

given you good doctrine; do not abandon My Torah.^[32]

The Gemara records another teaching that links suffering to neglect of Torah study:

אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא – Rava, and some say it was Rav Chisda, said: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו – If a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, יבדוק במעשיו – he should investigate his deeds to determine which sin he may have committed that would cause such suffering,^[33] שגאמר – as it is stated: "ונחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה ונשובה ערה" – Let us search and examine our ways, and return to Hashem.^[34] פשפש ולא

מציא – If he examined his deeds and did not find anything,^[35] ותלה בבטול תורה – he should attribute his afflictions to neglect of Torah study,^[36] שגאמר – as it is stated: "אשרי הנבך", "אשר תיסקרנו יה ומתורתך תלמדנו" – Fortunate is the man whom God afflicts, and whom You teach from Your Torah.^[37] ואם תלה ולא מציא – And if he attempted to attribute his afflictions to neglect of Torah study but did not find anything, בידוע שיסורין הם – it can be assumed that they are "afflictions of love," שגאמר – as it is stated: "כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח" – For Hashem rebukes the one He loves.^[38]

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NOTES

32. [Unlike a person who sells assets and hopes that the buyer will abandon them, thereby giving the seller a chance to regain them, God is happy that the Jews have the Torah.] Even after God gave it to them, He instructed them not to forsake it and told them that it is "good" (*Rashi*).

Although the word לקח implies a sale [לקח means purchaser], the verse continues with the word נתתי, I gave, which implies a gift. It thus teaches that God "sold" us the Torah [in exchange for the merits of Abraham (see *Shemos Rabbah* 33:1)], but He did so joyously, in the manner of one who bestows a gift (*Maharsha, Eitz Yosef*).

The *Vilna Gaon* explains that a person who sells a cherished object at least receives money in return. Even one who gives it away as a gift does so to reciprocate a favor that the recipient did him in the past. God, however, ceded the Torah to us [as it is written: לא קשימים הוא, it is not in Heaven (*Deuteronomy* 30:12)] without receiving anything in return. Thus God's joy at this transaction stands in stark contrast to the way a human being would feel in a comparable situation (*Beurei HaGra*).

33. It is a principle of our faith that everything which befalls a person, whether to his benefit or to his detriment, is decreed by Heaven in accordance with his deeds (*Meiri to Shabbos* 55a; see also *Rambam, Hil. Taaniyos* 1:2,3 and *Ramban to Exodus* 13:16 [end]). Therefore, a person who suffers harm must presume that it is a punishment for a sin he has committed.

34. *Lamentations* 3:40. The preceding verses in that chapter speak about suffering and affliction (*Maharsha*).

35. I.e. he does not find that he committed a sin that would warrant such suffering (*Rashi*).

As a rule, a transgressor is punished with afflictions that correspond to his sin and affect the part of the body that performed it. This rule is referred to as מדה כנגד מדה, *measure for measure* (see *Sotah* 8b-9b). In this case the person is unable to find a link of this nature between his suffering and any sin he may have committed (see following note).

36. As we learned above, anyone who has the opportunity to study Torah and does not do so is visited with suffering.

How can the Gemara state that the person searched his deeds and found no sin, when in fact he is guilty of the grave sin of neglecting Torah study? *R' Chaim Volozhiner* answers that in the case of all other sins they are punished with sufferings that afflict the part of the body that committed the sin (see previous note). The person referred to here sought a sin to match his sufferings but found none. The Gemara therefore states that he should attribute his sufferings to neglect of Torah study. That sin can cause any type of suffering to any part of the body (*Ruach Chaim to Pirkei Avos* 4:11).

The *Vilna Gaon* interprets the Gemara to mean that if one failed to find a sin, he should attribute this failure to a lack of Torah knowledge, for it is the Torah that defines what behavior is sinful and what is not. Due to his neglect of Torah study, he lacks the knowledge to recognize his sin (*Beurei HaGra*).

37. *Psalms* 94:12. If one is afflicted with suffering, he should turn to Torah study (*Rashi*).

38. *Proverbs* 3:12. This verse is preceded by the words: *Do not despise Hashem's discipline, and do not scorn His reproof*. The passage thus means: *Do not despise Hashem's discipline . . .* [if you cannot attribute your sufferings to any sin], *for Hashem rebukes him whom He loves* (*Maharsha*).

God afflicts those whom He loves, even if they had not committed any sin, in order to give them greater reward in the World to Come than their merits would otherwise have justified (*Rashi*).

Rashi evidently follows the Gemara's conclusion (*Shabbos* 55b) that even a person who does not deserve to be punished for sin might be visited with suffering (see also *Tosafos* below, 46b מר"י in the name of

Baal Halachos Gedolos; Chovos HaLevavos, Shaar HaBitachon ch. 3; *Maharal, Nesivos Olam Nesiv HaYissurin* ch. 1; *Derech Hashem* 2:3; see, however, *Igros Moshe Yoreh Deah* I §140 for a different understanding of *Rashi*). Some other Rishonim, though, regard this view as violating the principle set forth in note 33. In their opinion, any pain inflicted by God is limited to those who have sinned (*Meiri* here and to *Shabbos* 55a; *Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim* 3:17,24; *Ramban, Shaar HaGemul* first section; see below for *Ramban's* explanation of "afflictions of love" which is consistent with this approach). [However, even the second opinion agrees that there is a concept of נסיון, *trial*. That is, God places obstacles in the path of the righteous in order to test the extent of their devotion (see *Rambam* *ibid.* and *Ramban* to *Genesis* 22:1).]

אִיּוּבֵי אֱהָבָה, *Afflictions of love*

It is generally agreed that the purpose of "afflictions of love" is to enhance the sufferer's Heavenly reward. The commentators offer various explanations as to the dynamics of this phenomenon.

Ramban (*Shaar HaGemul* *ibid.*) maintains that "afflictions of love" atone for sins that were committed inadvertently [שגגות]. Transgressions of this nature prevent a person from enjoying his complete reward in the World to Come, but they do not warrant punishment in Gehinnom. Therefore, out of love and compassion, God cleanses people from their inadvertent sins by afflicting them in this world. They are thus rendered fit to receive their full measure of reward in the World to Come.

In a similar vein, *Maharal* (*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaYissurin* ch. 1) explains that "afflictions of love" are visited upon one who deserves to reach sublime heights in the World to Come, but whose soul is tainted with earthliness and physicality, which bar him from this exalted level. The Almighty visits him with suffering to cleanse his soul and allow it to gain its rightful position in proximity to the *Shechinah*. (See *Pnei Yehoshua* for a similar approach.)

From *Rashi*, though, it seems that "afflictions of love" do not merely allow a person to receive his due reward, but they even increase it. In this light, *Pnei Yehoshua* suggests the following explanation: Although justice dictates that a person be punished for his sins, people who are merely of average moral standing might rebel against God (Heaven forbid) if they are punished with the frequency and intensity they deserve. God, in His mercy, seeks to spare the world from the devastation such rebellion would necessarily bring in its wake. God therefore shifts the onus of punishment from the average people onto the righteous, who will bear it with love. Since a righteous person who is afflicted for this reason is suffering on behalf of others, he is credited with the reward that is consequently taken from them. *Derech Hashem* (2:3:8) explains that in the merit of accepting these afflictions with love, the righteous person atones for his generation and is himself elevated to a high degree. [See, however, *Radak* to *Isaiah* 53:4, who disagrees with the concept of one person ever being punished for the sins of another.]

Ran (*Derashos, Derush* §10): Even a person who observes all the mitzvot and does not sin might nevertheless feel some desire for the temporal pleasures of this world. This inclination, though natural, stands as a barrier against the realization of his full spiritual potential. In order to free him from this limitation, God will afflict him with sufferings, which have the effect of distancing him from the pursuits of this world and muting their siren call.

Tzlach: A person who is weak and ill finds it more difficult to study Torah and perform mitzvot than one who is strong and healthy. Therefore, his reward is greater, in accordance with the rule "The reward is in proportion to the exertion" (*Pirkei Avos* 5:23). Thus, by visiting suffering upon the righteous, God increases their opportunities for reward.

[For further insight into the phenomenon of the suffering of the righteous, see below, 7a, and the sources listed in note 50 there.]