when we state that because of our [transgressions] we are in exile, and numerous other times during the year. In all misfortunes that befell our nation, they justified G-d and put the blame on themselves,

[as it says in *Eichah* (3:42) —] “We have trespassed and rebelled,” and “Let us search and examine our ways, and return to G-d” (ibid, verse 40). **Every misfortune was utilized as an impetus to self-searching and self-betterment.**

When some public misfortune came, however small, the Sages and the people attributed it to their own [transgressions]... When men search themselves for transgressions, they discover them... We must be our own severest critics because great things are expected of us. The precious metals are examined for the smallest impurities...for our benefit...

Throughout Jewish History, our forefathers always attributed their misfortunes to their own transgressions. Now, it is not true that misfortunes come only because of transgressions... [But] the “good tiding” is that the Jewish nation will always utilize misfortune to become better.

[Rav Miller concludes –] *Olam Haba* (the world to come) is a key to dealing with *klal yissurim*:

In viewing the events of history, we must keep in mind the principle: “The world is judged according to the majority” (*Kiddushin* 40b), and the minority of the righteous undergo the tribulations sent because of the transgressing majority... But you cannot understand anything if you don't believe in *Olam Haba* [where any perception of injustice to individuals in this world will be taken care of]. *Olam Haba* is the *ikar ha'ikrim*, the heart of the matter.

Rav Shimshon Pincus (*Yad Hashem haysa bam l'ra'ah* — Struck by G-d's Hand) explains that throughout all of the generations, G-d showed us His strong hand, above the laws of nature. The message which G-d wants to teach us from the magnitude of the destruction and the strictness of the judgment is that the Jews are not living in the natural world according to the normal understandings of people. We are living rather in G-d's world, and He is guiding it according to His system. Both the degree of our obligations and the severe consequences when we don't live up to them follow G-d's system, beyond the boundaries of the physical world.

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

***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