

Understanding Messages within our Difficulties and Challenges – Part 3

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

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

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

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

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

Our ability to see meaning and significance in *yissurim* is closely tied to our self-awareness. Part of the work of understanding *yissurim* is being honest with ourselves and not allowing the *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) to merely interpret the *hashgacha* in a way that is convenient for us. This includes being open to the possibility that G-d may be trying to get us to deal with issues that we've actually spent years avoiding.

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

Concluding Sources:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Final Summary:

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

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

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

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

The defining theme and goal of all of this is what the *Orchot Tzadikim* explains is the *mitzvat asef* to be – *matzduk hadin al kol m'orotav* – To acknowledge G-d's justice in all that befalls us.

“*Yissurim*” is not “suffering” but rather pain, challenges, and difficulties that are given to us, from G-d's love, and exclusively for our benefit. While the pain that occurs to us is a **reality** that is often beyond our ability to control, whether or not we relate to this pain as suffering is a **choice** that we definitely can control. What is very unfortunate is how often this message is a *chidush* (brand-new idea) to those who hear it.

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

day world, there will always be much that we will be capable of gaining and understanding from them.

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

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

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

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