

YOM KIPPUR

Questions

Nachum Ish Gam Zu was one of the greatest *tanaim* that ever lived. He was a man who spent his life doing good and only good. Whenever *Klal Yisroel* were in trouble, the *chachomim* asked him to represent them because he was accustomed to having miracles done for him. Here he was involved in some seemingly minor error - not getting off the donkey quickly enough - and he was punished so severely. It seems that the punishment is way out of proportion to his sin. After all, did he know the poor man was so weak that he would die in the time it took for him to come down from the donkey? His iniquity seems very slight, and the consequence very severe. How does the punishment fit the crime?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כא/א

אמרו עליו על נחום איש גם זו שהיה סומא משתי עיניו גידם משתי ידיו קיטע משתי רגליו וכל גופו מלא שחין והיה מוטל בבית רעוע ורגלי מטתו מונחין בספלין של מים כדי שלא יעלו עליו נמלים פעם אחת היתה מטתו מונחת בבית רעוע בקשו תלמידיו לפנות מטתו ואחר כך לפנות את הכלים אמר להם בניי פנו את הכלים ואחר כך פנו את מטתי שמובטח לכם שכל זמן שאני בבית אין הבית נופל פיננו את הכלים ואחר כך פיננו את מטתו ונפל הבית אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי וכי מאחר שצדיק גמור אתה למה עלתה לך כך אמר להם בניי אני גרמתי לעצמי שפעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך לבית חמי והיה עמי משוי שלשה חמורים אחד של מאכל ואחד של משתה ואחד של מיני מגדים בא עני אחד ועמד לי בדרך ואמר לי רבי פרנסני אמרתי לו המתן עד שאפרוק מן החמור לא הספקתי לפרוק מן החמור עד שיצתה נשמתו הלכתי ונפלתי על פניו ואמרתי עיני שלא חסו על עיניך יסומו ידדי שלא חסו על ידיך יתגדמו רגליי שלא חסו על רגליך יתקטעו ולא נתקררה דעתי עד שאמרתי כל גופי יהא מלא שחין אמרו לו אוי לנו שראינוך בכך אמר להם אוי לי אם לא ראיתוני בכך

They say about Nachum Ish Gam Zu that [at the end of his life] he was blind in both eyes, crippled in both hands, crippled in both legs, and his body was filled with sores. The legs of his bed were placed in buckets of water so that the ants wouldn't climb them [and onto him].

One time, he was lying on his bed in a very rickety house. His students requested to move him on his bed and then remove the vessels from the house. He said to them, "First remove the vessels, and then remove me. You are assured that as long as I am in the house, it won't fall." His students removed all of the vessels, then removed him, and only then did the house collapse.

They said to him, "Rebbe, since you are such a complete tzaddik, why did this condition befall you?" He answered, "My sons, I brought it upon myself. One time, I was travelling on the road to my father-in-law's house. I had with me three donkeys, one laden with food, one with drink, and the other with delicacies. A poor man stopped me in the road and said, 'Rebbe, support me.' I said to him, 'Wait until I get off my donkey.' Before I could get off my donkey, he passed away. I went and fell on his face and said, 'My eyes that didn't have mercy on your eyes should be blind. My hands that didn't have mercy on your hands should be lame. My legs that didn't have mercy on your legs should be crippled. I didn't become appeased until I said that my entire body should be filled with sores.'"

His students said to him, "Woe to us that we have to see you like this." He responded, "Woe to me if you didn't see me like this."