

OPTIMISM

Background

One of the most famous concepts in Judaism is **גם זו לטובה**: whatever HASHEM does is for the best. This Gemara is one of the primary examples of that concept. In the story, a bad event seemed to have been slated to happen, and HASHEM saved Rebbe Akiva from it. Rebbe Akiva offered praise saying, "Everything that HASHEM does is for the best."

Questions

One of the basics of our belief system is that HASHEM controls everything, including the bandits and including whether they decide to go to this town or that one. Why must a person thank HASHEM for saving him when it is clear that HASHEM brought him to that point of danger?

What makes this Gemara even more difficult to understand is a comment that the Marhasha makes, "One must say that whatever HASHEM does is for the best, since it is possible that it is for the best." In other words, it is also possible that it isn't for the best.

1. How can it be that HASHEM would do something for ill?
2. What possible consolation is it to know that it might be for the good, when it might also be for ill?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ס/ב

לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד כי הא דרבי עקיבא דהוה קאזיל באורחא מטא לההיא מתא בעא אושפיזא לא יהבי ליה אמר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב אזל ובת בדברא והוה בהדיה תרנגולא וחרמא ושרגא אתא זיקא כבייה לשרגא אתא שונרא אכליה לתרנגולא אתא אריה אכליה לחמרא אמר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב ביה בליליא אתא גייסא שבייה למתא אמר להו לאו אמרי לכו כל מה שעושה הקדוש ברוך הוא הכל לטובה

A man should always be accustomed to saying, "Whatever HASHEM does is for the best," as did Rebbe Akiva. Once, when Rebbe Akiva was walking on the path, he arrived at a city and wanted to lodge for the night. Everyone refused to allow him to sleep there. He said, "Whatever HASHEM does is for the best."

He went and lay down in a field. He had with him a rooster, a candle, and a donkey. A wind came and blew out the candle. A cat came and ate the rooster. A lion came and ate the donkey. Rebbe Akiva said, "Whatever HASHEM does is for the best." That evening armed bandits came and captured the occupants of the city, taking them as slaves. In the morning, when Rebbe Akiva discovered this, he said, "Didn't I say to you, 'Whatever HASHEM does is for the best?'"

רש"י ברכות דף סא/א

הכל לטובה - אילו היה נר דלוק היה הגייס רואה אותי, ואילו היה החמור נוער או התרנגול קורא היה הגייס בא ושובה אותי

For the best: *If there had been a candle burning, the bandits would have seen it. Had the donkey brayed or the rooster called out, they would have heard and captured me as well.*

מהרש"א

כל מה שעושה הקדוש ברוך הוא הכל לטובה - אפשר דמן שמים עבדין ליה לטב

It is possible that from Heaven, they are doing this for the good.