

Understanding Messages within our Difficulties and Challenges – Part 1

Introduction

The Torah understanding is that Hashem not only created the world – something – from absolutely nothing, but that He continually sustains and supervises it. And not only does He supervise the big events in the world, He also supervises the details in all of our lives. This naturally leads to a classical question which has been discussed throughout the generations – How much can we understand this *hashgacha pratit* (personal Divine supervision) which occurs in each of our lives? Before addressing this very significant issue concerning *hashgacha pratit*, there are three important prerequisites which need to be clarified.

First – Concerning the central concept of *bitachon* (trust in G-d), the *Chazon Ish (Emunah v'Bitachon 2:1)* wrote:

There is an old misconception rooted in the hearts of many when it comes to the concept of *bitachon* (trust in G-d)... This fundamental trait has come to be understood as the obligation to believe that whichever result seems most beneficial to us is the one that must occur. And if one is unsure and concerned that the other possibility may happen, then this person must be lacking in *bitachon*.

This understanding of *bitachon* is wrong...for who can know the judgments of G-d and how He relates to us? Rather, *bitachon* means the clarity that nothing happens by chance – everything that occurs in this world is the result of a decree from G-d... While there are many different levels and gradations to *bitachon* [and] it is natural to be afraid when encountering a dangerous situation...included within *bitachon* is to remain steadfast in one's *emunah* (belief in G-d) even when one considers the possibility of *yissurim* (painful difficulties and challenges). One's heart remains aware that this difficulty is not random, since there is no randomness at all in the world, and everything is exclusively from G-d...

According to this, *emunah* (belief in G-d) and *bitachon* (trust in G-d) are one and the same. *Emunah* is the general perspective of the believer, i.e., the theory, and *bitachon* is its application.

The **Pele Yo'etz (Erech Havtacha)** says similarly:

Bitachon does not mean that G-d does everything which a person wants and that nothing difficult will ever happen to him. We see this in the *tzadikim* (righteous) who are poor and afflicted with severe suffering, and in the many difficult things that continually happen in the world. The essence of *bitachon* is, rather, that whatever happens is for the good and that Heaven sees the good in what is happening to a person. Man has very limited understanding of what happens and will perceive bad as being good and good as being bad. Only G-d knows what is truly good to be able to serve G-d and to achieve completeness. Therefore [*bitachon* means that], all that happens to a person should be accepted wholeheartedly with gladness, and one should have *emunah* in G-d that only good comes from Heaven, never bad.

Second – Not only do we need to know that everything that occurs in this world is the result of a decree from G-d, but both the Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachye held that everyone is required to believe in *hashgacha pratit*.

The **Ramban** (Introduction to *Iyov*) wrote:

It is obvious and well-known that the belief in G-d's knowledge about the precise details of each being, as well as His supervision of them in general and particular, is a major principle in Judaism. Whoever rejects this principle completely rejects the Torah.

Rabbeinu Bachye (*Kad HaKemach – Emunah*) said:

The essence of the Torah and the *mitzvot* is *emunah*... This mitzvah, which depends upon thought, is to believe that the world has a single Creator, [and] that He supervises mankind.

Third – We need to be *matzdik hadin al kol m'orotav* – to acknowledge G-d's justice in all that befalls us. The **Orchot Tzadikim** (*Sha'ar HaSimcha*) actually counts this as one of the 613 *mitzvot*, based on the verse (*Devarim* 8:5):

“*v'yadata im l'vavecha, ki ka'asher y'yaseir ish et b'no, Hashem Elokecha m'yasreka* –
And you should know with your heart, that just like a parent gives *yissurim* to his child,
G-d your L-rd gives you *yissurim*.”

This verse clearly shows the problem with the common translation of the word “*yissurim*” as “suffering.” It would be absurd to translate this verse as – “Just as a parent causes his child to suffer, similarly does G-d your L-rd cause you to suffer!” While there may be no single English-word translation for *yissurim*, this verse provides the proper context for us to understand it.

Yissurim, therefore must mean – pain, challenges, and difficulties (what could be called “tough love”) that were given to us from G-d's love, and exclusively for our benefit.

Sources that discuss how we can understand Hashgacha

With these three prerequisites in mind, we can now begin to discuss *hashgacha pratit*. The obvious first source is the well-known *Gemara Brachot* (5a):

“If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him – *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (he should examine his actions)...

[If he was] *pishpeish* but didn't find – he should assume that it was because of *bitul Torah* (neglect of Torah learning)...

And if he did assume [that it was because of *bitul Torah*] but [still] didn't find anything, it is clear that they must be *yissurim shel ahava* (afflictions of love).”

The simple message seems to be – not only is *hashgacha pratit* relevant for every single person, but the ability to understand and interpret this *hashgacha pratit*, that specifically occurred to us, is also relevant for every single person.

The **Nefesh HaChaim** (4:29) explains this *gemara*:

“If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him – *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (he should examine his actions) ... This is because G-d relates to us with the principle of *mida k'neged mida* (measure for measure) – the actual limb that was corrupted through transgressing is the very limb that *yissurim* came upon. [Through this examination and introspection] one will then come to know and understand which [specific] transgression these *yissurim* correspond to. One will then take it to heart to admit and abandon it, and thereby be healed. Therefore it says – “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him – *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (he should examine his actions)” – and through the *yissurim* he will understand his path.

The *gemara* then goes on to say – “If he searched but didn't find” – i.e., a transgression done by that limb, in this particular manner, that would have appropriately led to these specific *yissurim* to have come upon him through *mida k'neged mida*, then he should “assume that it was because of *bitul Torah*.” This is because *mida k'neged mida* is not relevant to *bitul Torah*, since *bitul Torah* could impact any limb in the entire body.

Rav Avraham Grodzinsky, the *Mashgiach* of Slobodka, explained *yissurim* by comparing them to *nevuah* (prophecy), in his work, the **Torat Avraham**:

The purpose of *nevuah* is never to give us new information or clarity regarding Torah, but rather to give us clarity about the nature of reality. Even those who want to observe the Torah can be confused as to how well they are following it. Yeshaya, for example, chastises the people for not bringing *korbanot* (offerings) properly, and in their observance of *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* (holidays).

This leads to a very obvious question – If *nevuah* was so valuable in the past, when people were so much greater, what are all of the generations supposed to do afterwards, with neither *nevuah* nor *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration)?

The answer is that the *hashgacha* has granted us something to take the place of *nevuah*, and it is *yissurim*. *Yissurim* are not an *onesh* (punishment) for transgressions that we have already done, but are rather G-d's agents to teach us about our past mistakes and to help us to avoid any additional transgressions in the future, without which, it would be impossible for us to do *teshuva*.

As the *Gemara Brachot* (5a) says – “If a person sees *yissurim* coming upon him, he should examine his actions”... Through the analysis of *mida k'neged mida* we will be able to determine which transgression would have logically caused these *yissurim* to have come upon us. These *yissurim* are very powerful to [help us to] search out and uncover, to analyze and understand the secrets of the heart, even more than a *Navi* (Prophet) of G-d. The *Gemara Megillah* (14a) tells us – “The transfer of the signet ring [from Achashveirosh to Haman which was the prelude to all of the evil decrees that followed against the Jews] was greater than all of the 48 *Nevi'im* (male prophets) and 7 *Nevi'ot* (female prophetesses).” While the *Nevi'im* were **not** successful in getting the Jews to do *teshuva*, the *yissurim* **did** succeed in getting the Jews to do *teshuva*.

If this is true for the community, it is all the more true for every individual – *yissurim* will help them to uncover that which is concealed or that which they aren't paying sufficient attention to, and to do *teshuva*.

There is, however, an obstacle which prevents people from listening to these “*Nevi'im*” and it is called – *m'lumada* (habituation). *M'lumada* is not only a problem with *tefillah* (prayer), *brachot* (blessings), and *mitzvot*; it can also be a concern with our learning of Torah and properly understanding it. In addition to these more spiritual areas, *m'lumada* is also relevant to our feelings and perceptions, and can, therefore limit the impact that *yissurim* will have upon us... We have become so accustomed to life with *yissurim* that we hardly feel them anymore.

This situation of being desensitized to *yissurim* is a major obstacle to growing through the *yissurim*. If we are not only missing *nevuah*, but the *yissurim* that can replace it are also not helping us, how will we ever be aroused to do *teshuva*? The only solution is for us to reawaken our feelings — first with the big things that happen, and eventually with the small everyday occurrences in our lives.

In order to prevent us from making numerous mistakes and committing many transgressions, G-d granted this “*nevuah*” (i.e., *yissurim*) as a *chessed* (kindness) to both the community and the individual, for that time and for all generations.

It would seem that it would be a greater *chessed* for G-d to give us *yissurim* merely as a hint, not as illnesses or great pains, as the *Gemara Arachin* (16b) says –

“How far does *yissurim* extend? Even if one puts his hand into his pocket to take out three coins but only manages to remove two”.

The truth is that *yissurim* do begin with small hints. The *tochacha* (rebuke) in *Parshat Bechukotai* was actually given in five different stages, and only when the initial milder stage was ignored did the next more severe stage begin. The *hashgacha* continued to increase the *yissurim* in order that we would finally listen and improve our ways, since there is no solution for one who is lacking awareness other than to force him to be aware...

An even more obvious aspect of the *chessed* is that the one who is uncovering all of this is the person himself. The actual transgressor is the one who is seeing these secrets of his heart. This whole matter is remarkable – this very transgressor who is now so small and lowly, who doesn't understand G-d's Torah, and isn't listening to the words of the *Nevi'im*, has now become a “*Navi* of G-d.” The **main** point of *nevuah* is to help us understand ourselves so that we will know how to

return to the proper path...

Since we “become the *Navi*,” and we know ourselves better than anyone else, *yissurim* can be much more accurate than *nevuah* from someone else. **This great power of seeing into the heart is accessible to every single Jew** — not only the greatest people — in what is relevant for themselves.

Rav Wachvogel (*Mashgiach* of Lakewood Yeshiva, in *Leket Reshimot*, pg. 97-101) says similarly from the *Sifri*:

“The verse “*acharei Hashem teileichu* (You should follow after G-d)” refers to the *amud ha'annan* (the pillar of the clouds of Glory), and this is a mitzvah for all generations.” Rebbe Yerucham Levovitch, the *Mashgiach* of the *Mir Yeshiva* in Europe, pointed out the [obvious] difficulty with this – Since the *annan* (clouds of Glory) only existed for the 40 years [in the desert], how could this be a mitzvah for all generations? He explained this as a *mitzvat aseï* (positive obligation) for every person to follow after the *hashgacha* from Hashem.

There is *hashgacha* in every generation, and the only difference in the desert was that the *amud ha'annan* was revealed and obvious to all. In every generation, however, there are also *amudei ha'annan*, different *amudei ha'annan* that are [either] hidden or concealed.

Every single Jew, both collectively and individually, has an *amud ha'annan* which appears to him and guides him. He simply needs to search for his *amud ha'annan*. It may seem that it is not so easy to find, since it is hidden, but it definitely does exist!... Whoever merits it will clearly be shown how he needs to act.

If we don't try to see *hashgacha*, then we won't see or experience any *hashgacha*, and we won't even know what *hashgacha* is. If [however] one does try to see *hashgacha*, he will immediately see *hashgacha* – in every single step. This is the principle that – unless you search, you will never see.

Moshe Rabeinu merited everything through stopping to see the [burning] bush. There were many other shepherds of sheep that had passed by, seen the bush burning, and hadn't stopped...

Moshe Rabeinu stopped [to see] because he knew that everything that a person is shown has a purpose... And [since] “G-d saw that he turned to look... G-d [then] spoke to him.”

If one attempts to see *hashgacha*, [then] *hashgacha* will be shown to him. If one [even] pays attention a bit to what happens to him, one will immediately see that this is not a random world. One will see *hashgacha* and G-d's hand all around him even without *ruach hakodesh* or *nevuah*!

The *Gemara Arachin* (16b) asks – “How far does *yissurim* extend?” and concludes – “Even if one stuck his hand into his pocket to take out three coins but only took out two [and now needs “extra effort to put his hand back in and take out the third coin” – Rashi].”

Rav Yisrael Salant (as quoted in the *sefer Sam Derech* #13, *Balak*) explained this according to the *Gemara Brachot* 5a:

“When a person sees *yissurim* coming upon him, he should examine his actions.” Since *yissurim* that come upon a person never impact him for no reason, there must have been some issue that caused him to have them. The *gemara*, therefore, tells us how far *yissurim* extend, so we shouldn't think that we need to examine our deeds only if we have severe *yissurim* like *Iyov*, *Rachmana litzlan* (that G-d should protect us from). Rather, every single aggravation, even a very slight one, needs to awaken us to investigate our actions and to examine what caused these *yissurim* to happen to us.

As the *siddur* of the *Gra* explains – just like the *Avot* (forefathers) related everything back to G-d, we also need to recognize and to see how everything relates back to the Master of the universe. There is, therefore, a great obligation on every person to consider every occurrence, whether small or big, and to ask – “What does G-d want with this?”

Understanding Messages within our Difficulties and Challenges – Part 2

Sources that question our ability to understand *hashgacha*.

Before speaking about our ability to understand *hashgacha pratit*, the *Chafetz Chaim* (*Sheim Olam* – chapter 3) reaffirms the fundamental principle that: Every single thing that occurs in this world, from the earth until the heaven, is entirely under the *hashgacha* of G-d. The Rabbis have spoken extensively about the topic of *hashgacha* – “No man stubs his toe below unless it has been decreed upon him from above” (*Chulin 7b*)... A person needs to consider his actions and see the *hashgacha* that has come upon him, and he will thereby strengthen his *bitachon*. And even if the *hashgacha* is not so obvious, for example when one profited because the price for the entire market went up, he should think about his particular relationship to this situation, and then the *hashgacha* will become revealed.

The *Chafetz Chaim* then cautions us regarding the level of clarity we will actually be able to achieve –

A person comes here [to this world] for just a few years, and he wants to understand answers to all of his questions... But the days of a person are extremely brief, and he sees very little of the world and its matters, like a traveler that goes from place to place. He barely recognizes who he himself is and what he is supposed to accomplish. This may be his first time in this world, or perhaps he has already been here many different times, and he has still not completed his task. It is written in the name of the Ari that today virtually all of the souls are *gilgulim* (reincarnations). Since a person's knowledge is so limited, he can't investigate the actions of the King of Kings. A person [therefore] needs to walk with Him with purity, and to have *emunah* that every single thing He does is entirely for the best, since nothing bad comes from above. Then he will certainly merit to see that, in the end, these very things were entirely good and kindness.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichot Mussar* #18) also spoke about our limitations in understanding our *yissurim* –

“As precious and beneficial as *yissurim* are, in order for one to derive this benefit and to understand them properly, he must have a *Rav*... The most valuable lesson a student could receive from his *Rav* is how to understand *yissurim*.

There are so many different levels and details of pain that may be factored into *yissurim*, both physical as well as spiritual, from the most subtle to the most difficult — how can a person possibly know which ones are coming for which issues?

In addition, when a person does stop to consider the purpose and message of his *yissurim*, he may easily end up understanding them incorrectly... The nature of people is not to see their own failings, and therefore they will twist the *yissurim* to another direction entirely...

The preciousness of *yissurim* is not only that they help us to fix our direction in life, but also that they show us just how much G-d cares about us. As the *Gemara Arachin* 16b says – “One that goes 40 days without *yissurim* has acquired this [temporal] world” – and lost his connection to *Olam Haba* (the world to come).

We see that there are many great and elevated benefits to *yissurim*, but for all of them one needs a *Rav*, to learn from him the Torah of eternal life, the Torah of *yissurim*. And then through the *yissurim*, it will be possible for one to reach all of the exalted levels and life in *Olam Haba*.

The **Mabit** (*Beit Elokim – Tefilah #16*) explained that our ability to understand our *yissurim* is limited specifically in our day and age –
“It is well known that when the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) rested on the Jewish people through the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) or *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), then *hashgacha*, *nissim* (miracles), and the chosenness of the Jews were openly manifest to everyone... Only those with transgressions suffered, and once they did *teshuva* the difficulties stopped. When the *Shechina* departed because of our transgressions, however, then the open *hashgacha* also ceased. *Hashgacha* now occurs only in a hidden manner, both for *s’char* and *onesh* (positive and negative consequences). While the stubborn can now rationalize that they [*s’char* and *onesh*] are not from G-d, the intelligent realize that everything that happens in our exile, in general and in particular, is entirely from G-d’s *hashgacha*.

After discussing many possible factors that could be involved with determining the proper *din* (judgment) and *yissurim* that should occur to people, the **Ramchal** (*Derech Hashem 2:3 – B’Hashgachah Ha’Ishit*) explains:
“The key point is that the judgment is true and straight, as it says (*Devarim 32:4*) – “*Hatzur tamim pa’alo, ki kol d’rachav mishpat* – The Creator’s work is perfect and all His ways are just.” No created thing can encompass G-d’s thoughts or the profound depth of His plan... From all of this, we see that there are many different and varied reasons for everything that happens to an individual in this world, whether it is clearly good or not. It is important to realize, however, that this does not mean that every event is always the result of all these causes. These are merely all the possible causes, but things can sometimes result from one and sometimes from another. The Highest Wisdom, however, perceives and knows what is best to rectify the entire creation. The various causes do not always have the same effects. Many different causes are almost always involved, and in many cases will contradict one another... Because of these numerous conflicts, the Highest Wisdom must balance and decide every single factor, creating situations which are products of the various combinations of these causes with respect to each individual.

Occurrences may thus be the result of one or another of these causes, but ultimately at least one of these causes that we have discussed must be involved. The details of this judgment, however, are beyond the grasp of man’s understanding. But to know its general concepts and categories is to know much, as we have explained earlier.

Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin, in an article on this topic, spelled out why we are so limited in our ability to understand *hashgacha pratit*:

“While each person certainly needs to understand that every single thing that happens to him is *hashgacha pratit*, we still need to ask – how do we know that this is a *siman min haShamayim* (sign from Heaven) to determine how and what we should do?”

And even if we can assume that what happened was a *siman min haShamayim*, do we have the tools in our hands to then determine with a pure heart what exactly this *siman* is telling us? If we encounter resistance to some particular activity, is this an indication from *Shamayim* that we should abandon it? Or perhaps the opposite; this is showing us the importance of the task in line with the principle – “According to the effort is the achievement.”

Let’s begin by examining two different incidents that occurred to the **Chafetz Chaim**:

a. While he was involved in compiling the *Mishna Brura*, his son tragically died in an accident that occurred in his home. The *Chafetz Chaim* went to the *beit medrash* (study hall), pounded on the *bima*, and announced publicly – “I know that all of this is *ma’aseh Satan* (the work of the Satan) to try to stop me from the holy work of writing the *Mishna Brura*, and I am, therefore, publicly announcing before the entire congregation that this won’t stop me. Nothing will prevent me from my work with this exalted task!”

b. It is known that near the end of his life, the *Chafetz Chaim* decided to make *aliya* to the holy land, and he had (even) arranged a place to live there. Much effort had gone into this since the *Chafetz Chaim* saw many different benefits in this great matter for all of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish

people) as well as for the residents of *Eretz Yisrael*. And then, near the very end of his preparations, his *Rebbitzen* was taken from him. The *Chafetz Chaim* declared – “It appears from *Shamayim* (Heaven) that I am being blocked,” and he then stopped all of his efforts in this matter.

Let us each think, if these two occurrences were presented to us, how would we decide? How would we interpret what the *hashgacha* wanted from us?... We could easily have reached the exact opposite conclusion from the *Chafetz Chaim* – interpreting what he recognized as the *ma'aseh Satan* as the *siman min HaShamayim*, and the *siman min haShamayim* as the *ma'aseh Satan*.

Biases and desires fill up our minds, and are therefore active partners with all of our thoughts and decisions. Therefore, whatever our biases and desires are agreeable to, we view as *simanim min haShamayim*, and whatever they are opposed to we interpret as *ma'aseh Satan*.

How, in fact, did the *Chafetz Chayim* know which *siman* he should pay attention to and which to ignore?

Rav Zeidel Epstein suggested – Whatever was clear to the *Chafetz Chaim* from his logic [i.e. finishing the *Mishnah Brura*], he wouldn't change because of *simanim*. In terms of making *aliyah* to *eretz Yisrael*, however, where he was doubtful because of the various factors on both sides of the question, is where there was room for *simanim*.

***Ma'aseh Ish* (pg.145-6) – Three *ma'asim* (stories) which show that recent *Gedolim* (Jewish leaders) felt we were very limited in being able to interpret *hashgacha*:**

1. A student of the *Chazon Ish* was electrocuted...and his life was miraculously saved... He went into the *Chazon Ish* to discuss this with him –
“G-d certainly wants something from me. What else does the *Rav* think that G-d wants me to accept upon myself?” The *Chazon Ish* answered him – “It is impossible to know, and you may end up being misled, therefore, don't change anything.” The *Chazon Ish* knew the questioner well, and it was clear to him that [this student] was fulfilling all of his regular responsibilities, both in terms of obligations and prohibitions, properly. The questioner, however, thought that G-d might be expecting...a higher level of behavior. It was in regard to this that the *Chazon Ish* responded to him – “Don't do anything” since G-d never intends that one should do anything that is not clear.

2. Rav Moshe David Lefkowitz told the following *ma'aseh* (story) –
When one of the *Gedolim* was sitting *shiva* for his infant son who had tragically died, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the *Steipler Rav*) went to pay a *shiva* visit to him. The father said to him – “The *Gemara* (*Brachot* 5a) says that when *yissurim* come upon a person, he should [respond by] searching out his actions, since everything operates through the principle of *mida k'neged mida* (measure for measure). If so, what is incumbent upon me to do?” Rav Kanievsky told him that the *Chazon Ish* understood that *gemara* to have been relevant only in previous times, but today we aren't able to search out and find [the cause of our *yissurim*]. In fact, if a person begins to search with the principle of *mida k'neged mida*, he may end up even more mistaken and misled from the proper path.

3. Rav Lefkowitz added that he heard the following qualification to this from Rav Shach after a different tragic occurrence –
“Of course, where a person clearly sees or feels that some things [in his life] need to be repaired, it is obvious that it is incumbent upon him to fix them. And if, G-d forbid, he doesn't attempt to address them, then he will face very serious consequences. However, in general, when he is neither aware nor feels that there is any specific issue [that needs to be addressed], he shouldn't begin [the process of] searching out. One should rather strengthen himself and increase his efforts with his learning and the depth of his learning. Through the strength of Torah, his *neschama*

(soul) will grow, even besides the *s'char* (benefit) of *talmud Torah k'neged kulam* (that Torah learning is equal to everything). Additionally, one should increase his *kavanah* (focus) in both *tefillah* and *brachot*, since they are the foundations of *emunah* and *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven).

In other words, while *yissurim* may help to focus us on some obvious area that we need to improve, we will be unable, even with the help of a *Rav* to interpret them definitively, to know specifically what G-d wants from us (beyond fulfillment of — and improvement in — our basic responsibilities).

The ***Gemara Pesachim (50a)*** quotes the verse:

“*V'haya Hashem l'melech al kol ha'aretz, bayom ha'hu yihi'ye Hashem echad u'shmo echad* – And it will be that G-d will be King over all the earth, on that day G-d will be one and His Name will be one” (*Zecharia 14:9*)

The *gemara* then asks the question –

[But] can it be that today He is not one? Rebbe Acha bar Chanina answers – *Olam Haba* (the world to come) is not like *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world):

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, upon hearing positive news we say (the blessing) “*hatov v'hameitiv* – the One that is good and does good,” and upon hearing negative news we say “*Boruch dayan ha'emes* – blessed is the True Judge”; while in *Olam Haba* we will say only “*hatov v'hameitiv*.”

The *Tzlach* explains this with a verse from *Yeshaya (12:1)* – “You will say on that day – ‘I thank you G-d for You were angry with me, and now Your wrath has subsided and You have comforted me.’” Nothing bad ever comes from G-d, everything is for the good. Even the difficulties that come upon a person are not bad, but rather good to give him merit, humble his *yetzer hara* (negative inclination), and purify his *neschama* to merit the world that is all good. However, the one in this world doesn't understand that the [difficulties] are benefiting him, since they appear in his eyes as bad. *Yissurim* that come to cleanse us of transgressions are similar to a painful medical procedure that is done for a sick person. If he is foolish he will scream to have the procedure stopped, while if he is wise, he will willingly endure it. However, after his death, or in the future time for the entire world (hopefully soon), when he sees and understands the true good, the verse from *Yeshaya* will then apply. He will then be able to give thanks for the past when G-d was temporarily angry with him, for the purpose of benefiting him in the end. This is the intention of the *gemara*:

“In ***Olam Ha'zeh*** one says *Boruch dayan ha'emes* on negative news” – since it seems that this is coming from *midat hadin* (the trait of strict justice), “while in ***Olam Haba*** we will say only *hatov v'hameitiv*” – because we will then see **retroactively** that everything really came from *midat tovah* (the trait of pure goodness) and it will then be appropriate for a person to make the blessing of *hatov v'hameitiv* on everything that had happened to him **previously**.

In other words, in this world we don't understand that what appears “bad” is really benefiting us. In the future, however, we will be able to retroactively give thanks for the past. Therefore, we see that full clarity is possible only retroactively, in *Olam Haba* — not in this world.

Limited — but Not Exempt from Trying

Despite the many sources that speak about our limitations in being able to understand our *yissurim*, the **Ramban** (*Sha'ar Hagemul 124,125*) cautions us against giving up and not even attempting to interpret them:

One may ask – “Since there are aspects of justice that are hidden and [therefore] we [ultimately] need to believe that G-d is the true judge that does only justice, why do we need to bother, and why are we commanded, to learn the various explanations and secrets that have been hinted at?”

Why can't we simply rely entirely on the final conclusion [that everything is really for the best even if we can't see it now] and that G-d will never deviate or ignore any aspect of the judgment?"

This is the claim of fools that despise wisdom. We benefit enormously from this learning which gives us wisdom and an understanding of G-d and His ways. And whether we end up attaining clarity or find that it is hidden from us, this [search for understanding] will help our *emunah* and *bitachon* in G-d — much more than those who never tried. We will come to appreciate the hidden aspects of the judgment from those [aspects] that we *can* understand, to recognize that they are *all* correct and just.

This attempt to know and understand the truth and justice of G-d's judgments, to the best of one's ability, which will settle one's mind on the matter, is the obligation of every person that wants to serve G-d with love and fear... And certainly with the secret factor that was discussed previously [of *gilgul neshamot* – reincarnation of souls] no questions or doubts at all will remain in the mind of a person.

Both the **Chovot HaLevavot** and **Rabbeinu Bachye** agree with the Ramban that it isn't sufficient to rely on the justice of *yissurim* through the acceptance of tradition alone. One must rather attempt to intellectually understand the principles behind G-d's judgments as much as one possibly can. The Ramchal, in *Da'at Tevunot*, points out that once one comes to understand these principles intellectually, there is then an additional obligation to achieve an emotional realization with them, as we say in the *Aleynu* prayer three times every day – “And you should know this day and place it on your heart, that G-d is the L-rd in the heavens above and the earth beneath, there is no other (*Devarim* 4:39).”

Therefore, we see that despite our limitations in this area, not only is it foolish not to attempt to understand *hashgacha*, but in fact, anyone who wants to serve G-d properly is obligated to try to do so.

Understanding Messages within our Difficulties and Challenges – Part 3

Practical Guidelines for *Hashgacha Pratit* from Rabbi Moshe Zeldman:

First, we need to remember that there is always meaning and significance to *yissurim*. As valuable as it is to respond to *yissurim* by saying *Tehilim* (*Psalms*) and viewing them as “*gam zu l'tovah* – also this is for the best,” this should never be a substitute for thinking about their meaning and significance, and how they relate to us.

When we witness the pain of others, we have to realize that while they are directly experiencing G-d's *hashgacha*, there is no less *hashgacha* in how their situation is affecting **us**. Rather than asking – “Why is my friend sick?,” we should ask – “Why did G-d give **me** a sick friend?”

If we would do the opposite and only try to understand the *hashgacha* affecting the recipient of the *yissurim*, the danger is that we could end up justifying in our minds why we think that they “deserve” it. That would probably make us less compassionate and less likely to want to help that recipient.

Conversely, the more we try to understand how the meaning and significance of another's *yissurim* relates back to us, the more we will see that G-d wants us to be compassionate and supportive towards this one that is directly undergoing the *yissurim*. While this focus sounds very self-centered at first, it usually works in just the opposite direction.

Our ability to see meaning and significance in *yissurim* is closely tied to our self-awareness. Part of the work of understanding *yissurim* is being honest with ourselves and not allowing the *yetzer*

hara (negative inclination) to merely interpret the *hashgacha* in a way that is convenient for us. This includes being open to the possibility that G-d may be trying to get us to deal with issues that we've actually spent years avoiding.

In summary, by constantly working to understand how all *yissurim* relate back to us – not only will we grow, we will also be more likely to help others better.

Concluding Sources:

The **Manchester Rosh HaYeshiva** was once speaking with a man who was enduring a great deal of personal travail. He told the *Rosh HaYeshiva* that he [felt he was] deserving of such retribution, for he was a transgressor. The *Rosh Yeshivah* disagreed and told him: "It is for the *Ribono shel Olam* (Master of the Universe), and not for you, to make such calculations." The man responded, "But isn't one obligated to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (a spiritual accounting) to see where his failures lie?" The *Rosh Yeshiva* told him, "A person should examine his actions so that he can pinpoint where improvement is needed. But it is not for him to seek to plumb the workings of Providence by associating his sufferings with specific misdeeds."

A very appropriate final statement on this topic is from the **Aish Kodesh**, a collection of talks from Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the *Piaseczner Rebbe*, that he gave in the Warsaw Ghetto, in the midst of the Holocaust:

"There are *yissurim* in the category of *mishpatim*, whose function and purpose we can understand; but there are also *yissurim* in the category of *chukim*, whose purpose we do not understand... To meet every *chukah*, we need to strengthen our *emunah* (belief and acceptance of G-d). The *chukah* is without reason; but *emunah* is also above reason, so when we bind ourselves with a perfect *emunah*, to G-d [Who is] above reason, then even the *chukah*-type calamities are sweetened (*Parshat Vayeshev*, December 21, 1940)."

"One's *emunah* must itself involve an act of *mesirat nefesh* (self-sacrifice)... Now when the concept of *mesirat nefesh* is applied to *emunah*, the meaning is this – even at a time when G-d's presence is hidden – one believes in Him; one believes that everything comes from Him, everything is good, everything is just, and all of the *yissurim* are full of G-d's love for Israel (December 15, 1941 – Chanukah)."

"The Jew's *emunah* in G-d is not called '*emunah*' because he doesn't 'know'; rather *emunah* involves the soul's knowledge and perception. It is present when the Jew's soul perceives a little of the aura of His greatness and sanctity. For this reason a person can [even] be more aware of and more certain of his *emunah* than of knowledge acquired by means of the intellect. This perception is a kind of prophetic vision... a definite inner awareness, without visual sensation. This perception of the soul is ours as a legacy from the *Avot* (our forefathers), for as the *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 61a) says – "If the Israelites are not themselves *Nevi'im* (Prophets), they are *b'nei Nevi'im* (the children of Prophets)"...

It seems that there are two aspects to *emunah*. One type is evident when the individual has strength, or, even more so, *simcha*. At such times the individual will even feel his *emunah* with certainty. However, when the person is in a state of depression, and certainly if he feels totally broken, it may happen that he does not feel his *emunah*. This is because *emunah* is a kind of prophetic inspiration, and *nevuah* requires *simcha*. However, even at such times, one should not say that, G-d forbid, he does not have *emunah*. He is a believer even then; it is just that he does not feel it (*Parshat HaChodesh* March 14, 1942)."

Final Summary:

Absolutely everything that occurs, both big and small, whether obviously beneficial or very difficult, is *hashgacha pratit* from Hashem; nothing at all is random.

Absolutely everything that occurs to us is for the best, whether we are able to see it clearly in this world, or only in terms of the next.

There is *hashgacha pratit* with all *yissurim*, and this is relevant for all of us. However, the degree to which we are capable of understanding and interpreting the particular *hashgacha pratit* that impacts each one of us is the issue where there are so many different approaches. At the same time, independent of our ability to understand them, we need to see *yissurim* as precious because they show us just how much G-d cares about all of us.

This process of thinking greatly deepens and strengthens our relationship with G-d.

The defining theme and goal of all of this is what the *Orchot Tzadikim* explains is the *mitzvat asef* to be – *matzduk hadin al kol m'orotav* – To acknowledge G-d's justice in all that befalls us. “*Yissurim*” is not “suffering” but rather pain, challenges, and difficulties that are given to us, from G-d's love, and exclusively for our benefit. While the pain that occurs to us is a **reality** that is often beyond our ability to control, whether or not we relate to this pain as suffering is a **choice** that we definitely can control. What is very unfortunate is how often this message is a *chidush* (brand-new idea) to those who hear it.

What, in the end, is my conclusion? Of all the sources that I saw, the one that spoke most strongly to me was the approach of the *Aish Kodesh* – to view our *yissurim* as *chukim*. While we will certainly never fully understand *chukim*, that doesn't mean that we can't understand them at all. Insights, awarenesses, and lessons are definitely accessible to us, even with *chukim*. This is also true when it comes to *yissurim*. While we may never fully understand *yissurim* in our present-day world, there will always be much that we will be capable of gaining and understanding from them.

Through a type of *mesirat nefesh* (self-sacrifice) we can accept the *hashgacha pratit* even without complete clarity. And we will be able to accept that the *hashgacha pratit* from G-d is only good, and entirely from G-d's love for us. This will greatly strengthen our *emunah* and bind us closely to G-d.

Yissurim strengthens the *emunah* within every single person, even though many are too broken to feel it.

G-d should help every one of us to be able to learn from the small *yissurim* in our lives and not require larger ones, and additionally to be able to see the good and G-d's love within all of them.

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