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THE CHALLENGE OF EMUNAH

The sugya of enumah is one of the most challenging topics. The general emunah topics of how Hashem created the world, or how He runs it - that people can handle. The challenge lies in the type of emunah regarding which the Gemora in Chullin (7b) states: אמר ר' חנינא אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא א"כ מכריזין עליו מלמעלה - Rabbi Chanina said, a person doesn't stub his finger below, unless they declare about him on high that he should injure it. A real story comes to mind, where a young man got so upset at his father, that he picked up a knife and put it through the father's hand, straight to the table! What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear such a story? A sick young man, a crazy young man? Obviously, he wasn't in normal mode. But believe it or not, today he's a very fine young man. I met him recently. The p'shat is that Hashem decreed on that father that this was supposed to happen. Even something that comes from another person, has be nigzar in shamayim. For some reason, the father had some kitrug in shamayim against him and they asked whether he should get his hand stabbed or not. I am sure it was discussed what part of the hand had to be stabbed - it's unbelievable how the judgement goes! And once it's decreed, it's as if it's done; there is nothing a person can do to avoid it. The Chovos HaLevavos shows this, when he writes as follows in Sha'ar Cheshbon Hanefesh (siman 30):

וכן לא יוכל אחד מן הברואים להועיל לך ולא להזיקך ולא לאחד מהם יכולת להוסיף בימי חייך ולא לפחות מהם וכן לכל מדותיך וטבעך ומעלליך הטובים והרעים

Similarly, none of the created beings (human or animal) are either capable of benefiting or harming you, and not one of them are capable of adding to the days of your life or subtracting from them; likewise for all of your traits, your nature, and your good or bad deeds.

He writes likewise in Sha'ar Habitachon (Ch 3-4).1 This is something we have to figure out how to get into our kishkes. We have to understand that there's nothing that happens to any one of us that's not directly from Hashem. Here is a person who's working for a boss and the boss hates the worker because he's always berating him. The boss thinks that he needs to fire the worker, so he decides to fire him, and he says: ברוך שפטרני. But in truth it's not up to him. I've seen many bosses who didn't have the koach to fire their employees because Hashem wanted the employee to have the job. It happened once that I became aware that a certain employer wanted to fire his worker. I told the employee that I was aware that the boss wasn't satisfied with the job he was doing and he could lose his job in that company because of his own negligence. "The fact that Hashem let you hear about it and allowed me to give you a warning is an indication that Hashem is giving you a message that you still have a chance and if you correct yourself, you could stay in this company," I told him. He corrected himself for a day, the next day he forgot about it, and a few weeks later he was out of the job. And now he was forced to correct his shortcomings for the next job.

TO THE LAST DETAIL

Rav Chaim Volozhiner said in the name of the Gr"a (and Rav Chaim writes that he already reached the same conclusion in his younger years), that it's a common mistake to say that a בעל הבחירה is capable of harming another person without it being a decree from Hashem.2 The Vilna Gaon said clearly that every single thing is nigzar on the person, including which stone he will

[&]quot;והחמישי שאין ביד אחד מהברואים להועיל את נפשו ולא להזיקה ולא לזולתו כי אם ברשות הבורא יתברך...וכן כשירגיש האדם שלא יועילנו ולא יזיקנו אחד מהנבראים אלא ברשות הבורא יתברך ישוב לבו מיראתם ותקותם ויבטח על הבורא לבדו כמו שנאמר (תהלים קמו ג) אל תבטחו בנדיבים בבן אדם שאין לו תשועה" (שער הביטחון ג':טי-י')

¹ בספר תולדות הגרי"ז מסלנט כתוב אמר הגר"ח מוולוז'ין זצ"ל: "שמעתי מהחסיד וגם אני אמרתי כן אפילו מנערותי, שזה טעות מה שמורגל בפי העולם שבעל-בחירה יכול לעשות לאדם בלתי גזירת הבורא, רק שבכל דבר נגזר על האדם באיזה אבן ינגף. אבל בבעל-בחירה, לא נגזר איזה בעל-בחירה יעשה לו לטוב ולמוטב. אבל אם לא נגזר לו מן השמים, אין בעל בחירה יכול לעשות לו מאומה",

fall on to injure himself, which part of his head he will hit, and with how much force. The only thing that's not nigzar with a בעל

is which במירה is which במירה is going to harm the person. So let's say, Hashem decides you will get harmed by another human being; it's not nigzar which person will harm you. And the same is true, he says, if it was nigzar that someone should do good to you; it is not known which human being will do that favor for you. For example, someone here is going to give you a present. It's not decreed in shamayim which person will give you that present. It's not decreed in shamayim that your parents are going to support you - even if you think that will be so because you are accustomed to it. Or, if your parents decide to abuse you, r"l, you should know that it wasn't decreed that your parents should abuse you; what was decreed in shamayim is that you were going to be abused. People think they can run away from abuse. The reason is that they believe that the abuse is not decreed upon them. They think, "If I will avoid this person, I will avoid the abuse." It doesn't work like that. Hashem decides how much abuse there is going to be. But if in shamayim it's not nigzar that you will be harmed or abused, you will not be harmed or abused by anyone!

And the emes is that Yosef HaTzaddik already said this to his brothers when his brothers were concerned that after Yakov's death, Yosef would seek revenge against them for his sale. Yosef famously told them: - am I instead of Hashem? (Bereishis 50:19). Rashi explains that אלוקים אני means: "Do you think that I am in place of Hashem, that if I wanted to harm you in any way, that I could do it? It's impossible! Look, the proof is from what you wanted to do to me: you all wanted to harm me, and did it work? No! Hashem turned it around and made it good, so how in the world can I hurt you?"3

THE ETERNAL LESSON FROM THE MARCHESHES, HY"D

I read an amazing World World 2 story about the famous Marcheshes (Rav Chanoch Henech Eigis, hy"d, of Vilna, 1863-1941). When a Nazi who was teasing him (while torturing him) asked, "So, where is your G-d now?" Rav Chanoch calmly answered, "My G-d is right here, and the only reason you are able to lay your finger on me is because that's what was decreed by my G-d. If G-d had not decreed, you would not have laid a finger on me." The German kept torturing him and asking: "Do you still believe in that?" He answered, "Yes, I still believe that." The Nazi tortured him more and Rav Chanoch kept on saying, "Yes, I still believe that." Until the end.

I've read stories about big talmidei chachamim, r"l, who saw their children or spouses killed in front of them and they carried that hatred all their lives. A lot of times you read these gut wrenching war stories where a parent said to the Germans, "Take my life instead of my child," and you think that it's his choice. No, it's not his choice. That's also min hashamayim because if it was decreed that his child was going to get killed. And sometimes the Nazis killed the father and the child. You can't change it. It's all up to Hashem's will.

WHAT BOTHERED RAV MEIR SOLOVEICHIK

This is a very difficult topic because one of the greatest subjects in people's lives is the issue of abuse that people receive or have received from others: teachers, parents, siblings, employers, associates, friends, etc. We all believe that everything was chosen by their abusers and has nothing to do with Hashem, and we carry grudges and we try to take revenge, instead of opening up our eyes and saying, "Hakodosh Boruch Hu, I know this is from you and please let me understand what it is that You want from me."

I will never forget how my Rebbi (HaRav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, zt"l) was going through a very challenging time in his life, when his oldest child went through a difficult divorce. My Rebbi really felt the challenge. Someone called me from Eretz Yisroel and asked me to come there, so that perhaps I could speak to the Rebbi, because he wasn't talking to anybody, even to his other close talmidim. So I went to Eretz Yisroel. I hung around for a couple of days. On the third day - when I saw that my Rebbi wasn't talking to me - I decided to broach the subject. I told him, "Rebbi, we are talking about all the subjects except about the elephant ("pil," in Hebrew) in the room." He asked me, "Meheicha teise [who says] that we have to talk about it?" I told him, "The gemora says that if a person has a worry on his mind, he should discuss it: לאחרים. Right there, on the spot, he asked me, "And how were you machriya (decided) like that lashon of the gemora and not like the other version, which says that a person should remove [yesicenna] the worry from his mind (instead of telling it over to someone)? Why are you machriya (why are you paskening) like the first lashon?"4 He challenged me on the spot, mamish! I am sure he knew this gemora and saw that it was a safek (whether it's better to speak about it or forget it about), so it wasn't so clear to him that he should talk about it.

I said, "Rebbi, please forgive me, but how are you machriya the other way? Maybe you are withholding from yourself a good eitza." All he said to me was, "Nu-nu." This was his common Brisker refrain. "Du vilst redn?" (do you want to talk) he asked me. "I could try," I told him. He said, "Do you know why I am not talking about this? Because no one wants to talk to me about the subject; all they want to do is to create a diversion of how to get me to מסיח דעת. So they all start saying lashon hara about the other side, that they are ganavim, gazlanim, they don't have middos, they are taking steps that are not becoming of bnei Torah, they want to add all the negatives about yeinam! But this is not the sugya - this is not the subject," he said. Then he slowly added, "This is the point, Yisroel, אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא א"ב מכריזין עליו מלמעלה - a person doesn't injure his finger below, unless they declare about him on high that he should injure it. And you should know another point, that when they meet out yisurim to someone, they don't have big barrels, they weigh them out by the drop, in thimbles, but they don't drop them on you at the same time. They drop them drop by drop. But what I am sitting here and thinking about," he said, "is why did the Ribono Shel Olam do this to me? I am not talking about my son now - that's his heshbon, but why me? Hashem decides the exact measure of yisurim and who should get them, so if Hashem decides that the yisurim should not affect a father, they will not affect him, so why did He bring it upon me? That's what I am thinking about."

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

I always say the following moiredike (amazing) ma'ase. We lived with my shvigger, A"H, in this house, and my shvogger (brother-in-law) who lived on Yeshiva Lane nearby was undergoing a major, open heart surgery. For my mother-in-law to deal with that would have been a major challenge. She had gone through enough yisurim in her life. So, we figured out a way not to tell her about her son's surgery. He used to call her once or twice a week, so I told my wife that if in shamayim they decided that my shvigger should have yisurim from this, she will find out about it no matter what; and if it was decided that she should not get harmed by it, she won't find out about it.

So right before the surgery, my shvogger caller her up and spoke to her for a while, and she started wondering because it was a protracted conversation and he usually didn't call at that time. But she was very happy. She hung up the phone. My shvogger went into this very difficult surgery, and then - a few days later - his wife called my mother-in-law to say, "How are you? Regards from your son, etc." So l'ma'ase she didn't find out at the time. Six week later, she met someone who asked her, "Oh, how is your son feeling?" "My son? Oh, he's feeling just fine." "No, I mean how's he feeling after his surgery?" "What surgery? What do you mean?" she asked. But by that point in time, he had already recuperated and was feeling much better. I told my mother-in-law, "You see, you were not supposed to be affected by this news at all, so this news didn't come to you. It had no shaychus to you!"

A person has to know, any collateral damage has been decreed from shamayim: Any pressure in a person's heart, when a parent suffers from a wayward child and the child "goes off," that's also Hashem's deciding what type of yisurim the parents will have and to what extent. You see some parents fall apart, and some parents don't. Some parents' children get divorced and their lives are over, and some parents can handle that challenge better. A person has to know that everything is measured by Hashem.

WHO REALLY SMACKED YOU?

The Chofetz Chaim in his sefer Shem Olam (this also appears in Chofetz Chaim Al HaTorah) brings a proof to this idea from this week's parsha, Parshas Mishpatim (Shemos 21:18), where it says יובא יובא - he [the doctor] should surely heal you.5 This is a source where the Torah gives permission for a doctor to heal a patient. We learn from here and you are allowed to go to a doctor. The gemora (Bava Kama 85a) asks what's the big chiddush here - why would one think that he cannot go to a doctor?!6 Why not? So Rashi (ibid) explains that the gemora's hava aminah was רחמנא מחי ואיהו מסי , that since Hashem is the One who "smacked" you, He should be the One to heal you - and therefore (perhaps we should say) that you cannot "take the law" in your hands and go to the doctor. So to resolve this, the gemora says that the pasuk said the word "heal" twice, ורבא ירבא ירבא ירבא ירבא doctor. But the Chofetz Chaim says that this is difficult to understand, because the above gemora is talking about a case of two men who are fighting, where one of them aims to strike his fellow, but accidentally lands his punch

¹ ובחז"ל מכאן שנתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות (ב"ק פ"ח ע"א) וברש"י שם וז"ל "ולא אמרינן רחמנא מחי ואיהו מסי". ויעוין בתום ' שם ד"ה שנתנה רשות וכו'. מכל זה מוכח להדיא, שכל עניני צער שמזדמן לאדם, ואפילו אם אחד מחרפו ומגדפו הכל הוא מן השמים, אלא שמגלגלין חוב ע"י חייב, וכמו שאחז"ל על הפסוק והשבות אל לבבך, שעונותיך הם המחרפים אותך. ולא עוד אלא אפילו אם אחד הכה לאדם, ואפילו אם אחד הכה אות במזיד, זה ג"כ השגחה מלמעלה אלא שמגלגלין. וראי ברורה לזה, הוא מהכתוב הנ"ל, המדבר בענין מריבה בין איש לרעהו ככתוב "וכי יריבון אנשים והכה איש את רעהו". וא"כ המוכה בעצמו הוא ג"כ חייב שהלא לא היה צריך לצאת לריב עם חברו, ואעפ"כ מכנה הגמ' את ענין ההכאה הזאת בלשון "רחמנא מחי". ע"כ דענין שכזה ג"כ מן השמים. וכן מצינו בדוד שקלל אותו שמעי בן גרא ויסקל הואו בצבים ועפרו בעפר, השיב דוד ד' אמר לו קלל. וכ"ז עושה הקב"ה לטובת האדם, כדי שיכופרו עונותיו ע"י העלבון, ואינו צריך ליתן לב לזה כלל להשיב תשובה למחרפו, אלא אדרבה יודה לד' על שנזדמן לו כפרה כזאת, וע"ז אמרו ז"ל (גיטין ל"ו ב") העלבין ואינן עולבין וכו' עליהן הכתוב אומר ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו (חפץ חיים על התורה, משפטים כ"'ז איט)

ורבא בתראי דאמרי כל שחיב בשבת חייב בריפוי וכל שאינו חייב בשבת אינו חייב בריפוי ריפוי ריפוי דמנא ביה קרא למה לי מיבעי ליה לכדתנא דבי ר' ישמעאל דתניא דבי ר' ישמעאל דתניא דבי ר' ישמעאל דתניא בעהות (רש"י: נתנה רשות לרופאים לרפאות - ולא אמרינן רחמנא מחי ואיהו מסי)

on the guy's pregnant wife, who has to go to the hospital. And yet the Torah still says, !רפא ירפא ירפא You should surely heal her. So the Chofetz Chaim wants to know why we would think that this is a case of Hashem "hitting" her? Wasn't it another man who punched her?! In other words, when some guy punches you in the face, where is the ירמנא מחי here?! So evidently, when someone punches you in the face, that's called ירמנא מחי Hashem is One who smacked you!

You see from here, says the Chofetz Chaim, that any invanei tzaar (suffering) that come to a person, even if someone shames you, puts you down, embarrasses you, calls you names, calls you an idiot - you have to know it's all from shamayim, and they are מגלגלים חוב ע"י חייב - they appoint someone who's already guilty of some aveiros to administer the "punch" to you. Even if a guy planned to hit you in your face, this was also השגחה from Above! The Chofetz Chaim brings clear proof from Dovid Hamelech and Shimi ben Geira. We know that when Dovid was running away from Yerushalayim after losing his malchus, he met Shimi Ben Geira (his former rebbi). Instead of encouraging Dovid, Shimi ben Geira started to call him names (i.e. you are a murderer, an adulterer, a menuval) and he then took dirt and threw it on him! At that moment, one of the soldiers who was next to Dovid Hamelech asked the him if he should kill Shimi ben Geira for being morid b'malchus, but Dovid said, "Leave him alone, because Hashem is the One who told him to curse me." And you have to remember this and never forget this - Hashem does this for the benefit of the person, says the Chofetz Chaim, in order that a person should have a kaporah through this humiliation or insult. You should not eat yourself alive over this and try to respond to your offender to benefit yourself. On the contrary, if you don't respond, you should know that you will have gevaldike zechuyos! Any dibbur that a person speaks - if it's not a form of a mitzvah or an aveira (where you exercise your own bechira) - you should know that it's also from shamayim, because a person has no bechira on it! The Chofetz Chaim writes in Shmiras Halashon (Part 2, Ch. 12) that anything that comes out from the mouth of a person, except for words that are nogea for mitzvos, aveiros or yiras shamayim, is hakol b'dei shamayim.7 Do you ever go somewhere and you ask a question and you are not sure why you asked that question?

A STRANGE QUESTION

I once told you the following story. My son was learning in a good yeshiva, and for some strange reason - while I was talking to him on the phone one day - I asked him, "Tell me, who's the best bochur in the yeshiva?" My wife heard my question and said, "Why are you asking him this question?" I told her, "I don't know. I have no idea why I asked this question." Meanwhile, my son came back and he told me who the best bochur was. Later on, I was wondering why I asked this question. Was it my curiosity? But I did not know this bochur from the yeshiva, I had no shaychus to him. Three years later I got a phone call from somebody who wanted to suggest a shidduch for my daughter. I asked him, "What is the young man's name?" He told me it was so and so. I said, "Is his father so and so?" He said, "Yes." I told him, "My answer is yes." He asked, "Why? Are you so convinced from what I just told you?" "No," I said, "Hashem gave me a siman l'milsa that is my shidduch." Now, I finally understood why Hashem made me ask that question three years prior to that. So now I wasn't going to think twice about it. He asked me again, "Aren't you going to check him out first?" I said, "I don't have to. I'm not going to look into him, I'm not going to check him out. The answer is yes."

Now, I was so certain that the answer was yes, that we made arrangements for their first date to be on Sunday, a few days later. Incidentally, the bochur's father was planning on leaving for Eretz Yisroel that Sunday. I called him up though I hadn't spoken to him for twenty years. He picked up the phone. I said, "My friend, hello. How are you doing? I heard our kids are going out. Isn't it interesting how the world turns? Listen, I heard that you are going to Eretz Yisroel. Don't go," I told him. "Why not?" he asked me. I said, "You are going to miss the party. This is the shidduch." And it was. Sunday night, Monday, and they were ready. And even though there were things that weren't supposed to work out, Hashem worked it out to the tiniest of details.

One of the interesting things about my son-in-law is that he's a very flowery writer and he knows how to express himself very articulately with his pen. My daughter, she should live and be well - at that time - did not know how to write a better sentence than "Yankel went up the hill." My wife also happens to be a very good writer, and she became a conduit between the two of them, during their engagement! She wrote him back beautiful, flowery letters. The guy was mamish in seventh heaven, and he thought that he got somebody with every ma'alah that he dreamed of! Eventually he found out. You know why it happened? Because that's how Hashem wanted it to happen. Hashem wanted this shidduch to happen.

⁷ ויאמר ראובן וגו': את שני בני תמית אם לא אביאנו אליך וגו' (בראשית מב ל"ז). ויאמר: לא ירד בני עמכם', (בראשית מ"ב ל"ז ל"ח). איתא במדרש, שאמר יעקב עליו (בראשית רבה צ"א): בכור שוטה הוא, בניו ולא בני הם' וצריך להבון באמת דברי ראובן. אבל הענין לאמתו הוא כך: כל מה שיוצא מפי האדם, [לבד מה שנוגע ליראת השם, שזה תלוי בבחירת האדם], הוא הכל בידי שמים, וחוץ מיראת שמים. ואיתא במדרש, שמאמר ראובן נתקים בבניו דתן ואבירם, ובאמת הוא עצמו גרם לזה, שאמר (בראשית ל"ז:): "הכל בידי שמים, חוץ מיראת שמים. ואיתא במדרש, שמאמר ראובן נתקים בבניו דתן ואבירם, ובאמת הוא עצמו גרם לזה, שאמר (בראשית ל"ז:): "השליכו אתו אל הבור הזה אשר במדבר", והמעשה היה רע מאד, וכן היה שירדו חיים שאולה לתוך הבור. ובמה שמחשבתו שם היתה לטובה, כמו שכתוב (שם): "למען הציל אותו מידם להשיבו אל אביו", זכה שאחד מבניו, והוא און בן פלת, נצול, ששב בתשובה לאביו שבשמים. ועל זה נקרא שמו און, שהיה באנינות כל ימיו על זה, כמו שאמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה.

YOUR THERAPIST WON'T HELP YOU

You should know that every single thing comes from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Someday Hashem will ask you why you were angry at somebody. "Why were you upset at your parents? I gave you those parents. I made those parents do everything they did for you." And you will come up with a nice excuse: "Oh, well, my therapist said that it was my parents' fault - and if it's my parents' fault - I shouldn't talk to my parents." Let me tell you something: your therapist was wrong. But where did he get that from? He went to school. He went to college and became misguided.

I know many children who went to therapists who told them, "Your father abused you." And the kid would say, "No, I have a very loving relationship with my father. I love my father." And the therapist would then say, "No, you don't understand - he really abused you!" And the kid would repeat, "No, he didn't." The persistent therapist would start getting frustrated, "I am telling you, he had to abuse you! The reason for your strange behavior, the reason why you are acting up this way, must stem from the abuse that you endured as a child."

"But maybe I just don't have the greatest middos; maybe I have challenges in this world, and maybe Hashem gave me those challenges to make me aware of my middos?" the kid asks. So the therapist looks at him and says, "Oh, don't think about that - you are not a bad person. Your parents are!" The kid then persists, "But isn't there a mitzvah of kibud av v'em?" "Oh, that's only if they are tzaddikim, but if they do something wrong, you take a shoe box, write your father's name in it, dig a hole in the ground outside, or if the ground is too frozen, go to the lake, break the ice, stick the box in the hole and say, "Bye-bye, daddy! And then all of your problems are going to be solved."

People don't know how to accept the role of Hashem in their lives. And then they call me and say, "But, but, but..." But, you don't believe in Hashem! You believe what you heard in your silly classes from chamorim and the children of chamorim - that's what you believed in and you espoused that nonsense. You don't understand that Hashem runs the world, and that Hashem put this child with this specific set of parents - it's not an accident, it's not a coincidence. Hashem says, "I'm putting you together with them, so that everybody should know that the father has to be aware of what he has to work on, and the child has to be aware of what he has to work on." Nobody can hurt you or harm you if it's not decreed from Hashem - it's just impossible!

Now, you want to know how to deal with someone who's metzayer (pain) you? There are ways of how to deal with that. Of course you have to learn that. Why does Hashem do this? It's a world of challenges, there's no question that you have to know how to deal with these things. And therefore we have to accept them and we have to mechazek this point - in order for you to get past your personal tzaar. Don't beat yourself up. Know what to focus on and how to focus on it. Take all your challenges and understand how to grow from them.

I once told a therapist, "If you teach people how to grow from their challenges and not run away from them, then you'll have a chelek in Olam Haba and you're going to be a groise tzaddik there - because you are helping people to be strong and you helping them to become complete. But if you tell a person, 'Oy, nebach, this is not your fault. This is someone else's fault. You are not responsible for your behavior; it's understandable why you acted this way' - then you have to know that you will give din v'cheshbon for this in the future. You have to help a person grow by facing their challenge, overcoming it, and moving forward from it. Make the challenge an experience in life that they can grow from."

₹ THE BOTTOM LINE ﴾

The challenging part of emunah is not the idea that Hashem created and runs the world. Rather, it is accepting that everything that happens to us - whether good or bad - is decreed from Above. The stories of the Marcheshes' torture at the hands of a Nazi, or Rav Meir Soloveichik's son's divorce or the surgery of Rebbetzin Sorotzkin's son - all vividly illustrate to us that any damage, suffering, pain, or even the words of reshus that come out of our mouths, are not only decreed in shamayim, but their amount, severity and timing are precisely measured as well. This coming week, if I experience a challenge - no matter how small it may be - I will strengthen my emunah by recognizing and accepting where my challenge truly comes from. And in that zechus, IY"H, I will learn to see any events or challenges I face as hashgacha pratis and not as a coincidence or a set of random events.



