
TOWARD UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING AND ADVERSITY

This class attempts to address the issue of human suffering in general, including the difficult issue of “Why bad things happen to good people.” Judaism does not view suffering as a series of random occurrences, rather as Divinely guided challenges sent to benefit us. This shiur follows the principle of Rav Chaim Friedlander commenting on Daas Tevunos by the Ramchal that Judaism cannot attribute specific reasons to explain individual cases of suffering. However, Judaism can offer a range of reasons to explain why suffering and adversity occur in general. This shiur represents a partial list of explanations for suffering found in Chazal. Reasons for national suffering are primarily addressed in the shiur on Tisha B’Av and are also mentioned below regarding the Holocaust in Section I-D.

The overall structure of the shiur is based upon Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb’s approach distinguishing between 1) justifications for suffering based upon an individual’s past history and 2) justifications for suffering to guide a person to achieve his ultimate future potential. Some of the reasons cited have applications to both the past and future, yet are nevertheless listed under just one of these categories.

This class will address the following questions:

- ~ How can we understand suffering?
- ~ Is there a connection between someone’s past and present tribulations?
- ~ How can adversity and suffering help us to reach our potential?

Class Outline

Section I. Establishing a Context for Understanding Suffering & Adversity
Part A. God Created and Guides the World
Part B. Free Will and Accountability for Our Actions
Part C. Everything God Does is for the Good
Part D. The Limits of Human Knowledge and the Role of Trust

Section II. Justifications for Suffering Based on Past Events
Part A. Suffering Sensitizes, Purifies and Atones
Part B. Suffering of the Righteous and Reward of the Wicked
Part C. Transmigration of the Soul

Section III. Justifications for Suffering to Achieve One’s Ultimate Potential
Part A. Achievement Through Effort & Individual Perfection
Part B. Suffering as a Catalyst for Introspection and Personal Growth
Part C. Tests to Build and Refine Character
Part D. The World to Come

SECTION I. ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING & ADVERSITY

To understand suffering requires insight into the existence of God and the purpose of man. Only in the context of a caring God actively involved in the fate of humankind can we approach the issue of human suffering.

On the one hand, God responds to the decisions man takes based on his free will; on the other, God guides us towards achieving our purpose and maximizing our potential. Also important is appreciating the fundamental desire of God to bestow good upon His creations, and the fact that the human intellect cannot always grasp the ways in which this goodness is manifest.

PART A. GOD CREATED AND GUIDES THE WORLD

1. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem, (The Way of God), Feldheim, translation by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, p 31. – Basic belief.**

Every Jew must know and believe that there exists a first Being, without beginning or end, who brought all things into existence and continues to sustain them. This Being is God.

כל איש מישראל צריך שיאמין וידע, שיש שם מצוי ראשון, קדמון ונצחי, והוא שהמציא וממציא כל מה שנמצא במציאות, והוא האלוה (ברוך הוא)

2. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shor, Volume II, p. 301. – Divine guidance over the world.**

God knows everything that happens to all of creation every moment in time – even when a leaf falls from a tree. God fills the entire world like the soul fills the entire body; there is no place where He is absent.

הקב"ה יודע מכל תנועה קלה שבקלות של כל נברא בכל רגע ממש. אם עלה נושר מהעץ- הקב"ה יודע מזה. והוא, כי הוא ית' ממלא את כל העולם כולו כמו שהנשמה ממלאה את כל הגוף ולית אתר פנוי מיניה.

God guides the world. He wants the continuity of the world and of every individual (See Shmuel II, 14:14). As the Ramban teaches, He runs the world according to the principles of reward and punishment based on an individual's free will decisions.

הקב"ה מנהיג את עולמו. הוא ית' רוצה בקיום העולם וחושב מחשבות לבלתי ידח ממנו נידח (ש"ב יד, יד), והנהגה היא בדרך שכר ועונש, כדברי הרמב"ן הנ"ל, והבחירה בידי אדם...

PART B. FREE WILL AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS

Judaism teaches that each individual has free will to reach his potential and is accountable for his decisions and actions.

1. **Rambam, (Maimonides), Hilchot Teshuvah, (The Laws of Repentance) 5:1 – The principle of free will.**

The ability is given to every individual to decide to act properly and become righteous or act improperly and become evil. That is what is written in the Torah (Bereishit 3:22), "And now man is like one of us, knowing good and evil ..."

רשות לכל אדם נתונה אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו, ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו, הוא שכתוב בתורה הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע.

This means that a human being is unique in creation in that he personally understands the nature of good and evil and can choose to do either and there is no one who can prevent him from doing either...

כלומר הן מין זה של אדם היה יחיד בעולם ואין מין שני דומה לו בזה הענין שיהא הוא מעצמו בדעתו ובמחשבתו יודע הטוב והרע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ ואין מי שיעכב בידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע.

2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 33b – Freedom to fear.

Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the awe of God.

הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים

3. Rashi, ibid. 33b – Choosing the right path.

Everything is in the hands of Heaven – everything that occurs to a person is from God. For instance, (whether the person is) tall, short, poor, rich, smart, dull, light, dark, all of this is from Heaven. But whether a person is righteous or evil is not from heaven – this is the responsibility entrusted to the individual. There are two paths presented to each person – with the intention that he should choose the path of fearing God.

כל הבא על האדם ביד הקדוש ברוך הוא כגון ארוך, קצר, עני, עשיר, חכם, שוטה, לבן, שחור, הכל בידי שמים הוא, אבל צדיק ורשע אינו בא על ידי שמים, את זו מסר בידו של אדם, ונתן לפניו שתי דרכים, והוא יבחר לו יראת שמים:

4. Tosefot, ibid. – Attributes that we are born with and events that occur are in the hands of Heaven; only choices we make ourselves are in our hands.

Everything is in the hands of Heaven. This means that [things like] lions, and thieves and other bad occurrences are decrees from Heaven. But chills and fevers are not decrees because one can avoid them. Certainly, if someone wishes to kill himself by [jumping into] fire or a river, he can, even though [his death] was not decreed. This is different than the concept of “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for awe of Heaven,” because that refers to a person’s attributes, whether he is strong or weak, poor or rich, tall or short, wise or dull ... but this refers to events which occur to a person.

פירוש אריה וגנבי הבאים על האדם הכל נגזר בידי שמים אבל צנים פחים מזה לא נגזר עליו כלו' יכול לשמור אבל ודאי אם רוצה לאבד עצמו באש או בנהר יכול לאבד עצמו אע"פ שלא נגזר כלום ולא דמי להא דאמר הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים דהתם מיירי במדות של אדם מה יהיה גבור או חלש עשיר או עני ארוך או קצר [חכם או טפש] כדאיתא בנדה בפרק כל היד (דף טז: ושם) אבל הכא מיירי במאורעות הבאות על האדם:

5. Maimonides, Thirteen Principles of Faith, 11 – The principle of accountability.

I believe, with complete faith, that the Creator, blessed is His Name, rewards with good those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who violate His commandments.

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה. שהבורא יתברך שמו גומל טוב לשומרי מצותיו ומעניש לעוברי מצותיו:

PART C. EVERYTHING GOD DOES IS FOR THE GOOD**1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:4 – His ways are perfect.**

The Rock, His works are perfect, all of His ways are just. A God of trustworthiness without iniquity, righteous and fair is He.

הַצֹּדֵק תְּמִימִים פָּעְלוּ כִּי כָל דְרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין
עֹנֵל צַדִּיק וְיֵשֶׁר הוּא:

2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 60b – For the good.

A person should accustom himself to say, "Everything that God does is for the good."

לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם רְגִיל לֵאמֹר כָּל דְּעֵבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטַב
עֵבִיד

3. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 60b – The lantern, the cock, and the donkey.

Rabbi Akiva was once traveling from one place to another. When he reached a particular town he looked for an inn in which to dwell, but found none. He declared: "Everything that God does is for the good." He went to sleep in the open, accompanied by a cock, a donkey, and a lantern. The wind blew and extinguished the lantern, a cat came and ate the cock, and a lion came and ate the donkey. Yet, he declared once again: "Everything that God does is for the good." On that night a group of bandits raided the town and took its inhabitants captive. Rabbi Akiva said to his disciples: "Did I not tell you that all God does is for the good?" [Rashi: Had the candle been burning, or had the cock or donkey been alive, Rabbi Akiva would have been discovered and taken captive.]

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא דְהוּהוּ קְאָזִיל בְּאוֹרְחָא מֵטָא לְהֵיכָא מֵתָא
בְּעָא אוֹשְׁפִיזָא לֹא יְהִי לִיהּ אִמְרַי כָּל דְּעֵבִיד רַחֲמָנָא
לְטַב אוֹל וּבֵת בְּדַבְרָא וְהוּהוּ בְּהֵדִיָּה תְרַנְגוּלָא וְחִמְרָא
וְשִׁרְגָא אֵתָא זִיקָא כְּבִיָּה לְשִׁרְגָא אֵתָא שׁוֹנְרָא אֲכִלְיָה
לְתְרַנְגוּלָא אֵתָא אֲרִיָּה אֲכִלְיָה לְחִמְרָא אִמְרַי כָּל דְּעֵבִיד
רַחֲמָנָא לְטַב בֵּיהּ בְּלִילִיא אֵתָא גֵּיִסָא שְׂבִיָּה לְמֵתָא
אִמְרַי לְהוּ לֹאֻ אִמְרִי לְכוּ כָּל מָה שְׁעוֹשֶׂה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא הַכֹּל לְטוֹבָה.

4. Ramchal, Derech Hashem, Part II, Ch. 8, Section 1 – God's desire to bestow good.

We know that in truth God's only desire is to bestow good, and He loves His creation like a father loves his child. However, the love itself can justify the father bringing suffering to his child for his ultimate benefit, as is it written, "As a father disciplines his child, so too does God discipline you" (Devarim 8:5). Therefore, Divine judgment and law itself are based upon and flow from God's love.

יִדְעֵנוּ בְּאֵמֶת שְׂאֵין חֲפֵצוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּב"ה אֵלָּא לְהִיטִיב,
וְהֵנָּה הוּא אוֹהֵב אֶת בְּרוּאָיו, כֹּאֵב הָאוֹהֵב אֶת בְּנוֹ אֵלָּא
שֶׁמִּטְעֵם הָאֲהָבָה עֲצֻמָּה רָאוּי שִׁיִּסֵּר הָאֵב אֶת בְּנוֹ,
לְהִיטִיבוֹ בְּאַחֲרִיתוֹ; וְכַעֲנִין שְׁנֵאמַר: "כִּי כֹאֲשֶׁר יִסֵּר אִישׁ
אֶת בְּנוֹ ה' אֶלְקִיד מִיִּסְרָךְ" (דְּבָרִים ח:ה);
וְנִמְצָא שֶׁהַמִּשְׁפָּט וְהַדִּין עֲצֻמוֹ מִמְקוֹר הָאֲהָבָה הוּא
נוֹבֵעַ.

PART D. THE LIMITS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE AND THE ROLE OF TRUST**1. Shemot (Exodus) 33:18-23 – We are not able to perceive God clearly in this world.**

“And [Moshe] said, “Show me, please your Glory” ... And [God] said, “You are not able to see My Face, for man cannot see Me and live.” And God said, “Behold, there is a place before Me and I will stand you upon a rock. And it will be that when My Glory passes over you and I have placed you in a cleft in the rock and will cover you with My hand and you shall see My back, My face you shall not see.”

ויאמר הראני נא את כבודך: ... ויאמר לא תוכל לראת את פני כי לא יראני האדם וחי: ויאמר ה' הנה מקום אתי ונצבת על הצור: והיה בעבר כבדי ושמתוך בנקרת הצור ושכתי כפי עליך עד עברי: והסרת את כפי וראית את אחרי ופני לא יראו:

2. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:14 – We cannot grasp Divine justice.

Rav Yanai taught, “We cannot understand the peace of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous.”

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

3. Rabbeinu Yonah, ibid. – We know, but do not understand.

We know that in truth there is an explanation for the matter but we are not capable of comprehending it.

אין אנו משיגים לטעם הדבר, והוא מן הדברים האמיתיים שאין ידיעתנו משגת.

4. Rambam, Mishnah Berachot 9:5 (According to HaTargum HaKadmon) – God's ways are beyond us.

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/Isaiah 55:9).

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

5. Rabbi Yaakov Neiman, Darchei Mussar, p. 247 – Belief even contrary to one's perception.

To believe that God created the heavens and earth does not require great wisdom since one's basic intellect directs one to have such a belief.

להאמין שהקב"ה ברא שמים וארץ לא צריך לזה חכמה יתירה כי השכל הפשוט מחייב להאמין בזה...

However the highest level of faith is to believe in God when one sees things that defy one's intelligence and cause one to ask difficult questions on the ways of God. Nevertheless, one dismisses these questions and has faith in the God of the Jewish people and understands that it is impossible to comprehend the Creator – this is the highest level of belief.

To believe that there is “no injustice” (Devarim 32:4) even though according to one's perception one sees staggering injustice, as we have seen in our recent history with the murder of six million Jews – those who were righteous, luminaries, pure; boys girls, men, women, entire cities and families were decimated without a remembrance.

Regarding this one needs to believe there is no injustice, for everything the Merciful One does is for the good, and there is a Heavenly calculation for everything.

אבל המדרגה הכי גדולה באמונה להאמין בהקב"ה כשרואים דברים שזה נגד השכל ויש להקשות קושיות חמורות על הנהגת ד' ובכל זאת הוא מבטל כל הקושיות ומאמין אמונה פשוטה בד' אלוקי ישראל ומבין כי א"א לנברא שיבין את בוראו, זוהי מדרגה הכי גדולה באמונה.

להאמין כי "אין עול" אעפ"י שלמראה עיניו הוא רואה עול עד אין שיעור, כמו שראינו בזמן האחרון שנהרגו ששת מיליונים יהודים, צדיקים, גאונים, תמימים, תינוק ותינוקות אנשים ונשים, עיירות שלמות ומשפחות שלמות נעקרו מן העולם ולא נשאר זכר מהם.

וע"ז צריך להאמין כי אין עול, כי כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב הוא עביד ועל כל יש חשבון למעלה.

6. [Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner, Making Sense of Suffering, ArtScroll, p. 5, 7 – Trust extends beyond intellectual endeavor.](#)

God in His essence is unknowable, but that does not mean He does not exist. The totality of His ways is unfathomable, but that does not mean He has no ways. Intellectual endeavor remains crucial, but it must be coupled with another element: trust. Trust is what we are left with when we have gone as far as we can towards intellectual understanding and have still not obtained satisfactory answers. Trust is the certainty that there is sense to God's ways even when we are denied access to those ways...

God could have created us with the intellectual capacity to understand every mitzvah (including the *chukim*). Or He could have limited the Torah to only those mitzvot that we are capable of comprehending (*eydut* and *mishpatim*). But he did neither. Rather He gave us the *chukim* to introduce the element of trust into our relationship with him. We do not understand them. We observe them because we trust Him.

SECTION II. JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SUFFERING BASED ON PAST EVENTS

PART A. SUFFERING SENSITIZES, PURIFIES AND ATONES

1. Ramchal, Derech Hashem, p. 101 – Suffering sensitizes and purifies.

“Good deeds incorporate an intrinsic quality of perfection and excellence into man’s body and soul. Evil deeds, on the other hand incorporate in him a quality of insensitivity and deficiency, all with a precise measure depending on the deeds...God gave suffering the power to dispel the insensitivity in man allowing him to become pure and clear...”

המעשים טובים מעצימים הם באדם, בגופו ונפשו, מציאות שלמות ומעלה, והפכה המעשים הרעים מעצימים בו מציאות עכירות וחסרון, והכל בשעור מדקדק כפי מה שהם המעשים... ששם יתברך שמו בסגלתם, להסיר מאותו האדם העכירות ההוא, וישאר זך ובהיר מוכן לטובה בזמן הראוי...

2. Talmud Bavli, Arachin 16b – The extent to which suffering atones.

How far does [this idea of atonement achieved through] suffering go? Rabbi Elazar said: Even if someone bought a suit and it does not fit exactly ... even if he wanted a cup of hot drink, but was poured a cold one or vice versa ... even if someone accidentally puts his clothes on backwards ... even if he reaches into his pocket for three coins but pulls out two.

עד היכן תכלית יסורין אמר רבי אלעזר כל שארגו לו בגד ללבוש ואין מתקבל עליו ... אפילו נתכוונו למזוג בחמין ומזגו לו בצונן... הושיט ידו לכיס ליטול שלש ועלו בידו שתיים.

PART B. SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND REWARD OF THE WICKED

1. Ramchal, Derech Hashem, p.97– Worldly suffering as punishment for the few evil deeds of the righteous (allowing them to enjoy their reward in the World to Come untainted by sin).

The good deeds of the wicked and evil deeds of the righteous, which constitute a minority, are dealt with in this world through its gratifications and sufferings. It is in this world that the wicked are rewarded with prosperity for their few virtues while the righteous are punished for their [few] faults.

אך למעשים טובים אשר לרשע ולמעשים הרעים אשר לצדיק על צד המעוט, ימצא העולם הזה בהצלחותיו וצרותיו, שבו יקבל הרשע גמול מעוט הזכות אשר לו בהצלחותיו, והצדיק – ענש עוונותיו ביסורין שבו

2. Devarim 7:9-10 – “Payment” of the wicked. (The wicked receive material reward for their good deeds in their lifetimes, but forfeit the World to Come.)

Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is the faithful God, Who keeps His covenant and His loving-kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments for a thousand generations; but repays those who hate Him in his lifetime to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him in his lifetime.

וידעת כי ה' אלהיך הוא האלהים האל הנאמן שימר הברית והחסד לאהביו ולשמרי מצותיו לאלהי דור: ומשלים לשנאיו אל פניו להאבידו לא יאחר לשנאו אל פניו ישלם לו:

3. **Rashi, *ibid.* – The purpose of the “payment.”**

He is repaid during his lifetime in order to remove him from the World to Come.

בחיינו משלם לו גמולו הטוב כדי להאבידו מן העולם הבא:

4. **Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, p.111 – Judgment according to personal level and potential. (Although two people may commit the same wrong, the consequence of the deed, possibly including suffering in this world, will differ according to each one’s level.)**

[Every man’s predicament in life is therefore his challenge]. The Highest Wisdom divided these challenges among the human race in a manner decreed fitting and proper to fulfill its profound plan. Every individual therefore has his own challenge in the battle with his *Yetzer*. This is his assignment and responsibility in this world and within its framework he must strive for success. His deeds are then judged by God’s attribute of justice with true precision, depending on the particular responsibility that was given to him.

ואמנם חלקה החכמה העליונה את עניני הנסיון האלה בין אישי מין האנושי, כמו שגזרה בעמק עצתה היותו ראוי ונאות; ונמצא לכל איש ואיש מבני האדם חלק מיוחד בנסיון ובמלחמת היצר, והוא פקודתו ומשאו בעולם הזה וצריך לעמד בו כפי מה שהוא; ויודנו מעשיו במדת דינו יתברך כפי המשא אשר נתן לו באמת, בכל בחינותיו, בתכלית הדקדוק.

PART C. TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL

1. **Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, p. 125 – Reincarnation. Suffering may be experienced on account of previous incarnations.**

A single soul can be reincarnated a number of times in different bodies, and in this manner, it can rectify the damage done in previous incarnations. Similarly it can also achieve perfection that was not attained in its previous incarnations. The soul is then ultimately judged at the end of all these incarnations. Its judgment will depend on everything that took place in all its incarnations as well as its status as an individual in each one. When an individual has a reincarnated soul, it is possible that he will be affected in a particular manner as a result of his deeds in a previous incarnation. The situation in which he is placed may follow from this, and this situation may bring with it the special responsibility given to him.

נשמה אחת תבוא לעולם הזה פעמים שונות בגופים שונים, ועל ידי זה הנה תוכל לתקן בפעם אחת את אשר קלקלה בפעם אחרת, או להשלים מה שלא השלימה. ואולם בסוף כל הגלגולים, לדין שלעתיד לבוא, הנה הדין יהיה עליה כפי כל מה שעבר עליה מן הגלגולים שנתגלגלה ומן המצבים שהיתה בהם. והנה אפשר שיגיעו ענינים לאדם שנשמתו מגלגלת, כפי מה שיגרם לה מצד מה שעשתה גלגול קודם, וינתן לאדם ההוא בעולם מצב כפי זה וכפי המצב שינתן לו יהיה המשא אשר יוטל עליו.

SECTION III. JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SUFFERING TO ACHIEVE ONE'S ULTIMATE POTENTIAL

Although we generally view suffering in a negative light, it can in fact perform several positive roles. The achievement gained through pain and struggle cannot be compared with that which came easily. In a certain sense, the “no pain no gain” adage is not far off the mark! Furthermore, suffering can serve as a catalyst for repentance and betterment. The challenges it brings can open new avenues for personal growth that would otherwise never be achieved.

PART A. ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH EFFORT & INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION

1. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 99b – Born to strive.

Rabbi Elazar said: Every person was born to strive, as it is written, “For a man is born to strive” (Iyov/ Job 5).

אמר רבי אלעזר: כל אדם לעמל נברא, שנאמר (איוב ה') 'כי אדם לעמל יולד'.

2. Bereishit 37:1

And Yaakov (Jacob) settled in the land of his father, in the land of Canaan.

וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו בארץ כנען:

3. Rashi, ibid., based on Bereishit Rabbah 84 – Yaakov was not permitted to settle in peace.

Yaakov requested to dwell in peace, but the problem with Yosef suddenly came upon him. The righteous request to live in peace. [Therefore] the Holy One, Blessed is He, says to them, “The Righteous are not satisfied with that which has been prepared for them in the World to Come, yet they [also] request to dwell in peace in this world!”

ביקש יעקב לישב בשלום קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף צדיקים מבקשים לישב בשלום אמר הקב"ה לא דיין לצדיקים מה שמתוקן להם לעוה"ב אלא שמבקשים לישב בשלום בעוה"ז.

4. Talmud Bavli, Menachot 53b – Israel requires crushing like an olive (no pain no gain).

Rabbi Yochanan said: In what way is Israel compared to an olive? Just as an olive does not give forth its oil without being crushed, so too the Jewish people will not return to the proper path without being subjected to suffering.

מה זית אינו מוציא שמנו אלא ע"י כתיחה אף ישראל אין חוזרין למוטב אלא ע"י יסורין

5. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5a – Our greatest national gifts were only given through suffering.

It has been taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through suffering. These are: The Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come.

תניא, רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר: שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, וכולן לא נתנן אלא על - ידי יסורין. אלו הן: תורה וארץ ישראל והעולם הבא.

6. **Avot 5:22 – Reward and toil.**

The reward is directly proportional to the toil.

לפום צערא אגרא

PART B. SUFFERING AS A CATALYST FOR INTROSPECTION AND PERSONAL GROWTH1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5a – Suffering motivates one to introspect.**

Rava, and some say Rav Chisda, stated: If a person sees that circumstances of suffering have befallen him, he should examine his deeds as it is stated, “Let us search our ways and introspect and come close to God” (Eichah/Lamentations 3:40).

אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו - יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר (איכה ג:ם) "נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה'".

Aside from the introspection that suffering normally motivates, sometimes insight into the cause of our adversity is not possible without the objectivity of our friends, colleagues and spiritual mentors, as illustrated by the next two sources:

2. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5b – Rav Huna suffered an unexpected financial loss and was advised by the rabbis to investigate his business practices. They discovered that Rav Huna in fact owed his laborers payment in a disputed case.**

Rav Huna had four hundred barrels of fine wine that turned to vinegar. Rav Yehudah ... and the rabbis came to him ... and told him, “You should check your [spiritual] affairs.” He told them, “Am I suspect in your eyes?” They told him, “Is God suspect of enacting judgment without cause?” He told them, “If there is someone among you that heard something [wrong] about me, he should say so.”

They told him, “This is what we have heard: You did not pay your laborers!” He told them, “Have they left me anything? They stole everything from me!” [He defended not paying the workers by claiming they stole more than their due wages.] They told him, “Of this it is said, ‘Steal from the thief, and savor the taste [of theft]!’” [Because his claim was not substantiated in court, he was obligated to pay his workers.] He told them, “I accept it upon myself to pay them.” Some say that the vinegar reverted to wine, and others say that the price of vinegar went up and was sold for the price of wine.

רב הונא תקיפו ליה ארבע מאה דני דחמרא על לגביה רב יהודה ... ורבנן ... ואמרו ליה לעיין מר במיליה אמרו להו ומי חשידנא בעיניכו אמרו ליה מי חשיד קודשא בריך הוא דעביד דינא בלא דינא אמר להו אי איכא מאן דשמייע עלי מלתא לימא אמרו ליה הכי

שמייע לן דלא יהיב מר שבישא לאריסיה אמר להו מי קא שביק לי מידי מיניה הא קא גניב ליה כוליה אמרו ליה היינו דאמרי אינשי בתר גנבא גנוב וטעמא טעים אמר להו קבילנא עלי דיהיבנא ליה איכא דאמרי הדר חלא והוה חמרא ואיכא דאמרי אייקר חלא ואיזדבן בדמי דחמרא.

3. **Commentary of Alshich to Eichah (Lamentations) 3:39 – The importance of consulting with others to help catalyze personal growth.**

If [Rav Huna] would not have investigated the matter through his disciples, and would have relied

אם לא היה חוקר ודורש לתלמידיו, וסמך על עצמו שלא מצא בו עון לא היה מתקן עונו,

on himself, he would not have found any sin, and would not have corrected it, for it would not have been revealed to him, and he would not have repented. Therefore, the verse states, "Let us search our ways and introspect" (Eichah 3:40) – first to search on our own, and then to introspect by means of others, like Rav Huna who consulted with his disciples. Through this, we will "come close to God," which we would not achieve by relying on ourselves.

ואחר כך נחקרה מהזולת אם לא נמצא, כרב הונא שחקר ודרש מתלמידיו, ועל ידי כן ונשובה עד ה', מה שאין כן אם נסמוך על עצמנו:

4. **Yonah (Jonah) 1:1-3, 2:1-2, 4:5-11 – Yonah the Prophet was asked by God to go to the non-Jewish city of Nineveh to admonish the inhabitants to repent, but attempted to evade his mission by escaping overseas. The storm that threatened to capsize the ship and subsequent events were intended to inspire him to repent. After he went to Nineveh, whose inhabitants repented and were spared punishment, God taught Yonah the gravity of his mistaken judgment by means of the kikayon (a plant that shelters from the sun).**

And the word of God came to Yonah ben Amitai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city and call out against it for its wickedness has risen before me." Yonah got up to run away to Tarshish from before God, and he descended to Yafo and found a ship heading towards Tarshish ... Then God cast a mighty wind toward the sea; there was a great tempest in the sea and the ship threatened to be broken.

God designated a large fish to swallow Yonah, and Yonah remained in the fish's innards for three days and three nights. Yonah prayed to God, from the fish's innards ...

Yonah left the city and sat at the east of the city. He made himself a booth there, and sat under it in the shade until he would see what would occur in the city. God, designated a kikayon, which rose up above Yonah to form a shade over his head, to relieve him from his discomfort. Yonah rejoiced over the kikayon, a great joy. Then God designated a worm at the dawn of the next day, and it attacked the kikayon so that it withered. And it was when the sun shone that God designated a stifling east wind; the sun beat upon Yonah's head and he felt faint. He asked for his soul's death, and said, "Better is my death than life!"

And God said to Yonah, "Are you so deeply grieved over the kikayon?"

And he said, "I am grieved to death."

God said, "You took pity on the kikayon for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow; it lived one night and perished after one night. And I –

ויהי דבר ה' אל יונה בן אמתי לאמר: קום לך אל נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא עליה כי עלתה רעתם לפני: ויקם יונה לברח תרשישה מלפני ה' וירד יפו וימצא אניה באה תרשיש ויתן שכרה וירד בה לבוא עמהם תרשישה ... וה' הטיל רוח גדולה אל הים ויהי סער גדול בים והאניה חשבה להשבר:

וימן ה' דג גדול לבלע את יונה ויהי יונה במעי הדג שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות: ויתפלל יונה אל ה' א-להיו מומעי הדגה:

ויצא יונה מן העיר וישב מקדם לעיר ויעש לו שם סכה וישב תחתיה בצל עד אשר יראה מה יהיה בעיר: וימן ה' א-להים קיקיון ויעל מעל ליונה להיות צל על ראשו להציל לו מרעתו וישמח יונה על הקיקיון שמחה גדולה: וימן הא-להים תולעת בעלות השחר למחרת ותך את הקיקיון וייבש: והי כורח השמש וימן א-להים רוח קדים חרישית ותך השמש על ראש יונה ויתעלף וישאל את נפשו למות ויאמר טוב מותי מחיי: ויאמר א-להים אל יונה ההיטב חרה לך על הקיקיון ויאמר היטב חרה לי עד מות: ויאמר ה' אתה הסת על הקיקיון אשר לא עמלת בו ולא גדלתו שבן לילה היה ובן לילה אבד: ואני לא אחוס על נינוה העיר הגדולה אשר יש בה הרבה משתים עשרה רבו אדם אשר לא ידע בין ימינו לשמאלו ובהמה רבה:

shall I not take pity upon Nineveh the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left; and many animals as well?"

PART C. TESTS TO BUILD AND REFINE CHARACTER

Suffering and hardship often present us with a challenge to overcome. These challenges are part of Divine Providence that guides us toward actualizing our potential. By overcoming the trials that come our way, we discover hidden talents that might otherwise never surface. After overcoming the trial, an individual will also be equipped to help others who encounter similar circumstances, and to serve as a role model for others to follow.

1. Pirkei Avot 5:3 – Avraham (Abraham) was tested out of love.

Avraham Avinu was challenged by ten tests and overcame all of them. This teaches how great was Avraham Avinu's love of God.

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו ועמד בכלם
להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם אבינו:

2. Rabbi Ovadia Bartenua, Pirkei Avot 5:3 – The ten trials of Avraham.

The first [test of Avraham Avinu] was Ur Casdeem when Nimrod threw Avraham into a furnace; the second was having to leave his home and country; the third was the famine; the fourth was when Sarah was taken to Pharaoh; the fifth was the war with the Four Kings; the sixth was the Covenant Between the Parts, when Avraham was shown the exiles [that the Jewish people would undergo]; the seventh was circumcision; the eighth was when Sarah was taken to Avimelech; the ninth was the banishment of Hagar and Yishmael; the tenth was the sacrifice of Yitzchak.

אחד, אור כשדים, שהשליכו נמרוד לכבשן האש. שני, לך לך מארצך. שלישי, ויהי רעב. רביעי, ותוקח האשה בית פרעה. חמישי, מלחמת המלכים. שישי, מעמד בין הבתרים, שהראהו שעבוד מלכיות. שביעי, המילה. שמיני, וישלח אבימלך ויקח את שרה. תשיעי, גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה. עשירי, העקידה:

3. Ramban (Nachmanides), Bereishit 22:1 – All trials are for our benefit.

The matter of a test is based on a person's complete freedom of choice, for it is up to each person to decide whether or not he wants to do a certain action... God tests the person in order to bring potential into the realm of action. All of the tests in the Torah are for the benefit of the one being challenged.

ענין הנסיון הוא לדעתי, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה... המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל... והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנסה.

4. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 35b – The trials of poverty, wealth, and beauty were overcome by Hillel, Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsom, and Yosef respectively. These individuals serve as role models for others to follow.**

The Rabbis taught, “A poor person, a wealthy person and a wicked person come to Judgment. They ask the poor man, ‘Why did you not occupy yourself in Torah study?’ If he says, ‘I was poor and was busy with providing for my provisions,’ they respond to him, ‘Your poverty was nothing compared to that of Hillel’ ... They ask the wealthy person, ‘Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah study?’ If he says, ‘I was wealthy and was troubled with [managing] my assets,’ they respond to him, ‘Your wealth was nothing compared to that of Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsom’ ... They ask the wicked man, ‘Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah study?’ If he says, ‘I was handsome and was occupied with my desires,’ they respond to him, ‘Your beauty was nothing compared to that of Yosef...’” We find that Hillel obligates the poor, Rabbi Eliezer ben Charsom obligates the wealthy, and Yosef obligates the wicked.

תנו רבנן עני ועשיר ורשע באין לדין לעני אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר עני הייתי וטרוד במזונותי אומרים לו כלום עני היית יותר מהלל... עשיר אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר עשיר הייתי טרוד הייתי בנכסי אומרים לו כלום עשיר היית יותר מרבי אלעזר... רשע אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר נאה הייתי וטרוד ביצרי הייתי אומרים לו כלום נאה היית מיוסף... נמצא הלל מחייב את העניים רבי אלעזר בן חרסום מחייב את העשירים יוסף מחייב את הרשעים.

PART D. THE WORLD TO COME

Ultimately the essence of each Jew is the soul, which enjoys the reward from its labors in this world in the eternal World to Come. A righteous person may suffer in this world, but his reward awaits him in the World to Come. (See also the Morasha class on the World to Come.)

1. **Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 39b – There is no reward for mitzvot in this world.**

It is Rabbi Yaakov who taught, “There is no reward for mitzvot in this world.”

רבי יעקב היא, דאמר: שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא.

2. **Pirkei Avot 4:16 – Prepare yourself for the palace.**

Rabbi Yaakov said, “This world is compared to a corridor to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the corridor in order to enter the palace.”

רבי יעקב אומר העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס לטרקלין.

3. **Rambam , Hilchot Teshuvah 8:1-2 – The righteous are destined for the goodness of the World to Come.**

The goodness that awaits the righteous is the World to Come. This is life which has no death, and goodness which has no element of bad. This is the meaning of the verse “In order that it will be good for you and you will have length of days” (Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:7). We learn from tradition that

הטובה הצפונה לצדיקים, היא חיי העולם הבא; והם החיים שאין עימהן מוות, והטובה שאין עימה רעה. הוא שכתוב בתורה, “למען ייטב לך, והארכת ימים” (דברים כב,ז): מפני השמועה למדו “למען ייטב לך” לעולם שכולו טוב, “והארכת ימים” לעולם שכולו

“It will be good for you” in the world which is all good, and “You will have length of days” in a world which has no end. This is the World to Come.

The reward of the righteous is to merit this pleasantness and be part of this goodness. The punishment of the wicked is that they will not merit this life, but will be destroyed and die.

ארוך; וזה הוא העולם הבא.

שכר הצדיקים--הוא שיזכו לנועם זה, ויהיו בטובה זו; ופרעון הרשעים--הוא שלא יזכו לחיים אלו, אלא ייכרתו וימותו.

4. **Pirkei Avot 4:17 – This world is the place for good deeds, introspection, and personal growth; in the “World to Come” one reaps the reward.**

He used to say, “One hour of teshuvah and good deeds in this world is worth more than the entire World to Come, and one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come is better than the whole life of this world.”

הוא היה אומר יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה מכל חיי העולם הבא ויפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעולם הבא מכל חיי העולם הזה.

5. **Shemot Rabbah 52:3 – A person receives reward in the World to Come even for those deeds which he *intended* to accomplish, but was prevented from doing so by extenuating circumstances.**

It happened that when Rabbi Avahu left this world [he was despondent thinking that his accomplishments were limited]. Then when he saw all the good things that were prepared for him in the World to Come, he began to feel happy and said, “All these things are for Avahu?!”

מעשה בר' אבהו שהיה מסתלק מן העולם וראה כל הטוב שמתוקן לו לעולם הבא התחיל שמח ואמר כל אלין דאבהו!