

SUFFERING

WHY DO
BAD THINGS
HAPPEN TO GOOD
PEOPLE?





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Dear Friend,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce our tenth learning booklet to you.

As in the previous booklets, we have incorporated the following features:

- An exciting and relevant topic
- An overview describing what you will be learning
- Learning material in English and (or) appropriately measured to fit into a 40 minute session
- A summary at the end

It is our hope that this project serves to broaden your knowledge of key Jewish understandings and inspires you to search for more.

We look forward to providing you with more cutting edge learning experiences in the near future.

Sincerely

Yehoshua Werde
Director

For all comments and suggestions please feel free to approach me or email to Director@Torahlp.com

Lesson Overview

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Part One: Is it alright to question G-d's actions?

Shouldn't we have faith that Hashem knows what He is doing?

What kind of person challenges Hashem's goodness?

Surprisingly enough, Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabeinu, Yirmiyahu Hanavi, Shlomo Hamelech, Iyov, Chabakuk, and others, all asked the same question:

TALMUD, BERACHOS 7A

אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם מפני מה יש צדיק וטוב לו ויש צדיק ורע לו

MOSHE SAID BEFORE [HASHEM], "MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHAT IS THE REASON THAT THERE ARE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR WHOM THINGS ARE GOOD AND THERE ARE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR WHOM THINGS ARE BAD? [AND] THERE ARE WICKED PEOPLE FOR WHOM THINGS ARE GOOD AND THERE ARE WICKED PEOPLE FOR WHOM THINGS ARE BAD?"

Hashem Invited Avraham to Challenge Him on the Suffering of the Innocent

BEREISHIS 18:17-26

וְה' אָמַר הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעֵצוֹם וְנִבְרָכוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֵתוּ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָךְ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקַת סֹדִם וְעִמְרָה כִּי רַבָּה וְחִטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד אֶרְדָּה נָא וְאַרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָּלָה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעַה וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ

סְדָמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדְנוּ עִמָּד לִפְנֵי ה' וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאֵף תִּסְפָּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע אֹלֵי יֵשׁ חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הֲאֵף תִּסְפָּה וְלֹא תִשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם לְמַעַן חַמְשִׁים הַצְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ חָלְלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע וְהִיא כְּצְדִיק כְּרָשָׁע חָלְלָה לָךְ הַשֵּׁפֵט כֹּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אִם אֲמַצָּא בְּסֹדֶם חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וְנִשְׂאָתִי לְכֹל הַמָּקוֹם בְּעִבּוּרָם

HASHEM SAID, "SHALL I HIDE FROM AVRAHAM WHAT I AM GOING TO DO? AVRAHAM IS ABOUT TO BECOME A GREAT AND MIGHTY NATION, AND THROUGH HIM ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD WILL BE BLESSED. I HAVE GIVEN HIM SPECIAL ATTENTION SO THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM, AND THEY WILL KEEP HASHEM'S WAY, DOING CHARITY AND JUSTICE. HASHEM WILL THEN BRING ABOUT FOR AVRAHAM EVERYTHING HE PROMISED."

HASHEM [THEN] SAID, "THE OUTCRY AGAINST SODOM IS SO GREAT, AND THEIR SIN IS SO VERY GRAVE. I WILL DESCEND AND SEE. HAVE THEY DONE EVERYTHING IMPLIED BY THE OUTCRY THAT IS COMING BEFORE ME? IF NOT, I WILL KNOW." THE MEN TURNED FROM WHERE THEY WERE, AND HEADED TOWARD SODOM.

AVRAHAM WAS STILL STANDING BEFORE HASHEM. HE CAME FORWARD AND SAID, "WILL YOU ACTUALLY WIPE OUT THE INNOCENT TOGETHER WITH THE GUILTY? SUPPOSE THERE ARE FIFTY INNOCENT PEOPLE IN THE CITY. WOULD YOU STILL DESTROY IT, AND NOT SPARE THE PLACE FOR THE SAKE OF THE FIFTY GOOD PEOPLE INSIDE IT? IT WOULD BE SACRILEGE EVEN TO ASCRIBE SUCH AN ACT TO YOU—TO KILL THE INNOCENT WITH THE GUILTY, LETTING THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED FARE ALIKE. IT WOULD

BE SACRILEGE TO ASCRIBE THIS TO YOU! SHALL THE WHOLE WORLD'S JUDGE NOT ACT JUSTLY?"

HASHEM SAID, "IF I FIND FIFTY INNOCENT PEOPLE IN SODOM, I WILL SPARE THE ENTIRE AREA FOR THEIR SAKE."

Why does the posuk tell us that Hashem thought to hide the news of the destruction of Sedom from Avraham?

In the above pesukim notice how:

1) Hashem thinks to hide the news from Avraham, knowing that he will beg for the decree to be overturned. It appears Hashem wanted Avraham to ask the question and beg for mercy on their behalf.

2) Notice how Avraham invokes the language: "Chalilah Lecha" it would be a chilul Hashem (bad PR) for Hashem to punish innocent people.

The posuk is telling us that Hashem wants us to be bothered by suffering and beg Hashem to be kind and benevolent. Hashem wants us to turn to Him in prayer and beg of Him the question: why do the righteous suffer?

A similar thing we find with regard to Moshe Rabeinu:

Moshe Defies Hashem's Request

SHMOS 32:7-32

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ רֵד כִּי שַׁחַת עַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
סָרוּ מֵיָהָר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם יַעֲגֵל מִסֶּכֶה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לוֹ
וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוֹךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רְאִיתִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם קִשָּׁה עֲרֹף הוּא
וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וַיַּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלָם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל
וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פָּנָיו ה' אֱלֹקָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָה ה' יַחַר אַפּוֹ בְּעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר
הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה לְמָה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם
לֵאמֹר בְּרַעַה הוֹצִיאָם לְהַרְגָם אֹתָם בְּהָרִים וּלְכַלְתָּם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה
שׁוֹב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְהִנָּחֵם עַל הָרַעַה לְעַמֶּךָ זָכַר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק

וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ וּתְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אַרְבֵּה אֶת
זְרַעְכֶם כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֲתָן לְזַרְעֲכֶם
וְנָחְלוּ לָעַלְמִים . . . וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה חָטָא הָעַם הַזֶּה
חָטָאָה גְדֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִי זָהָב וְעַתָּה אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם
אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסַּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ

HASHEM DECLARED TO MOSHE, "GO DOWN, FOR THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT HAVE BECOME CORRUPT. THEY HAVE BEEN QUICK TO LEAVE THE WAY THAT I ORDERED THEM TO FOLLOW, AND THEY HAVE MADE THEMSELVES A CAST-METAL CALF. THEY HAVE BOWED DOWN AND OFFERED SACRIFICE TO IT, EXCLAIMING, 'THIS, ISRAEL, IS YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF EGYPT.'"

HASHEM THEN SAID TO MOSHE, "I HAVE OBSERVED THE PEOPLE, AND THEY ARE AN UNBENDING GROUP. NOW DO NOT TRY TO STOP ME WHEN I UNLEASH MY WRATH AGAINST THEM TO DESTROY THEM. I WILL THEN MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION." MOSHE BEGAN TO PLEAD BEFORE HASHEM HIS G-D.

HE SAID, "O HASHEM, WHY UNLEASH YOUR WRATH AGAINST YOUR PEOPLE, WHOM YOU BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT WITH GREAT POWER AND A SHOW OF FORCE? WHY SHOULD EGYPT BE ABLE TO SAY THAT YOU TOOK THEM OUT WITH EVIL INTENTIONS, TO KILL THEM IN THE HILL COUNTRY AND WIPE THEM OUT FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH? WITHDRAW YOUR DISPLAY OF ANGER, AND REFRAIN FROM DOING EVIL TO YOUR PEOPLE.

"REMEMBER YOUR SERVANTS, AVRAHAM, YITZCHOK, AND YAAKOV. YOU SWORE TO THEM BY YOUR VERY ESSENCE, AND DECLARED THAT YOU WOULD MAKE THEIR DESCENDANTS AS NUMEROUS AS THE STARS OF THE SKY, GIVING THEIR DESCENDANTS THE LAND YOU PROMISED, SO THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO OCCUPY IT

FOREVER." . . .

MOSHE WENT BACK UP TO HASHEM, AND HE SAID, "THE PEOPLE HAVE COMMITTED A TERRIBLE SIN BY MAKING A GOLDEN IDOL. NOW, IF YOU WOULD, PLEASE FORGIVE THEIR SIN. IF NOT, YOU CAN BLOT ME OUT FROM THE BOOK THAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN."

Question: Before reading any further, can you figure out where in the above pesukim Hashem invites Moshe to challenge him?

Answer: Why would Hashem say to Moshe "Now do not try to stop me"?

And what does Moshe do?

He tries anyway to stop Hashem from destroying the Jewish people and succeeds in thwarting the decree.

Why doesn't Moshe listen to Hashem's request?

It is clear that Hashem wants us to challenge Him and beg Him to take away the suffering of others.

While Avraham Avinu and Moshe begged Hashem to save the people of Sedom and the Yidden from destruction, Yeshayahu and Shlomo Hamelech asked the question of injustice straight out:

YIRMIYAHU 12:1

מִדּוּעַ דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים צִלְחָה?

"WHY DOES THE WAY OF THE WICKED PROSPER?"

KOHELES 8:14

יֵשׁ-הַבָּל, אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים...

"THERE IS A VANITY WHICH IS DONE UPON THE EARTH. THAT THERE ARE RIGHTEOUS MEN, WHO SUFFER LIKE THE WICKED..."

Only a believer can ask such a question

ELIE WEISEL (QUOTED IN THE GERMAN CHURCH STRUGGLE AND THE

HOLOCAUST PG. 274)

"AND HERE I WILL TELL YOU, STEVE, THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM WHEN YOU SAY THAT IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO LIVE TODAY IN A WORLD WITHOUT GOD. NO! IF YOU WANT DIFFICULTIES, CHOOSE TO LIVE WITH GOD. CAN YOU COMPARE TODAY THE TRAGEDY OF THE BELIEVER TO THAT OF THE NONBELIEVER?! THE REAL TRAGEDY, THE REAL DRAMA, IS THE DRAMA OF THE BELIEVER."

In a letter to a lady who questioned the existence of G-d in the face of the suffering in Auschwitz, the Rebbe pointed out to her that she must be a believer since only a believer can be bothered by the suffering of others:

LEKUTEI SICHOS, VOL. 33 PG. 254

אף שכל הנזכר לעיל כתוב בתור מענה על מכתבך אבל העיקר הוא לא רק שאני לא מאמין לזה שאת כותבת שאינך מאמינה באלקים חס ושלום אלא ברור לי שגם את לא מאמינה לזה וההוכחה היא, שמדי ראותך העדר הצדק והיושר בסביבתך או מדי העלותך על זכרוןך ענין השואה בעקבות היטלר ימח שמו כמו שמזכירה את במכתבך הרי זה מבלבל מנוחתך ואילו היתה המציאות שאין מנהיג ומתכנן מהו הפלא כשיש מאורעות היפך הצדק והיושר והגדול מחברו חיים בולעו וכו'? והשאלה היא לא רק בממדים גדולים כמו השואה הנזכר לעיל כי גם במסלול החיים הנקראים "חיים אפורים" של כל יום ויום רואים במוחש שכל תופעה שהיא היפך הצדק והיושר מבלבלת מנוחת הנפש ומביטים על זה כמאורע שלא צריך הי' להיות כן והרי בודאי שחומר הדומם ואפילו בעלי חיים שבסביבתנו אין הם מצווים על הצדק והיושר ובודאי שחוסר מנוחה הנגרמת על ידי תופעות אלו מקושר במשהו שהוא למעלה מהדומם צומח וחי ואפילו למעלה מן האדם ו"משהו" זה נמצא

בלב כל אדם פנימה ומזה הודאות בעיני כל אחד ואחת שהצדק צריך להיות השולט בעולם וההנהגה בסביבתו צריכה להיות דווקא על פי יושר שלכן אם נראה לעין משהו שלא בסדר מחפש הוא בכל המרץ והדרכים למצוא את הגורם שגרם ההיפך ממה שצריך הי להיות

I HAVE WRITTEN ALL OF THE ABOVE IN REPLY TO YOUR LETTER. IN TRUTH, HOWEVER, NOT ONLY DO I NOT BELIEVE YOU WHEN YOU SAY THAT YOU DO NOT BELIEVE IN G-D (G-D FORBID), BUT IT IS ALSO CLEAR TO ME THAT YOU DO NOT BELIEVE SO EITHER.

MY PROOF OF THIS IS THAT ON EVERY OCCASION THAT YOU WITNESS INJUSTICE IN YOUR SURROUNDINGS OR WHEN YOU THINK OF THE HOLOCAUST PERPETRATED BY HITLER (MAY HIS NAME BE BLOTTED OUT), AS YOU MENTION IN YOUR LETTER, YOU ARE OUTRAGED.

BUT IF IT WERE THE CASE THAT THE WORLD HAS NO RULER AND PLANNER, WHY SHOULD IT SURPRISE YOU THAT THERE TRANSPIRE UNJUST THINGS, AND THAT WHOEVER IS BIGGER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN HIS FELLOW SWALLOWS HIM ALIVE?

THIS APPLIES NOT ONLY TO EVENTS ON THE SCALE OF THE HOLOCAUST, BUT ALSO TO THE ROUTINE FLOW OF OUR DAILY LIVES, IN WHICH EVERY TIME WE PERCEIVE SOMETHING THAT IS WRONG AND UNJUST, THIS DISTURBS OUR TRANQUILLITY, SINCE WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THINGS SHOULD NOT BE THIS WAY. [BUT WHY SHOULDN'T THEY BE?]

THE PHYSICAL SUBSTANCE OF THE UNIVERSE IS NOT SUPPOSED

TO BE MORAL AND NEITHER ARE THE ANIMALS. OBVIOUSLY, OUR OUTRAGE OVER THE INJUSTICE WE SEE DERIVES FROM THE CONVICTION IN SOMETHING HIGHER THAN ALL PHYSICAL BEINGS, INCLUDING HUMAN BEINGS.

THIS CONVICTION IS EMBEDDED IN THE HEART OF EVERY HUMAN BEING, WHICH IS WHY ALL CONCUR [THAT THERE IS RIGHT AND WRONG AND] THAT THE WORLD OUGHT TO CONFORM TO WHAT IS RIGHT. THUS, WHEN WE WITNESS A WRONG, WE IMMEDIATELY SEEK AN EXPLANATION: WHY IS IT SO? WHAT HAS CAUSED SOMETHING TO BE OTHER THAN WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE?

It turns out that only believers can ask this question, and believers the likes of the greatest Jewish leaders of all time!

What is the logical basis of the question?

Part Two: The Logical Problem

The Three Underpinnings to the Problem of Suffering

HUGH J. MCCANN, "DIVINE PROVIDENCE," THE STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (SPRING 2009 EDITION), EDWARD N. ZALTA (ED.)

IN ITS CLASSICAL FORMULATION, THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IS A PROBLEM OF LOGICAL CONSISTENCY. THE OPPONENT OF THEISM ALLEGES THAT A TRIAD OF PROPERTIES TRADITIONALLY HELD TO BELONG TO GOD'S NATURE—OMNISCIENCE, OMNIPOTENCE, AND OMNIBENEVOLENCE— ARE NOT JOINTLY CONSISTENT WITH THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.

If G-d is . . .

1. Omnipotent—all-powerful (can do anything),
 2. Omniscient—all-knowing (knows everything), and
 3. Benevolent—completely good, just and moral,
- . . . then there should be no unjustified suffering in this world.

Some philosophers have tried to compromise one of the three foundations, but Judaism categorically ascribes to all three, as is evident in the following pesukim:

Omnipotent (all powerful)

TEHILLIM 22:15-20

אִין-הַמֶּלֶךְ, נוֹשָׁע בָּרֶב-חַיִל; גְּבוּר, לֹא-יִנָּצֵל בָּרֶב-כַּח. שֶׁקֶר הַסּוֹס,
לְתַשׁוּעָה; וּבְרֶב חַיִּלוֹ, לֹא יִמְלִט...נִפְשָׁנוּ, חִפְתָּה לַיהוָה; עֲזָרְנוּ וּמִגִּנָּנוּ
הוּא.

"THE KING IS NOT SAVED BY A VAST ARMY; A MIGHTY MAN WILL NOT BE RESCUED WITH GREAT STRENGTH. A HORSE IS FALSE HOPE FOR VICTORY... OUR SOUL WAITS FOR THE L-RD; HE IS OUR HELP AND OUR SHIELD!"

Omniscient (ever present)

TEHILLIM 94:7-11

וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לֹא יִרְאֶה-יְהוָה; וְלֹא-יִבִּין, אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. בִּינוּ, בְּעֵרִים בְּעַם;
וּכְסִילִים, מְתֵי תִשְׁכִּילוּ. הַנֹּטֵעַ אָזֶן, הֲלֹא יִשְׁמָע; אִם-יֵצֵר עֵינַי, הֲלֹא
יִבִּט. הַיֹּסֵר גּוֹיִם, הֲלֹא יוֹכִיחַ: הַמְלַמֵּד אָדָם דָּעַת. יְהוָה--יִדְעַ,
מַחְשְׁבוֹת אָדָם

"AND THEY SAY: G-D WILL NOT SEE, NEITHER WILL THE G-D OF JACOB PAY ATTENTION. THINK, YOU BRUTISH AMONG THE PEOPLE; AND YOU FOOLS, WHEN WILL YOU UNDERSTAND? HE THAT PLANTED THE EAR, SHALL HE NOT HEAR? HE THAT FORMED THE EYE, SHALL HE NOT SEE? G-D KNOWS THE THOUGHTS OF MAN..."

Just and Benevolent

DEVARIM 32:4

הַצּוֹר תְּמִים פָּעֵלוּ כִּי כָּל דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֲמוּנָה וְאִין עוֹל צְדִיק

וַיֵּשֶׁר הוּא:

THE ROCK, HIS WORKS ARE PERFECT, ALL OF HIS WAYS ARE JUST.
A GOD OF TRUSTWORTHINESS WITHOUT INIQUITY, RIGHTEOUS
AND FAIR IS HE.

Not only do we believe that Hashem and His ways are perfect, fair and just, we also believe He is kind and giving, as we say in our davening:

MORNING DAVENING

עוֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד חִנָּם בְּכֹל דּוֹר וְדוֹר

“THERE IS NONE GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE LIKE YOU...

A G-D SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN KINDNESS AND TRUTH... FOR SUCH IS YOUR WAY – TO BESTOW UNMERITED KINDNESS IN EACH AND EVERY GENERATION...”

Part Three: The Answer

The Gemora tells a story about how Moshe Rabeinu asked Hashem how Rabbi Akivah's suffering was justified, and he got a response:

Hashem's Response

TALMUD, MENACHOS 29B

בשעה שעלה משה למרום, מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות, אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, מי מעכב על ידך? אמר לו: אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו, שעתיד לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות. אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, הראהו לי, אמר לו: חזור לאחורך. הלך וישב בסוף שמונה שורות, ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים, תשש כחו; כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד, אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבי, מנין לך? אמר להן: הלכה למשה מסיני, נתיישבה דעתו. חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה, אמר

לפניו: רבונו של עולם, יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה ע"י?
אמר לו: שתוק, כך עלה במחשבה לפני. אמר לפניו: רבונו של
עולם, הראיתני תורתו, הראני שכרו, אמר לו: חזור [לאחור]. חזר
לאחוריו, ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין, אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, זו
תורה וזו שכרה? א"ל: שתוק, כך עלה במחשבה לפני.

WHEN MOSHE ASCENDED THE HEIGHTS, HE FOUND THE HOLY
ONE, BLESSED IS HE, AS HE WAS SITTING AND ATTACHING
CROWNS [TO SOME OF THE LETTERS IN THE TORAH]. [MOSHE]
SAID BEFORE HIM, "MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO IS HOLDING
YOU BACK [FROM GIVING THE TORAH AS IS]?" [HASHEM] SAID
TO HIM, "THERE IS ONE MAN WHO IS DESTINED TO EXIST AT THE
END OF MANY GENERATIONS, AKIVA BEN YOSEF IS HIS NAME, WHO
WILL EXPOUND UPON EACH AND EVERY POINT [OF THE CROWNS]
HEAPS AND HEAPS OF HALACHOS." [MOSHE] SAID TO [HASHEM]
"MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, SHOW HIM TO ME!" [HASHEM] SAID
TO HIM, "TURN AROUND [TO SEE WHAT IS BEHIND YOU." HE
FOUND HIMSELF IN RABBI AKIVA'S CLASS] MOSHE WENT AT SAT
AT THE END OF EIGHT ROWS OF STUDENTS, BUT HE DID NOT
UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WERE SAYING. [MOSHE'S] STRENGTH
EBBED [HE WAS DISHEARTENED]. ONCE THEY REACHED A CERTAIN
MATTER [THAT NEEDED A SOURCE], [R' AKIVA'S] STUDENTS
ASKED HIM, "TEACHER, FROM WHERE DO YOU KNOW THIS?" [R'
AKIVA] REPLIED TO THEM, "IT IS A HALACHAH GIVEN TO MOSHE
AT SINAI." [MOSHE'S] MIND WAS RELIEVED... [MOSHE] SAID TO
[HASHEM], "MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, YOU HAVE SHOWN ME
HIS TORAH, NOW SHOW ME HIS REWARD." [HASHEM] SAID TO
HIM, "TURN AROUND [TO SEE WHAT IS BEHIND YOU]." [MOSHE]
TURNED AROUND AND SAW THAT PEOPLE WERE WEIGHING THE
FLESH [FROM RABI AKIVA'S BODY] IN THE MEAT MARKET [TO SELL

IT]. [MOSHE] SAID BEFORE HIM, "MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, THIS IS TORAH AND THIS IS ITS REWARD?!" [HASHEM] SAID TO HIM, "QUIET, THIS IS WHAT ENTERED MY THOUGHT."

Of Thought, Not Speech

Reb Tzadok of Lublin explains that the answer to this question is that it is in the realm of Hashem's thought, not in the realm of speech. This is why Hashem told Moshe to be "quiet", i.e., that it is not of the realm of the spoken word, since the logic is from Hashem's hidden realm of thought that cannot be communicated to man.

The Navi Yeshayahu tells us just how distant Hashem's thoughts are from the thoughts of man, we are therefore unable to comprehend them:

YESHAYAHU 55:9

כִּי-גָבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גָּבְהוּ דַרְכֵי מְדַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתַי
מִמַּחְשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם

"AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH... SO ARE MY THOUGHTS HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS."

We cannot grasp Divine justice

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos states matter of factly that it is impossible for us to understand the suffering of Tzadikim:

PIRKEI AVOS 4:14

ר' ינאי אומר אין בידינו לא משלוות הרשעים ואף לא מייסורי צדיקים.

RAV YANAI TAUGHT, "WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE PEACE OF THE WICKED AND THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS."

Hashem's ways are beyond us

The Rambam explains that this is because our minds are too limited to grasp the magnitude of Hashem's intellect:

RAMBAM, MISHNAH BERACHOT 9:5

היסוד הוא כי הקב"ה יגמול לטובים ויענש הרעים, והכל משפט...

ודרך הצדק בהם אין ביכולת אדם להשיגו, כאשר אין בכח שכל אדם להיות שכלו כולל דעת הקב"ה, וכבר הודיענו הכתוב כי אין ביכולת רעיונינו להשיג חכמתו וצדק דיניו בכל מה שפעל ויפעל, והוא מה שאמר (ישעי'ה נה: ט) כי גבהו שמים מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IS THAT GOD REWARDS THE RIGHTEOUS AND PUNISHES THE EVIL; EVERYTHING IS JUST. HOWEVER, WE ARE INCAPABLE OF COMPREHENDING GOD'S SYSTEM OF JUSTICE, SINCE WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF GOD. THE TORAH TEACHES US THAT WE ARE NOT CAPABLE OF COMPREHENDING GOD'S WISDOM AND THE JUSTICE OF HIS JUDGMENTS IN ALL THAT HE DOES. THIS IDEA IS STATED "JUST AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH, SO TOO ARE GOD'S WAYS BEYOND YOUR WAYS AND GOD'S THOUGHTS BEYOND YOUR THOUGHTS" (YESHAYAHU 55:9).

Why You Don't Want an Explanation

Not only are we unable to understand Hashem's reasoning for suffering, we also do not want to. If we were to understand and accept suffering, we would become morally compromised and no longer sensitive to the pain of others:

RABBI ARON MOSS, CHABAD.ORG

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT AN EXPLANATION? DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW WHY THE INNOCENT SUFFER? I THINK NOT. YOU ARE FAR BETTER OFF WITH THE QUESTION THAN WITH AN ANSWER.

YOU ARE BOTHERED BY THE FACT THAT PEOPLE SUFFER UNDESERVEDLY. AS YOU SHOULD BE. ANY PERSON WITH AN OUNCE OF MORAL SENSITIVITY IS OUTRAGED BY THE INJUSTICES OF OUR WORLD. ABRAHAM, THE FIRST JEW, ASKED G-D, "SHOULD THE JUDGE OF THE WHOLE WORLD NOT ACT FAIRLY?" MOSES

ASKED, "WHY HAVE YOU TREATED THIS PEOPLE BADLY?" AND TODAY WE STILL ASK, "WHY G-D, WHY?"

BUT WHAT IF WE FOUND THE ANSWER? WHAT IF SOMEONE CAME ALONG AND GAVE US A SATISFYING EXPLANATION? WHAT IF THE MYSTERY WERE FINALLY SOLVED? WHAT IF WE ASKED WHY, AND ACTUALLY GOT AN ANSWER?

IF THIS ULTIMATE QUESTION WERE ANSWERED, THEN WE WOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE PEACE WITH THE SUFFERING OF INNOCENTS. AND THAT IS UNTHINKABLE. WORSE THAN INNOCENT PEOPLE SUFFERING IS OTHERS WATCHING THEIR SUFFERING UNMOVED. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE WERE TO UNDERSTAND WHY INNOCENTS SUFFER. WE WOULD NO LONGER BE BOTHERED BY THEIR CRY, WE WOULD NO LONGER FEEL THEIR PAIN, BECAUSE WE WOULD UNDERSTAND WHY IT IS HAPPENING.

IMAGINE YOU ARE IN A HOSPITAL AND YOU HEAR A WOMAN SCREAMING WITH PAIN. OUTSIDE HER ROOM, HER FAMILY IS STANDING AROUND CHATTING, ALL SMILING AND HAPPY. YOU SCREAM AT THEM, "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? CAN'T YOU HEAR HOW MUCH PAIN SHE IS IN?" THEY ANSWER, "THIS IS THE DELIVERY WARD. SHE IS HAVING A BABY. OF COURSE WE ARE HAPPY."

WHEN YOU HAVE AN EXPLANATION, PAIN DOESN'T SEEM SO BAD ANYMORE. WE CAN TOLERATE SUFFERING WHEN WE KNOW WHY IT IS HAPPENING.

AND SO, IF WE COULD MAKE SENSE OF INNOCENT PEOPLE SUFFERING, IF WE COULD RATIONALISE TRAGEDY, THEN WE COULD

LIVE WITH IT. WE WOULD BE ABLE TO HEAR THE CRY OF SWEET CHILDREN IN PAIN AND NOT BE HORRIFIED. WE WOULD TOLERATE SEEING BROKEN HEARTS AND SHATTERED LIVES, FOR WE WOULD BE ABLE TO NEATLY EXPLAIN THEM AWAY. OUR QUESTION WOULD BE ANSWERED, AND WE COULD MOVE ON.

BUT AS LONG AS THE PAIN OF INNOCENTS REMAINS A BURNING QUESTION, WE ARE BOTHERED BY ITS EXISTENCE. AND AS LONG AS WE CAN'T EXPLAIN PAIN, WE MUST ALLEVIATE IT. IF INNOCENT PEOPLE SUFFERING DOES NOT FIT INTO OUR WORLDVIEW, WE MUST ERADICATE IT. RATHER THAN JUSTIFYING THEIR PAIN, WE NEED TO GET RID OF IT.

SO KEEP ASKING THE QUESTION, WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE. BUT STOP LOOKING FOR ANSWERS. START FORMULATING A RESPONSE. TAKE YOUR RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND TURN IT INTO A FORCE FOR DOING GOOD. REDIRECT YOUR FRUSTRATION WITH INJUSTICE AND UNFAIRNESS AND CHANNEL IT INTO A DRIVE TO FIGHT INJUSTICE AND UNFAIRNESS. LET YOUR OUTRAGE PROPEL YOU INTO ACTION. WHEN YOU SEE INNOCENT PEOPLE SUFFERING, HELP THEM. COMBAT THE PAIN IN THE WORLD WITH GOODNESS. ALLEVIATE SUFFERING WHEREVER YOU CAN.

WE DON'T WANT ANSWERS, WE DON'T WANT EXPLANATIONS, AND WE DON'T WANT CLOSURE. WE WANT AN END TO SUFFERING. AND WE DARE NOT LEAVE IT UP TO G-D TO ALLEVIATE SUFFERING. HE IS WAITING FOR US TO DO IT. THAT'S WHAT WE ARE HERE FOR.

If we don't want an answer, why ask the question?

The purpose of the question is to demand that Hashem take away

all suffering. Instead of a challenge or an excuse for not believing in G-d (as we learned before only a believer can be bothered by the question), the question is meant as a rhetorical questions, begging Hashem to spare people from suffering. This was the approach of Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabeinu in asking the question, and this should be our approach as well; to beg of Hashem and do everything within our power to end all suffering.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS, "WHY DOES GOD ALLOW TERRIBLE THINGS TO HAPPEN TO HIS PEOPLE?" THE TIMES OF LONDON, JANUARY 1, 2005

THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION IS, THEREFORE, NOT, "WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?" BUT "WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO?" THAT IS WHY . . . ALONG WITH OUR PRAYERS FOR THE INJURED AND THE BEREAVED, WE WILL BE ASKING PEOPLE TO DONATE MONEY TO ASSIST THE WORK OF RELIEF. THE RELIGIOUS RESPONSE IS NOT TO SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, THEREBY TO ACCEPT. WE ARE NOT GOD. INSTEAD WE ARE THE PEOPLE HE HAS CALLED ON TO BE HIS "PARTNERS IN THE WORK OF CREATION." THE ONLY ADEQUATE RELIGIOUS RESPONSE IS TO SAY, "GOD, I DO NOT KNOW WHY THIS TERRIFYING DISASTER HAS HAPPENED, BUT I DO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT OF US: TO HELP THE AFFLICTED, COMFORT THE BEREAVED, SEND HEALING TO THE INJURED, AND AID THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR LIVELIHOODS AND HOMES."

Having Bitachon

As adamant as we should be about the problem of suffering, this should not diminish our firm belief and trust that Hashem ultimately knows what He is doing. As the Gemora instructs:

TALMUD BAVLI, BERACHOT 60B

לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד

A PERSON SHOULD ACCUSTOM HIMSELF TO SAY, "EVERYTHING THAT HASHEM DOES IS FOR THE GOOD."

Nochum Ish Gamzu would take it a step further and respond to misfortunes by saying "Gam Zu Letovah" - "Even this is for the good."

This is obviously not in answer to the problem of suffering, but a way to strengthen our trust in Hashem that, despite everything that doesn't make sense to us, Hashem still knows what He is doing.

The Gemorah tells a story of Nachum Ish Gamzu who trusted that everything Hashem does is for the best and he ended up seeing how it was actually so:

TALMUD, TAANIS 21A

אמאי קרו ליה נחום איש גם זו - דכל מילתא דהוה סלקא ליה אמר גם זו לטובה. זימנא חדא בעו לשדורי ישראל דורון לבי קיסר, אמרו: מאן ייזיל? ייזיל נחום איש גם זו, דמלומד בניסין הוא. שדרו בידיה מלא סיפטא דאבנים טובות ומרגליות. אזל, בת בהווא דירא. בליליא קמו הנך דיוראי, ושקלינהו לסיפטיה ומלונהו עפרא. (למחר כי חזנהו אמר: גם זו לטובה). כי מטא התם [שרינהו לסיפטא, חזנהו דמלו עפרא] בעא מלכא למקטלינהו לכולהו. אמר: קא מחייכו בי יהודאי! [אמר: גם זו לטובה]. אתא אליהו, אדמי ליה כחד מינייהו, אמר ליה: דלמא הא עפרא מעפרא דאברהם אבוהון הוא, דכי הוה שדי עפרא - הוה סיפיה, גילי - הוה גירי, דכתיב (ישעיהו מ"א) יתן כעפר חרבו כקש נדף קשתו. הווא חדא מדינתא דלא מצו למיכבשה, בדקו מיניה וכבשוה, עיילו לבי גנזיה, ומלוהו לסיפטיה אבנים טובות ומרגליות ושדרוהו ביקרא רבה. כי אתו ביתו בהווא דיורא. אמרו ליה: מאי אייתית בהדך דעבדי לך יקרא כולי האי? אמר להו: מאי דשקלי מהכא אמטי להתם. סתרו לדירייהו ואמטינהו לבי מלכא, אמרו ליה: האי עפרא דאייתי הכא - מדידן הוא, בדקוה ולא אשכחוה, וקטלינהו להנך דיוראי.

WHY WAS HE CALLED NACHUM OF GAMZU? — BECAUSE WHATEVER BEFELL HIM HE WOULD DECLARE, THIS ALSO IS FOR THE BEST. ONCE THE JEWS DESIRED TO SEND TO THE EMPEROR

A GIFT AND AFTER DISCUSSING WHO SHOULD GO THEY DECIDED THAT NACHUM OF GAMZU SHOULD GO BECAUSE HE HAD EXPERIENCED MANY MIRACLES. THEY SENT WITH HIM A BAG FULL OF PRECIOUS STONES AND PEARLS. HE WENT AND SPENT THE NIGHT IN A CERTAIN INN AND DURING THE NIGHT THE PEOPLE IN THE INN AROSE AND EMPTIED THE BAG AND FILLED IT UP WITH EARTH. WHEN HE DISCOVERED THIS NEXT MORNING HE EXCLAIMED, THIS ALSO IS FOR THE BEST. WHEN HE ARRIVED AT HIS DESTINATION AND THEY UNDOED HIS BAG THEY FOUND THAT IT WAS FULL OF EARTH. THE KING THEREUPON DESIRED TO PUT THEM ALL TO DEATH SAYING, THE JEWS ARE MOCKING ME. NACHUM THEN EXCLAIMED, THIS ALSO IS FOR THE BEST. WHEREUPON ELIJAHU APPEARED IN THE GUISE OF ONE OF THEM AND REMARKED, PERHAPS THIS IS SOME OF THE EARTH OF THEIR FATHER AVRAHAM, FOR WHEN HE THREW EARTH [AGAINST THE ENEMY] IT TURNED INTO SWORDS AND WHEN [HE THREW] STUBBLE IT CHANGED INTO ARROWS, FOR IT IS WRITTEN, HIS SWORD MAKES THEM AS DUST, HIS BOW AS THE DRIVEN STUBBLE. NOW THERE WAS ONE PROVINCE WHICH [THE EMPEROR HAD HITHERTO] NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONQUER BUT WHEN THEY TRIED SOME OF THIS EARTH [AGAINST IT] THEY WERE ABLE TO CONQUER IT. THEN THEY TOOK HIM [NACHUM] TO THE ROYAL TREASURY AND FILLED HIS BAG WITH PRECIOUS STONES AND PEARLS AND SENT HIM BACK WITH GREAT HONOR. WHEN ON HIS RETURN JOURNEY HE AGAIN SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE SAME INN HE WAS ASKED, WHAT DID YOU TAKE [TO THE KING] THAT THEY SHOWED YOU SUCH GREAT HONOR? HE REPLIED, I BROUGHT EARTH WHAT I HAD TAKEN FROM HERE. [THE INNKEEPERS] THEREUPON RAZED THE INN TO THE GROUND AND TOOK OF THE EARTH TO THE KING AND THEY SAID TO HIM, THE EARTH THAT WAS BROUGHT TO YOU

BELONGED TO US. THEY TESTED IT AND IT WAS NOT FOUND TO BE [EFFECTIVE] AND THE INNKEEPERS WERE THEREUPON PUT TO DEATH.

Story of Bitachon in Auschwitz

In Auschwitz (a similar story took place in the Lodz ghetto), a group of rabbis called Hashem to a din Torah where they weighed the merits and demerits of the Jewish people on one side and what was happening to the Jewish people on the other side. They paskened that the Jewish people win; they concluded that Hashem had lost the court case and was obligated to save the Jewish people. Then they went and davened ma'ariv and said kaddish!

With this same firm belief, many Chassidim walked into the gas chambers singing:

אֲנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאַמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּבִיאת הַמְּשִׁיחַ וְאֶף עַל פִּי שְׂתִּמְהָמָה
עַם כָּל זֶה אַחֲפָה לוֹ בְּכֹל יוֹם שְׂיָבוֹא

I BELIEVE WITH COMPLETE FAITH IN THE COMING OF MOSHIACH AND ALTHOUGH HE MAY TARRY, STILL I WAIT EVERY DAY FOR HIM TO COME.

Here is the story of how this came to be:

Story: Ani Maamin in the death camps

Although he was centered in Otvoczka, Rebbe Shaul Yedidya Elazar of Modzitz had Chassidim throughout the major towns and cities of Poland. One of these was Reb Azriel David Fastag, who became noted for his exceptional voice throughout Warsaw. Many came to the shul where Reb Azriel David and his brothers, who were also blessed with lovely voices, would daven on the Yamim Noraim [High Holy Days]. Reb Azriel David was the ba'al tefilla [led the prayers], while his brothers accompanied him as a choir. His crisp, clear and moving voice had a profound effect on all who heard him.

He lived simply, supporting himself from a small dry goods [clothing] store, but his happiness and fulfillment came of another source - the world of Neginah. His moving tunes made their way to Otvoczka, where his Rebbe, R. Shaul Yedidya Elazar appreciated them immensely. The

day a new niggun of R. Azriel David's came to the Rebbe was like a "Yom Tov" for him. [One of his most memorable compositions is "M'heira Yishama," a wedding tune.]

Dark clouds began to cover the skies of Europe - the clouds of Nazism. In spite of the terrible decrees, the yellow patch and the ghettos, most Jews could not fathom what was about to befall them. Only a few "read the map" correctly and managed to escape the clutches of the Nazi occupation to safe havens. One of them was the Modzitzer Rebbe, Rebbe Shaul Yedidya Elazar, whose Chassidim made a tremendous effort to save him. As the Nazis entered Poland, the Chassidim smuggled him out of Poland to Vilna [Lithuania], and from there he made his way across Russia to Shanghai, China, eventually arriving in America in 1941.

Meanwhile in Poland, tens of thousands of Jews were being 'shipped off' daily to their death in cattle cars that were part of the railway system. Aroused from their warm beds in Warsaw, husbands were separated from their wives, children from their parents. The elderly were often shot on the spot in front of their loved ones. Then the Jews were gathered and sent off in these trains to a place where their existence would no longer trouble those dregs of humanity known as the Nazis - to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, etc. What did it look like in one of those cattle cars of the "death train"?

What could one expect to find other than people in their death throes - gasping, sighing and crying? One could hear the stifled cries of children, crushed together and trampled upon by the spiked boots of the evil, cruel Nazis.

However, in one such car, it seemed like a "tone" of life managed to emerge from these crushed people. What - people on their way to the slaughter, singing??? Is this not some cruel Nazi joke? Let us look a bit closer...

An elderly Jew, wrapped up in his ragged clothing, his face white as snow, makes his way over to his neighbor on the death train, begging him to remind him of the niggun the Modzitzer Rebbe sang on Yom Kippur for the Avoda, to "Ma'areh Kohen."

"Now - now - all you want to know about is niggunim?" answered the other, with a hard look at the Chassid, thinking that maybe all the suffering had caused him to lose his mind.

But this Modzitzer Chassid, Reb Azriel David Fastag, was no longer

paying attention to his friend, or to anyone else on the train. In his mind, he was at the Amud HaTefilla [prayer stand] next to the Modzitzer Rebbe, and it is he who was the baal tefilla before all the Chassidim.

Suddenly, before his eyes, the words of the twelfth [of thirteen] Principle of Jewish Faith appeared: "Ani Ma'amin b'Emuna Sheleima, b'vias HaMoshiach; v'af al pi she'yismamaya, im kol zeh, achakeh lo b'chol yom she'yavo - I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Moshiach; and even though he may tarry, nevertheless, I wait each day for his coming." Closing his eyes, he meditated on these words and thought, "Just now, when everything seems lost, is a Jew's faith put to the test."

It was not long before he began to hum a quiet tune to these words. Amidst the heavy atmosphere of death and despair on the train, Reb Azriel David's dveykus [attachment to Hashem] took him above it all.

"How can one of us be singing at such a time?" wondered his fellow Jews on the train. And with such a sweet voice! It must be, that from Heaven they are accompanying us, in mourning, to our death... But listen, what is it that they are singing? You're about to be slaughtered, shot, poisoned or burnt and what are they singing? -- I believe!!!"

The Modzitzer Chassid was completely above it all, a pillar of song, bringing out of his bloodied lungs the song of his life -- the song of the eternity of the Jewish People. He was unaware of the silence in the cattle car, and of the hundreds of ears listening attentively in amazement. He also didn't hear the voices as they gradually joined his song, at first quietly, but soon - growing louder and louder! Meanwhile, he made sure to write out the notes of the newly composed song...

The moving tune, with its holy words, had penetrated the hearts of the Jews on the train, and had joined to the pure emuna [faith] in their hearts, which burst out from them in the form of this great song. The song spread from car to car. Every mouth that could draw a breath from those congested cattle cars, filled with live "corpses" and pungent with the odor of people crowded together, joined in a piece of "Ani Ma'amin - I believe." It became a wonderful, amazing symphony unto itself.

An elderly Jew, close to his death, asked for an explanation. His neighbor screamed to him, "We're singing the Jewish People lives - chai - lives! You too, sing with us - the Jewish People lives, Ani Ma'amin!" Closing his eyes, the elderly Jew clenched his fists and sang

with his remaining strength - "the Jewish People is alive, I believe that Moshiach Tzidkeinu [the Righteous] will come quickly," and expired.

As the train neared the death camp, the railway workers wondered: from where is this amazing song coming? Could the Jews be singing their own burial service tune?

As if waking from a dream, Reb Azriel David opened his eyes to the sight of the singing train. His eyes were red from crying; his cheeks, wet with tears. Deeply moved, he yelled to whomever would listen, "My dear brothers! This niggun is the song of the Jewish soul. It is a song of pure faith, for which thousands of years of exile and troubles cannot overcome!"

Then, in a choked voice, he continued, "I will give my portion in Olam Haba [the World to Come] to whomever can take these notes of my song 'Ani Ma'amin' to the Modzitzer Rebbe!"

A hushed silence descended upon the train. Reb Azriel David lifted himself up by the ends of his thumbs, searching through the crowd that surrounded him. Two young men appeared, promising to bring the notes to the Modzitzer Rebbe, at any cost. One of them climbed upon the other, and in the small crack of the train's roof that only he knew of, made a hole from which to escape. Poking his head out under the open sky, he said, "I see the blue Heavens above us, the stars are twinkling and the moon, with a fatherly face, is looking at me."

"And what do you hear?" asked his companion.

Turning white, the young man answered, "I hear the Ministering Angels singing the Ani Ma'amin tune, and it's ascending to the seven firmaments of Heaven..."

Bidding farewell to their brothers and sisters on the train, the two proceeded to jump off, one after the other. One was killed instantly from the fall, while the other survived, taking the notes of the song with him. He eventually found his way to Eretz Yisrael [perhaps to the Rebbe's son, the Imrei Aish, who was in Tel-Aviv], and the notes were sent by mail to Rebbe Shaul Yedidya Elazar in New York.

Upon receiving the notes and having the "Ani Ma'amin" niggun sung, the Rebbe said, "When they sang 'Ani Ma'amin' on the death train, the pillars of the world were shaking. Hashem said, 'Can it be that My Torah is a fraud? No! But whenever the Jews will sing 'Ani Ma'amin', I will remember the six million victims and have mercy on the rest of My People.'"

It is told that on the first Yom Kippur that the Rebbe sang the "Ani Ma'amin," there were thousands of Jews in the shul. The entire Kahal [congregation] burst into tears, which fell like water into the pool of tears and blood of the Jewish Nation. The tune soon spread throughout Klal Yisrael [world Jewry].

"With this niggun," said Rebbe Shaul Yedidya Elazar, "the Jewish People went to the gas chambers. And with this niggun, the Jews will march to greet Moshiach."

No More Suffering When Moshiach Comes

ISAIAH 25:8

בְּלֵעַ הַמּוֹת לְנִצָּחַ וּמָחָה ה' אֱלֹקִים דְּמַעָה מֵעַל כָּל פָּנִים וְחָרַפַת עֲמוֹ
יִסִיר מֵעַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ כִּי ה' דָּבַר

HE HAS CONCEALED DEATH FOREVER AND THE LORD GOD SHALL WIPE THE TEARS OFF EVERY FACE AND THE SHAME OF HIS PEOPLE HE SHALL REMOVE FROM UPON THE ENTIRE EARTH, FOR THE LORD HAS SPOKEN.

Appendix

The Rebbe on the Holocaust: No possible explanation

In addition to being a fast day commemorating the siege of Yerushalayim, Asarah B'Teves is also a day on which many say kaddish for their loved ones who perished in the holocaust. On Asarah B'Teves 5751, the Rebbe spoke out with strong words against those who claimed that the Holocaust happened because of the sins of the Jews of the time. In this sichah, the Rebbe denies that any reason could account for horrors of such a magnitude:

SEFER HASICHOS 5751, PG. 233

השַׁמְדַת שֶׁשָׁה מַלְיוֹן יְהוּדִים בְּאִכְזָרִיּוֹת הַכִּי גְדוֹלָה וְנוֹרָאָה שׁוֹאָה
אִיוֹמָה שֶׁלֹּא הִיְתָה (וְלֹא תֵהִי ר"ל) דּוֹגְמָתָהּ בְּמִשְׁךְ כָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת לֹא
יִכְוֵלָה לֵהוּיֹת בְּתוֹר עוֹנֵשׁ עַל עוֹנוֹת שֶׁכֵּן אֶפִּילוֹ הַשֵּׁטֶן עֲצָמוֹ לֹא
יִכְוֵל לְמִצּוֹא חֲשָׁבוֹן עוֹנוֹת בְּדוֹר הַהוּא שִׁיְהִי בּוֹ כְּדִי לְהַצְדִּיק ח"ו
עוֹנֵשׁ חֲמוֹר כֹּזֵה!

אין לנו שום הסבר וביאור (ע"פ חכמת התורה) כלל וכלל על השואה, כ"א רק ידיעת העובדה ש"כך עלה במחשבה לפני" ואשר "גזירה היא מלפני" [אף שבודאי לא באופן של חפץ (פנימיות הרצון) ח"ו, כאמור בתורה, "שכינה מה אומרת קלני מראשי כו", כי אם, ש"ברגע קטן עזבתך" ובודאי ובודאי לא ההסבר דעונש על עונות"

ואדרבה: כל אלה שנהרגו בשואה הם קדושים (כפי שנקראים בפי כל ישראל) כיון שנהרגו על קדושת השם (בגלל היותם יהדים) והשם ינקום דמם (כפי שמוסיף כל יהודי שמזכיר קרבנות השואה), ובנוסח התפלה ד"אב הרחמים": "קהלות הקודש שמסרו נפשם על קדושת השם...וינקום נקמת דם עבדיו השפוך, ככתוב בתורת משה...כי דם עבדיו יקום...ובכתבי הקודש נאמר...יודע בגוים לעינינו נקמת דם עבדיך השפוך", היינו שהקב"ה מעיד עליהם שהם "עבדיו" (שמציאותו של העבד היא מציאות האדון), ומבטיח ש"ינקום נקמת דם עבדיו השפוך" כיון ששפיכת דמם הוא היפך חפצו ...

ועד כדי כך גדלה מעלתם מצד הריגתם על קדושת השם [אפילו לולי עבודתם בקיום התומו"צ, ועאכו"כ בהוספה על גודל מעלתם בקיום התומו"צ, שהרי (בעיקר) מסלתה ומשמנה של היהדות התורנית ניספו בשואה ע"ד מרז"ל בכיו"ב "אין כל ברי' יכולה לעמוד במחיצתך"

ומושלל מלהשתמש בשואה בתור הפחדה בנוגע לעונש על עונות ובפרט בנוגע לדורנו זה "אוד מוצל מאש" שארית הפליטה מהשואה הנוראה

THE DESTRUCTION OF SIX MILLION JEWS IN SUCH A HORRIFIC MANNER"
THAT SURPASSED THE CRUELTY OF ALL PREVIOUS GENERATIONS,

COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE BECAUSE OF A PUNISHMENT FOR SINS. EVEN THE SATAN HIMSELF COULD NOT POSSIBLY FIND A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF SINS THAT WOULD WARRANT SUCH GENOCIDE

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO RATIONALISTIC EXPLANATION FOR THE HOLOCAUST EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT IT WAS A DIVINE DECREE ... WHY IT HAPPENED IS ABOVE HUMAN COMPREHENSION – BUT IT IS DEFINITELY NOT BECAUSE OF PUNISHMENT FOR SIN.

ON THE CONTRARY: ALL THOSE WHO WERE MURDERED IN THE HOLOCAUST ARE CALLED “KEDOSHIM” – HOLY ONES – SINCE THEY WERE MURDERED IN SANCTIFICATION OF G–D’S NAME. SINCE THEY WERE JEWS, IT IS ONLY G–D WHO WILL AVENGE THEIR BLOOD. AS WE SAY ON SHABBAT IN THE AV HARACHAMIM PRAYER, “THE HOLY COMMUNITIES WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE DIVINE NAME ... AND AVENGE THE SPILLED BLOOD OF HIS SERVANTS, AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE TORAH OF MOSHE ... FOR HE WILL AVENGE THE BLOOD OF HIS SERVANTS ... AND IN THE HOLY WRITINGS IT IS SAID ... LET THERE BE KNOWN AMONG THE NATIONS, BEFORE OUR EYES, THE RETRIBUTION OF THE SPILLED BLOOD OF YOUR SERVANTS.” G–D DESCRIBES THOSE WHO WERE SANCTIFIED AS HIS SERVANTS, AND PROMISES TO AVENGE THEIR BLOOD.

SO GREAT IS THE SPIRITUAL LEVEL OF THE KEDOSHIM – EVEN DISREGARDING THEIR STANDING IN MITZVAH PERFORMANCE – THAT THE RABBIS SAY ABOUT THEM, “NO CREATION CAN STAND IN THEIR PLACE.” HOW MUCH MORE SO OF THOSE WHO DIED IN THE HOLOCAUST, MANY OF WHOM, AS IS WELL KNOWN, WERE AMONG THE FINEST OF EUROPE’S TORAH SCHOLARS AND OBSERVANT JEWS.

IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE HOLOCAUST BE REGARDED AS AN EXAMPLE OF PUNISHMENT FOR SIN, IN PARTICULAR WHEN

ADDRESSING THIS GENERATION, WHICH AS MENTIONED BEFORE IS
"A FIREBRAND PLUCKED FROM THE FIRE" OF THE HOLOCAUST.

Concluding Question:

Based on what you have learned, how would you now answer the question: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Key Points

1. Many Jewish leaders questioned Hashem about the suffering of others
2. It is not a sign of lack of faith, in fact, only a believer could be bothered by the question.
3. The problem is based on three principles: Hashem is everywhere, all-powerful, and benevolent. If so, how could there still be suffering?
4. The reason why suffering doesn't make sense to us, is because it comes from the level of Hashem's thought (not speech) that cannot be communicated to or understood by man.
5. We ask the question only to demand that suffering be eradicated.
6. The Jewish approach to suffering is to do what we can to get rid of it.
7. Despite all the suffering, we believe and trust that Hashem knows what he is doing and ultimately is for the good and we have perfect faith that a time will come when there will no longer be any suffering with the coming of Moshiach.

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