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#### LETTERS

#### **Deterrents that may not work**

**Reader:** Many crimes meet with death by the court. However, executions rarely happened due to many requisites, not revealed to the Chumash student. Yes, death is to be a deterrent, but don't you think once a person learns the many requirements to execute, such a deterrent is mitigated?

- Chaim

**Rabbi:** Perhaps those who don't fear God will function on the "I won't get caught" lifestyle. For such a person, Torah says little. But Torah 's goal is for one to follow laws out of a desire to live by truth. The fear factor does not compel such a person's actions, as does his ideals. It is then irrelevant to him whether there is certain death or not for a crime. He won't sin as it violates God's will and his reason.

# JUSTICE WHY DO THE

# AND THE GOOD SUFFER?

#### JUSTICE

# **God's Justice** An In-Depth Torah Study

hy do evil people live and prosper? Why do good people suffer?

Who deserves God's providence? When does God mete out reward and punishment?

Are our calamities God's doings, or results of our errors?

How do we determine if any event is a benefit, or an evil?

What is good and what is evil? Is God just?

Few matters are more central than the topic of God's justice. We may view an experience as unjust, until we become wiser and learn how we benefitted, or learn how we deserved a punishment. Until the end of our lives, any given event may yet have ramifications that can turn an apparent good into an evil, and vice versa. Wisdom is the only means to answer our questions, and we must be humble enough to admit we do not possess God's absolute and complete knowledge. And although this topic is too broad to assess all cases, we must proceed to study what we can.

#### Part I God Knows All and is Just

God cannot create something, without knowledge of His creation. God is aware of all He created. God is aware of each person, our daily activities, our successes, failures, and even our thoughts. In the Ashray psalm, King David taught:

"God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His works. God supports all the fallen, and He sets upright all who are bent. You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all life. Righteous is God in all His ways, and pious in all His acts. God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth. The will of His fearers He performs, and their cries He bears and saves them. God guards all who love Him and all wicked people He destroys."

It is notable that King David repeats the word "all" through this psalm (Psalm 145) and again earlier in Psalm

34, "Many evil befall the righteous person, and God saves him from all of them (34:20)." This means God is consistently good. If two men are perfectly upright, God will not afflict one and save the other: He will save both. "All" perfectly righteous and deserving people receive God's goodness. Additionally, God is good "all" the time. This is King David's message. Nothing prevents God from meting out perfect justice. A building can collapse but God ensures that a righteous tenant leaves to escape any harm.

Questions concerning righteous people and their sufferings arise due to our ignorance of people's true character, or the true character of the "evil" such people endure. As we said above, it is possible what seems evil, ends up as a great benefit. People get stitches due to a car crash. Detained in the emergency room, they are detained from a flight that crashes. The car crash was a good. Others win lotteries only to suffer the tragic deaths of their family members who squander the wealth on drugs. The wealth in this case became an evil, and people harm themselves through their free will.

But what about real evils? Why do people who are apparently righteous endure such pain? Maimonides addresses this very point:

(Guide for the Perplexed (Book III, chap. XXIV):

People have generally the notion that trials consist in afflictions and mishaps sent by God to man, not as punishments for past sins, but [wrongly] as giving opportunity for great reward. This [reward] principle is not mentioned in Scripture in plain language, and it is only in one of the six places referred to that the literal meaning conveys this notion. I will explain the meaning of that passage later on. The principle taught in Scripture is exactly the reverse; for it is said; "He is a God of faithfulness, and there is no iniquity in him (Deut. 32:4)." The teaching of our Sages, although some of them approve this general belief [concerning trials], is on the whole against it. For they say, "There is no death without sin, and no affliction without transgression

(Tal. Sabbath 55a)." Every intelligent religious person should have this faith, and should not ascribe any wrong to God, who is far from it; he must not assume that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him.

Read that again: "<u>He must not assume</u> that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him." God knows every last detail of all His creatures. It is God's omniscience and steadfast trait of justice that convinced King David that "God is good all, and His mercies are upon all His works." No one today would suggest he is wiser than King David or Maimonides. The scope, depth and brilliance of their works demands at the least, that we consider what caused the king and Maimonides to accept God as perfectly just.

It is crucial that you do not evaluate a single quote isolated from the rest of what is written concerning God's justice. Reading the above alone, one might argue that he has done nothing to deserve a calamity. So we must study further. It could be nature, human aggression, or that a person made a foolish choice 5 years ago that finally meets up with him and destroys his life. Maimonides addresses these 3 classes or evil (Book III, chap. XII)...

#### Part II What is "evil?"

The evils that befall man are of three kinds:

(1) The first kind of evil is that which is caused to man because he possesses a body. Some persons have great deformities or paralysis of some of the organs. This evil may be part of the natural constitution of these persons, or may have developed subsequently in consequence of changes in the elements, e.g., through bad air, or thunderstorms or landslips. We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species the species themselves would not exist permanently. Thus the true kindness, and beneficence and goodness of God is clear. He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, viz., to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. If man were never subject to change there could be no generation: there would be one single being, but no individuals forming a species. Galen, in the third section of his book, The Use of the Limbs, says correctly that it would be in vain to expect to see living beings formed of the blood of menstruous women and the semen virile, who will not die, will never feel pain, or will move perpetually, or will shine like the sun. This dictum of Galen is part of the following more general proposition: Whatever is formed of any matter receives the most perfect form possible in that species of matter: in each individual case the defects are in accordance with the defects of that individual matter. The best and most perfect being that can be formed of the blood and the semen is the species of man, for as far as man's nature is known, he is living, reasonable, and mortal. It is therefore impossible that man should be

free from this species of evil. You will, nevertheless, find that the evils of the above kind which befall man are very few and rare: for you find countries that have not been flooded or burned for thousands of years: there are thousands of men in perfect health, deformed individuals are a strange and exceptional occurrence, or say few in number if you object to the term exceptional, they are not one-hundredth. not even one-thousandth part of those that are perfectly normal.

(2) The second class of evils comprises such evils as people cause to each other, when, e.g., some of them use their strength against others. These evils are more numerous than those of the first kind: their causes are numerous and known; they likewise originate in ourselves, though the sufferer himself cannot avert them. This kind of evil is nevertheless not widespread in any country of the whole world. It is of rare occurrence that a man plans to kill his neighbor or to rob him of his property by night. Many persons are, however, afflicted with this kind of evil in great wars: but these are not frequent, if the whole inhabited part of the earth is taken into consideration.

(3) The third class of evils comprises those which every one causes to himself by his own action. This is the largest class, and is far more numerous than the second class. It is especially of these evils that all men complain, <u>only few men are found</u> that do not sin against themselves by this kind of evil. Those that are afflicted with it are therefore justly blamed in the words of the prophet, "This hath been by your means (Malachi 1. 9)", the same is expressed in the following passage, "He that does it destroys his own soul (Prov. vi. 32)." In reference to this kind of evil, Solomon says, "The foolishness of man perverts his way (ibid. xix. 3)." In the following passage he explains also that this

"The third class of evils comprises those which every one causes to himself by his own action. This is the largest class, and is far more numerous than the second class. It is especially of these evils that all men complain, only few men are found that do not sin against themselves by this kind of evil."

kind of evil is man's own work, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have thought out many inventions (Eccles.vii. 29)", and these inventions bring the evils upon him. The same subject is referred to in Job (5:6), "For affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." These words are immediately followed bγ the explanation that man himself is the author of

this class of evils, "But man is born unto trouble." This class of evils originates in man's vices, such as excessive desire for eating, drinking, and love; indulgence in these things in undue measure, or in improper manner, or partaking of bad food."

This first lesson is that all evils are of 3 kinds: 1) Natural evils, which are few in our lives, like sickness and floods; 2) human aggression; and 3) our own foolishness. Thus, all these evils are not due to God. And if you were to ask why God must create sickness and aging, then you are asking why He made humans and the natural world in the way He did. But this question has two fatal defects: 1) we would not be human, had God changed a single thing; 2) this question can only be asked if you can produce an better alternative, which no one can. Only the Creator knows why the natural world must be designed as it is and why mankind demands the design is bears. Regarding floods, tsunamis, etc., these must occur due to the design of the Earth. Rain and mountains create valleys through which water reaches communities distant from reservoirs. But this combination of rain and topography also creates floods and landslides. Wise people don't build their homes on mountainsides or areas known to be flooded. We can use intelligence to steer clear of most anticipated harm.

Our knowledge as an "observer" of the universe is defective. As a wise Rabbi recently stated, "We are within the universe, and limited in our understanding as we too are creations, and not the Creator who is "external" to the universe." This may be explained by an example. A person is created deformed. He did not live vet so as to sin, to deserve this deformity. Man might view this as an injustice, for we are limited to observe the universe alone, and this forces our error. However, God knows all ramifications had this person not been deformed: life may have played-out a more severe hand to this person. Had he not been deformed and lived another path in life, he may have met with a brutal fate. We don't know, so we cannot say his deformity is an evil, and that God is unjust in creating him that way. Rashi actually teaches that Chanoch was "taken by God" before his time to prevent him from caving to a destructive lifestyle. God killed him earlier to preserve his righteous state, paragraphs further.

before he might corrupt his soul. (Gen. 5:24) Similarly, during the first Temple, according to one view, the righteous were killed first so they were saved from witnessing the nations' death, and the pain it could have caused them. This view suggests that the typical interpretation of death as an "evil", is in fact false. Death can be a benefit, since the soul continues. More likely, in God's best design for human beings, which demands chromosomes, genes and racial mixtures, there will be rare deformities when some genes combine. But the rare effects do not warrant God refraining from creating the rest of mankind. (Many times, the deformed person fully accepts his or her deformity; it is we who are bothered.) Similar to what Maimonides stated above quoting Galen, God's design of a being with soft muscles and hard bones subjects that being to suffering if he comes in contact with harder substances. Nonetheless, the human design is amazing and offers us tremendous goodness. We are then careful to preserve our lives by steering clear from any dangerous situation. To be clear, we cannot suggest with accuracy an explanation for a specific natural deviation. This is only known by God.

So we note 3 types of evils, and not one casts any injustice on God, as King David said.

The reason God's punishments are not included in Maimonides' list of evils, is because they are not evil, but corrective measures: "For those whom God loves, does He rebuke (Proverbs 3:12)." Fortunate is the man or woman who attracts God's attention, and His discipline. This means God knows such a person will repent and improve due to His lessons. That is why God "loves" such a person. God redirects a righteous person onto the right path, and at times this might be a disturbing circumstance. But since it is for the person's benefit, it is not an evil. But who is on the level where he or she deserves God's providence? That, Maimonides addresses а few

#### Part III The Holocaust: **Hester Panim** (Hiding His Face)

God teaches us in His Torah that He will administer a "hiding of His face" (providence) if we become so vile to deserve this. Our Rabbis have applied this to the Holocaust. During the first Temple too, we suffered greatly due to our sin of idolatry. And there, God says He commenced the deaths of Jews with the elders. How do we understand that? And during such a dark period, are the righteous swept away with the evil Jews? Talmud Sabbath 54b-55a conveys some surprising details:

Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is punished for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is punished for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is punished for [the sins of] the whole world. R. Papa observed, "And the members of the Resh Galutha's [household] are punished for the whole world. Even as R. Hanina said, why is it written, "The Lord will enter into judgement with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof." If the Princes sinned, how did the elders sin? But say, [He will bring punishment] upon the elders because they do not forbid the princes.

R. Aha b. R. Hanina said, "Never did a favorable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following case where it is written: 'And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set the letter Tav upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof, etc.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel [Ezek. 9], 'Go and set a Tav of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a Tav of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them.' Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Wherein are these

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contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL - Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradic-tion between an investigation of Science and an investigation of

Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.

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by Jewish Times' publisher Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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different from those?' God replied, 'Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked.' The Attribute of Justice replied, 'Sovereign of the Universe, they had the power to protest but did not.' God replied, 'It is fully known before Me that had they protested the wicked ones would not have listened to them.' The Attribute of Justice replied, 'Sovereign of the Universe, if it was revealed to Thee, was it revealed to them?'

Hence it is written, '[Slay utterly] the old man, the young and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my Sanctuary [mikdashi]. Then they began at the elders which were before the house'." Rabbi Joseph recited: "Read not mikdashi but mekuddashay [my sanctified ones]: this refers to the people who fulfilled the Torah from alef to Tav."

This last quote states that God instructed His destroyers not to afflict the elders, "but come not near any man upon whom is the mark." This is followed by a statement of elders being killed first, "Then they began with the elders which were before the house." Thus, God appears to have recanted His former decree to spare the elders. But we must understand: God does not change His mind since all is known by Him. Nor does there exist a separate being (the Attribute of Justice) with whom God converses. This metaphoric portion requires interpretation.

Idolatry is the worst sin. In a vision, God took Ezekiel to Jerusalem and showed him just how rampant idolatry had become. They worshipped the sun and idols, even within the Temple. The Jews deserved death.

God does not recant. However, there were elders who "sighed and cried" concerning the sins of the Jewish idolaters. Thus, they did not sin. How do we understand what appears to be a "change" in God's mind regarding those elders? Why were they killed too?

The Talmud's dialogue must be understood in human terms. The Rabbis – the authors of the Talmud – constructed this Talmudic portion as a metaphor. Their lesson is that although God has no parts (individual attributes), at times people are saved, punished, or killed. Thereby, man perceives God at

one time as merciful and at other times, strictly just.

In this historical instance many Jews deserved death. But some elders did not sin at all and actually fulfilled the entire Torah. God's preference is not that man dies, but that he repents: "Do I truly desire the death of the sinner, says God Elohim. Is it not his repentance from his ways [that I seek] and that he lives (Ezek. 18:23)?" This is what is meant by God marking the elders for life with a Tay, the letter commencing the word "tichyeh", to live. It refers to God's "preference," as if God did this first. But in this sin, God could not exempt the elders from the fate of death received by their brothers and sisters, since the elders failed to rebuke the Jews. Thus, Ezekiel says "Then they began with the elders which were before the bouse." Meaning, God commenced the killing with these elders. This is the one case where God's preference of His mercy bowed out to His justice.

However, the additional lesson is this: had the elders rebuked the nation, they would have been spared. God does not punish a wholly righteous person. This is not only learned from this story, but also from Abraham and Sodom. Abraham said, "Forbid it from You to act so, to kill the righteous [together] with the wicked, and the fate of the righteous will equal that of the wicked. Forbid it to you. The judge of the entire Earth won't perform justice (Gen. 18:25)?!" This was not a question. Abraham was certain that He who is the judge, will be completely just. It is wrong to suggest God kills the righteous together with wicked, that they meet the same fate. Maimonides addresses this topic of God "hiding His face."

(Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. li):

Hence it appears to me that it is only in times of such neglect that some of the ordinary evils befall a prophet or a perfect and pious man: and the intensity of the evil is proportional to the duration of those moments, or to the character of the things that thus occupy their mind. Such being the case, the great difficulty is removed that led philosophers to assert that Providence does not extend to every individual, and that man is like any other living being in this respect, viz., the argument based on the fact that good and pious men are afflicted with great evils. We have thus explained this difficult question even in accordance with the philosophers' own principles.

Divine Providence is constantly watching over those who have obtained that blessing which is prepared for those who endeavor to obtain it. If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases what happens to them is due to chance. This principle I find also expressed in the Law. Compare, "And I will hide my face them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them: so that they will say in that day, 'Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?' (Deut. xxxi. 17)." It is clear that we ourselves are the cause of this hiding of the face, and that the screen that separates us from God is of our own creation. This is the meaning of the words, "And I will surely hide my face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought (ibid.ver. 18)." There is undoubtedly no difference in this regard between one single person and a whole community. It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to chance, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God. Those who have their God dwelling in their hearts, are not touched by any evil whatever. For God says, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God (Isa. xli. 10)." When thou pass through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee (ibid xliii 2)." For if we prepare ourselves, and attain the influence of the Divine Intellect, Providence is joined to us, and we are guarded against all evils. Compare, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what

can man do unto me (Ps. cxviii. 6)?" Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace (Job xxii 21)"; i.e., turn unto Him, and you will be safe from all evil.

Consider the Psalm on mishaps, and see how the author describes that great Providence, the protection and defense from all mishaps that concern the body, both from those that are common to all people, and those that concern only one certain individual; from those that are due to the laws of Nature, and those that are caused by our fellow men. The Psalmist says "Surely He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day (Ps. xci. 3-5)." The author then relates how God protects us from the troubles caused by men, saying, "If you happen to meet on your way with an army fighting with drawn swords, killing thousands at your left hand and myriads at your right hand, you will not suffer any harm; you will behold and see how God judges and punishes the wicked that are being slain, whilst your remain unhurt. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked (ibid.vers. 7, 8)." The author then continues his description of the divine defense and shelter, and shows the cause of this great protection, saying that such a man is well guarded, "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name (ibid. ver. 14)." We have shown in previous chapters that by the "knowledge of God's name," the knowledge of God is meant. The above passage may therefore be paraphrased as follows: "This man is well guarded, because he has known Me. and then (bi cbashak) loved Me." You know the difference between the two Hebrew terms that signify "to love", ahab and hashak. When a man's love is so intense that his thought is exclusively engaged with the object of his love, it is expressed in Hebrew by the term hashak.



#### We Receive What We Deserve

(Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. xvii):

The greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts (Ps. xlix. 21)." For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind.

This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded. Consider how the action of Divine

Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield (Gen. xv. 1)," to Isaac, "I will be with thee, and I will bless thee (ibid. xxvi. 3)," to Jacob, "I am with thee, and will keep thee (ibid. xxviii. 15)," to [Moses] the chief of the Prophets, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee (Exod. iii. 12)," to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I shall be with thee (Josh. i. 5)." It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man's perfection. The following verse describes how Providence protects good and pious men, and abandons fools, "He Will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail (I Sam. ii. 9)." When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution, "for by strength shall no man prevail," but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection, some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and "He will keep the feet of his saints;" but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen; they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. The protection of the pious by Providence is also expressed in the following passages, "He keepeth all his bones, etc. (PS. xxxiv. 2 1)," "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous (ibid. ver. 16)," "He shall call upon me and I shall answer him (ibid. xd. 15)." There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Divine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety. The philosophers have likewise discussed this subject. Abu-nasr, in theIntroduction to his Commentary on Aristotle's Nikomachean Ethics, says as follows, "Those who possess the faculty of raising their souls from virtue to virtue obtain, according to Plato, Divine protection to a higher degree."



#### Part V The Lesson of Job

Maimonides stated, "This perplexity [of God's providence] is caused by the account that a simple and perfect person [Job], who is upright in his actions, and very anxious to abstain from sin, is afflicted by successive misfortunes, namely, by loss of property, by the death of his children, and by bodily disease, though he has not committed any sin."

Maimonides notes that Job is not called intelligent. Had he been intelligent, he would have justified God despite his troubles, knowing that losses he suffered were no questions of God's complete system of justice, with all its considerations, which man cannot know. In the end, Job admitted his error when he gained wisdom:

(Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. xxiii):

Job abandoned his first very erroneous opinion, and himself proved that it was an error. It is the opinion which suggests itself as plausible at first thought, especially in the minds of those who meet with mishaps, well knowing that they have not merited them through sins. This is admitted by all, and therefore this opinion was assigned to Job. But he is represented to hold this view only so long as he was without wisdom, and knew God only by tradition, in the same manner as religious people generally know Him. <u>As soon as he had acquired a</u> true knowledge of God, he confessed that

there is undoubtedly true felicity in the knowledge of God; it is attained by all who acquire that knowledge, and no earthly trouble can disturb it. So long as Job's knowledge of God was based on tradition and communication, and not on research, he believed that such imaginary good as is possessed in health, riches, and children, was the utmost that men can attain: this was the reason why he was in perplexity, and why he uttered the above-mentioned opinions, and this is also the meaning of his words, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye sees thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent because of dust and ashes (xlii. 5, 6)" that is to say he abhorred all that he had desired before, and that he was sorry that he had been in dust and ashes; comp." "And he sat down among the ashes (ii. 8)." On account of this last utterance, which implies true perception, it is said afterwards in reference to him, "for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant job hath."

The new idea, which is peculiar to Elihu and has not been mentioned by the others, is contained in his metaphor of the angel's intercession. It is a frequent occurrence, he says, that a man becomes ill, approaches the gates of death, and is already given up by his neighbors. If then an angel, of any kind whatever, intercedes on his behalf and prays for him, the intercession and prayers are accepted; the patient rises from his illness, is saved, and returns to good health. This result is not always obtained: intercession and deliver ance do not always follow each other: it happens only twice, or three times. Elihu therefore says, "If there be an angel with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, etc. (Job 33:29)." He then describes man's condition when convalescent and the rejoicing at his recovery, and continues thus, "Lo, all these things works God twice, three times with man (ibid. 29)." This idea occurs only in the words of Elihu.

Maimonides points us to the unique idea spoken by Elihu. That idea is that man cannot understand how God works, and the angel's intercession is only known through a divine communication, not observable phenomena.

Elihu continues with another example of man's ignorance of God's ways:

His description of the method of prophecy in preceding verses is likewise new. He says, "Surely God speaks in one way, yea in two ways, yet man perceives it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon man, in slumberings upon the bed (ibid. 14, 15)."

Here, Maimonides isolates a second example of our ignorance of God and His ways, where "man perceives it not."

He afterwards supports and illustrates bis theory by a description of many natural phenomena, such as thunder, lightning, rain, and winds; with these are mixed up accounts of various incidents of life, e.g., an account of pestilence contained in the following passage, "In a moment they die, and at midnight; the people become tumultuous and pass away (34:20)." Great wars are described in the following verse, "He breaks in pieces mighty men without number, and sets others in their stead (ibid. 24)." There are many more passages of this kind.

Here, Elihu weaves into human existence the same notion, that God's ways are unfathomable, for we view our lives' incidents as 'natural,' and know not when it is truly God's hand at work. Elihu shows from many examples how man cannot have a claim on God, since man does not know how God operates. This is the purpose of Elihu's words. The "mixing up" of natural phenomena and human existence is to convey to Job that just as we are ignorant of the depth of God's governing of the universe, we are equally ignorant of His hand in human affairs.

In a similar manner the Revelation that reached Job (chap. xxxviii., chap. xli.), and explained to him the error of his whole belief, constantly describes natural objects, and nothing else; it describes the elements, meteorological phenomena, and peculiarities of various kinds of living beings. The sky, the heavens, Orion and Pleiades are only mentioned in reference to their influence upon our atmosphere, so that Job's attention is in this prophecy only called to things below the lunar sphere. Elihu likewise derives instruction from the nature of various kinds of animals. Thus he says, "He teacheth us through the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wise through the fowls of heaven (xxxv. 11)." He dwells longest on the nature of the Leviathan, which possesses a combination of bodily peculiarities found separate in different animals, in those that walk, those that swim, and those that fly. The description of all these things serves to impress on our minds that we are unable to comprehend how these transient creatures come into existence, or to imagine how their natural properties commenced to exist, and that these are not like the things which we are able to produce. Much less can we compare the manner in which God rules and manages His creatures with the manner in which we rule and manage certain beings. We must content ourselves with this, and believe that nothing is hidden from God, as Elihu says, "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his goings."

This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours.

When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, [asking ourselves] whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of God; as is said in the end of this prophecy, "Therefore I abhor myself and repent concerning the dust and ashes (xlii 6)," and as our Sages say, "The pious do everything out of love, and rejoice in their own afflictions (B. T. Shabb. 88b)."

If you pay to my words the attention which this treatise demands, and examine all that is said in the Book of Job, all will be clear to you, and you will find that I have grasped and taken hold of the whole subject; nothing has been left unnoticed, except such portions as are only introduced because of the context and the whole plan of the allegory. I have explained this method several times in the course of this treatise. שריאל בריכות אריאל בריכות

עלאף האריבנא אלאבן הפונה לען אח ווי בטכמט להוריאר על אריעם טוי איזה ופולקוא ביעני לתו עלים א הצחרי לרוב והארין תו כבי לכן טוי הרייטנת האר כיאכלה באריעם ע ואריזון לא אריאון בתכואתאר

#### Summary Torah's History of a Just God

Can man start to explain the natural world, how all the creatures were created, what came first, and why all species are required? No, he cannot. As man cannot fathom these "lower" matters, the depth of wisdom in designing and sustaining the species and all of physical creation, he certainly cannot suggest he knows better than God as to how He should judge man. Complaints against our fate are therefore completely groundless. Job complained when he lost property, children and health. He thought these to be primary goals, and losing them was a just cause to complain of divine injustice. But Job finally was shown by Elihu and God that he was unaware of God's creation and rule of the natural world, thereby admitting he could not understand God's other sphere of control, being His government of man. Job accepted he was wrong to complain since he does not know God's justice. Job became awe struck by the realization of such wisdom, and found in it a greater purpose in life than wealth, health and children. It is vital that we read that again:

<u>He confessed that there is undoubtedly</u> <u>true felicity in the knowledge of God;</u> it is attained by all who acquire that knowledge, and no earthly trouble can disturb it. So long as Job's knowledge of God was based on tradition and communication, and not on research, he believed that such imaginary good as is possessed in health, riches, and children, was the utmost that men can attain. Once he admitted this error, this raised him to a higher level, a level on which he earned God's providence. Only then, did God communicate with Job. Job's losses were replaced with even greater good; his end far exceeded his beginning.

God created mankind with an intellect, a faculty capable of understanding the world, how to gain and avoid pain, and how to follow God's commands. From Cain through Pharaoh, God warned man on numerous occasions in order that he not hurt himself through flawed choices. And those who sought to harm innocent and righteous people deserving God's protection, God ruined their evil schemes; Lavan, Esav, Pharaoh I, Pharaoh Raamses, Amalek, the Greeks, and Haman all failed.

We may cause our own downfalls.

We may mistake opportunities, as evils.

We cannot accurately assess anyone as perfectly righteous.

We must know that as He alone is the Creator of Justice, God alone knows best how to administer justice to mankind. He knows when to answer us, when to say no, or "not now." God wants the best for us. If we abandon Him, He abandons us. Torah sources are God's direct instruction to mankind on what are absolute truths. If we draw close to Him through meticulous adherence to Torah, we can trust Torah's numerous stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, as well as King David's words "The will of His fearers He performs, and their cries He hears and saves them."

<u>"If man frees bis thoughts from worldly</u> matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him."

"This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded." ■

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#### JUSTICE



#### The Holocaust: Who Is Guilty?

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This past week we observed Yom HaShoah, the day that is dedicated to remembrance of the Holocaust. This tragic event is arguably the worst calamity in all of Jewish history. It is also the darkest chapter in the history of mankind. The Jews are not the only people who have suffered unspeakable afflictions at the hands of their fellow "humans." Many others have been enslaved, tormented, and tortured by evil beasts masquerading as people.

Yet, in my opinion, the Holocaust is unique. Never before was there such a systematic program, using the most sophisticated tools of advanced technology, aimed at the liquidation of an entire people for no other reason than that they were Jewish.

Every shred of mercy was eliminated; every sadistic tendency was magnified and glorified. The Nazis took particular delight in heaping degradation and torture on the most defenseless of their victims, especially children. No one was more brutalized in this horrific endeavor than the little children. Therefore, the Holocaust occupies a unique place in the annals of infamy.

The Torah commands us to "remem-

ber what Amalek did to you." The actual historical nation of Amalek no longer exists. However, the Rabbis have ruled that the title of Amalek applies to any nation that seeks to destroy the Jews, because we are the people of G-d. The Nazis clearly qualify for this infamous designation.

However, it would be wrong to limit this label of opprobrium only to the Nazis. Let us remember that Hitler did not come to power in a vacuum. He was elected to leadership by the German people, who were fully aware of his anti-Semitic intentions, which was a prominent part of his appeal. Hitler also had many non-German enthusiastic participants in the Final Solution.

In virtually every country he conquered, there were abundant fellow Fascists who were eager to join the genocide. Indeed, ordinary citizens who had lived side by side with the Jews for many centuries turned a blind eye to their suffering and inwardly rejoiced as they were carted off, leaving all their property and treasure behind. The hatred was so virulent that it did not subside when the Germans were defeated, and the surviving remnant returned. In Poland, many Jews who came home were persecuted and even murdered. All this needs to be remembered.

The Holocaust is not only the story of the cruel Nazi killers and their willing conspirators across Europe. It is also the tale of the icy indifference of the Western nations who should have been actively involved in forestalling the extermination and rescuing as many victims as possible.

What is morally more egregious, the crimes of the murderers or the callousness of the bystanders? The Torah commands, "Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother." The United States, England, and other Western countries regard themselves as being on an elevated moral plane. They officially condemn any and all forms of racism and bigotry, certainly the wanton killing of innocents. Yet, when intervention could have made a difference, when lives could have been saved, they chose the path of cruel passivity.

The gates, as well as the hearts, of America were locked. No one could enter. Even the passengers on the St.

Louis, who managed to arrive at our shores, were turned away. No country would accept them, and eventually they were brought back to Europe, where many were killed in the Nazi onslaught.

There is enough blame to go around, but we should not focus exclusively on the culpability of others. We should be cognizant of human wickedness, but must also look within. Judaism teaches that the foremost reaction we must have to events such as this is introspection and repentance.

Rabbi Soloveitchik has said that the Jewish communities in the U.S. and other free countries did not rise to the occasion and agitate day and night to arouse the sympathy of the people and the concern of the government. He said that we must do teshuva for our lethargic response to the plight of our brethren in distress. Indeed, he suggested that on Yom Kippur, we should add an extra Al Chet (confession) to the long list of sins we recount. He even pointed to a verse in the Torah that aptly summarizes the particular character of our failing.

When the sons of Jacob journeyed to Egypt because of the severe famine that plagued Canaan, they were dealt with very harshly by the Egyptian ruler whom they did not realize was their long-lost brother Joseph. Joseph was subjecting them to unusually severe harassment to stimulate pangs of regret. The ruse worked, as the brothers began to look within and contemplate their past deeds. Finally, they said, "Indeed, we are guilty with regard to our brother, for we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us and we did not listen. Therefore has this calamity come upon us."

That, says Rabbi Soloveitchik, applies to us as well. We did not listen to the terrible pleas of our our doomed brethren. We have to include this among the many lessons of the Holocaust that we need to internalize. We must always be sensitive and responsive to the cries of our beleaguered brothers and sisters, wherever they may be.

In remembrance of the 6 million kedoshim (holy ones), let us dedicate ourselves to being a more compassionate, wise, and holy nation.

Shabbat shalom.

# An Insight into God's Justice

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

JUSTICE

e are in awe of it, drawn to try and understand it yet knowing full well its details are beyond man's comprehension. Some attempt to draw definitive conclusions about it – "he deserved to die", while others deny it, claiming everything is subject to chance. It is a system that is perfect, while opaque. It is schar v'onesh, God's system of justice, and the Ramban offers us some valuable insights in how to approach it.

The Ramban wrote in a manner that many times was quite cryptic, that if taken at face value would fail to reveal the true chachma of his writings. A perfect example of this can be found in his commentary in Sefer Devarim. What we will see is an initially obscure piece

Ve are in awe of it, drawn to try that actually reveals a fundamental idea about God's justice.

We are told the following about God (Devarim 7:9-10):

"You will know that Hashem, your God, is the God, the trusted Almighty, who keeps the covenant and the kindliness for those who love Him and for those who keep His commandments, for a thousand generations. And He pays His enemies to his face to destroy him. He does not delay for His enemy--- to his face does He pay him"

The Ramban offers a lengthy observation on both verses; it is his focus on the second verse that is quite difficult to understand. He first notes the focus on

God repaying those who love Him with kindliness, contrasting that with repaying those that hate Him (the punishment to the Egyptians being the example at hand). He writes:

"Now this attribute that he mentioned is true forever. Thus although there is a wicked man whose life is prolonged in his evil doing, it happens to him only because of this above-mentioned attribute that He is the Keeper of Mercy, and he [the wicked] has done some good which must be recompenses. If so, there among the middos of God but two middos: He repays good for good, and evil for evil.

It is possible those who hate Him are those confirmed sinners who deny His existence and have no merit at all. As the Rabbis have said: 'Rabbi Yeshaya said: Because of three things God is long suffering to the wicked in this world-they may repent, or they have observed commandments for which God repays them for their recompense in this world, or perhaps righteous people will descend from them".

He then cites different examples of great leaders who emerged from parents who were reshayim.

The Ramban seems to emphasize that there is one golden rule when it comes to God's actions - good for good, evil for evil. Simple enough. But then he goes to great length to explain what would seem to be a contradiction to this rule. We always encounter people who are clear reshayim, sonei Hashem and yisrael and deniers of God, and yet they live long lives. He tries to explain that this fits under this rule as well, citing the above Midrash, which lists three reasons why God withholds destruction from the rasha. While the second rationale has merit on the surface, the first and third seem almost outlandish. How often does the rasha indeed repent, or have children who are great tzadikim? In other words, it is almost like an easy rationalization. If an evildoer is punished or dies early on, then it is evil for evil. If not, then it must be he has some potential merit. What insight into this middah is being revealed by the Ramban?

As mentioned above, the rule

portrayed by the Ramban is a well known concept. In fact, he writes about this rule in an almost matter-of-fact manner. Is it really that obvious? There is a system of schar v'onesh that exists, operating as Objective Justice. A person is always judged by God based on his actions. It is as simple as that, yet the Ramban places special emphasis on this concept. Throughout Jewish history, this essential idea has been under assault from within. We constantly attempt to attribute the good or bad that occurs to someone or something other than God's system of justice. We are told that certain causal relationships will bring about the good - wearing a certain color string or putting a metal object into bread. And when we are punished, rather than looking inwards and realizing it is due to our own actions, we instead look to the unchecked mezuzah or some other external irrelevant feature. The Ramban is telling us that it all comes down to these two middos - good for good, bad for bad. The fact that this is a concept many people have difficulty internalizing lies in understanding the Midrash cited by the Ramban.

What do these three possible scenarios share in common? Each represents an area of knowledge beyond man's realm, which reflects back on our actual extremely limited knowledge of schar vonesh. The first seemingly remote possibility is that the rasha will be chozer b'teshuva, repent and return to God. What the Ramban is telling us is not an idea in probabilities. Instead, the ability to know whether a person will choose to return to God, utilizing his freewill, is a knowledge only God can possibly know. The same theme exists in the second possibility. How God determines a person is to be rewarded for his act of perfection requires a knowledge that is beyond man's capabilities. The last scenario as well is in line with concept. No doubt the norm is not to have great leaders emerge after being raised and influenced by sonei Hashem, haters of God. The point is not whether or not it normally occurs; rather, the idea here is one should realize the infinite amount of causes and effects that would allow for such an outcome. A person must understand it is beyond his ability to ever know exactly how the tzadik emerges from such a household.

What we now see is a different way of looking at this middah (trait) of God. The Ramban is telling us that there is one overall fundamental that we can have knowledge of - that God acts in a just manner, repaying good with good, and evil with evil. We know there is a system of justice, and all acts by God are inherently just. However, we have no positive knowledge of any of the particulars. We cannot know the inner workings of an individual, determining whether he uses his bechira, free will. We cannot know the extent of perfection a person achieved with a specific mitzvah, and how and when he will be rewarded. We cannot know the infinite elements involved in a specific outcome. To some, lacking this knowledge is frustrating, and a reaction to this is to seek out a more paternalistic version of God. However, while one may achieve an initial emotional high, ultimately he will see an unsatisfactory outcome. We must understand this inherent limitation, and through this knowledge, the Ramban is telling us, we can internalize this fundamental idea.

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