

## Session 10: Suffering in This World



If we accept that Hashem is very good at being Hashem, a thinking person must marvel at the variety and intensity of pain that He has created-and then ask themselves why it must be this way. The question of suffering is discussed at length in the *Mesillas Yescharim*. In this class Rabbi Shafier brings down the Ramchal's teachings to show us how suffering cannot make sense without an awareness of *Olam HaBa*. It's essential viewing for anyone who wishes to make sense of the darker side of life.

### ספר מסילת ישרים - פרק א

והנה על העיקר הזה העירונו זכרונם לברכה במדרש קהלת

### Mesilas Yescharim - Perek 1

Our sages roused us to this fundamental principle in Midrash Kohelet

שאמרו, זה לשונם: ראה את מעשה האלהים וגו'

saying: "*see the work of G-d..*"

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון, נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן  
ואמר לו

"when the Holy One, Blessed be He, created Adam, He took him and led him to pass before all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him:

ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחים הן, וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי  
'see how beautiful and excellent are my works. All that I have created, I have created for your sake.

תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי.

Be careful that you do not become corrupt and destroy My world."

One of the questions that a person really should ask himself at some point in life is, how good is Hashem at doing that which Hashem does? Okay. How good is Hashem, how capable is Hashem at doing that which Hashem does?

Now if you're not really sure about the answer to this question, I don't know just look at the stars, the moon, the sun, just look at basic biology textbooks, study a little bit of physics, study the complexity of this world and you'll see that Hashem is very, very capable and that Hashem is extraordinarily good at doing that which Hashem does.

And then it's time to ask the very next question and that is well, if that's true then why did Hashem create the human being, you and I, the way that Hashem created us?

And if you think about the fact that Hashem is clearly very, very capable, and if you study the human condition, I think you're going to quickly see quite a number of things that make zero sense whatsoever. Hashem designed man in a manner to allow him to suffer. But it wasn't just that Hashem created the human being with the capacity to suffer, it wasn't just that Hashem created pain receptor sites and it wasn't just that Hashem created entire human dimension of personality that causes me grief or sadness or unhappiness, it's that clearly Hashem designed very specific conditions and very unique situations that seem to serve one purpose, not to help man but to make man's life on the planet quite difficult.

As in things like pain and injuries, disease, illness, distress, emotional or psychological and if you study the different types of these conditions, you really should ask a question, let's deal with something basic. There are in the world things called diseases. Now Hashem again is clearly quite capable because if you study the immune system in man, you see it's phenomenally complex. Brilliantly created and yet with gaping holes in it and specific diseases that seem to be almost handcrafted, hand designed to penetrate those very holes, almost like there's a Swiss cheese, a hole that's so tiny, right there, and a specific disease that was crafted to penetrate that very opening.

And let's just focus on a couple of more obvious ones. The black plague, now the black plague is probably the deadly epidemic ever known to mankind. It really hit the three different time periods, the sixth century, the fourteenth century and the seventeenth centuries, we're talking about not just billions of people, we're talking about estimates of a third of European population just dying.

We're talking within a week, meaning to say you get the disease, you have about six days, seven days, two weeks at most and you're dead. But we're talking entire towns, villages, we're talking again, almost a third of the European population dying in one fell swoop and by the way you don't have to go that far back in history, if you look at something much more recent, we had something called the flu.

Now you and I get the flu and it's very uncomfortable and it really is, it's two weeks in bed and maybe more but in nineteen eighteen there was a worldwide pandemic, a flu epidemic that went from one part of the globe to the other and it took quite a few people with it, the estimates are somewhere about twenty million people.

In the four years of world war one, maybe nine million people died, the flu in one year wiped out twice as much, or more and when you begin studying the various diseases that Hashem created, I think it begs asking why.

There are communicable diseases, there are infectious diseases, there are bacterial diseases, there are viral diseases, there are genetic diseases, and all of them cause pain and discomfort and all of them cause very serious side effects. But it's not just diseases, there are entire systems, disorders, central nervous disorders, there's immune system disorders, autoimmune system disorders, urinating system disorders, there is an entire field of medicine. You know we call it medicine and we call it health, but really it's an entire field, dedicated to trying to alleviate the pain, the suffering that mankind goes through.

And let's just study sort of, let's call it the top diseases in the USA. Heart disease is a major, major issue, the biggest killer we have in this country. Stroke is next, lung cancer, diabetes, arthritis. Now arthritis serves no benefit whatsoever, if you have a pain in your knee and you find it very difficult to stand, if you find it very difficult to walk, it is not a pleasant situation.

When I was in Rochester, there was a man who I consider one of my friends and he was a great *tzaddik*, I really loved him as an individual but he suffered. He suffered tremendously. Towards the end of his life, he had very, very severe arthritis. I remember one *Yom Kippur*, I helped him up three steps in the *Yeshivah*, I think he suffered more pain in those three steps than I suffered my entire year and that is a very, very debilitating disease. But it's not just arthritis, there's Alzheimer's, there's a condray, a condrey of element, physical, there are all kinds of cancers, not just that there's one cancer, there's bone cancer, there's brain cancer, there's breast cancer,

there's cervical cancers, colon cancer, you have entire legions of diseases, of ailments, of illnesses, and they have great, great costs.

Heart diseases in the United States of America costs about six hundred and thirty thousand people a year die because of cancer, only about five hundred thousand. When you start dealing with the respiratory illnesses, you start dealing with stroke, when you start dealing with all of the rest of the issues, you see there's a plethora of physical ailments, each one unique, each one seemingly designed, specifically to attack a different area of the body, cause different types of pain, suffering and of course there is a whole different area called psychological/emotional distress and there are all kinds of states.

There's Asperger's, there's anorexia, there's autism, there's bipolar, there's anxiety, there's ADD, there's depression, there are all types of personality disorders. And when you realize that each of them was handcrafted, each of them was specifically designed and the human personality had to be created in a manner to allow for these issues, you begin to realize something doesn't add up, something doesn't make sense.

But I want to really bring this home with one specific point. The *Chovos Halevavos* tells us that if you'd imagine the most kindly, giving human being, you could ever picture. Imagine Avraham *Avinu* total overflowing love. Take that love multiply it ten thousand, ten thousand times, you don't begin to have an inkling to the love that Hashem has for every one of His creations. Not because I did anything, and not because I'm worthy, but because Hashem is the *metiv*, Hashem is the benefactor, Hashem is the giver and Hashem wants to share of His good, with the ultimate purpose in creation called man.

Yet, if you look out on the planet, you don't see all that much of that shining benefit. Let's discuss something called pain. Now pain comes in many different pains. There is acute pain and there's chronic pain, there's breakthrough pain and then there's bone pain. There's soft tissue pain, there's refer pain, there's phantom pain. Phantom pain when *rachmana litzlan* a person loses a limb, and they no longer have that limb yet they feel intense pain in that limb that's no longer there, that they no longer have, but the nervous system hasn't sort of learnt that yet and they feel intense burning or needles or extreme pain without even a cause.

And not only does pain come in different sort of methods, it's stabbing, aching or throbbing but it comes in many, many different degrees, from minimal or barely discomfort to unpleasant, to constant, to unmanageable to pain so severe that literally it causes a person not to be able to function, maybe even to die. And you could really describe pain in a very, very poetic almost way.

There's achy kind of pain, there's dull pain, there's raw pain, there's sharp pain, there's cutting, there's shooting, there's boring, there's throbbing, there's pounding, there's beating, there's pulsing. You could write poetry about all the different flavors and nuances of pain.

So here's the question, if Hashem is the *metiv*, the benefactor, if Hashem loves human beings, why did Hashem created pain? And don't tell me that pain helps, because it doesn't. Avoidance pain which teaches you to take your hand away from the hot pot, is processed in the spine. You see when you step on that sharp nail, if it took long enough for the neuropath ways to bring up that message to the thalamus and process it in the brain, the nail would be way through your foot and you'd be in big trouble.

Avoidance pain that teaches you to quickly move your foot away, move your hand away is processed in the spine. The pain that's debilitating, the pain that doesn't let you get out of bed in the morning, the pain that is totally wracking and totally consuming, is processed in the brain and does man no good whatsoever.

So here's the question: Why would a good, kindly, creator, create pain?

And maybe you'll tell me well, it's too punish the wicked and that'd be fine and well if only the evil people, if only the wicked people suffered, okay I get it. But that's not quite the reality. Let me share with you a study that Landset Magazine, a prestigious medical journal published.

They found that ninety five percent of all people on earth, ninety five percent, old, young, reporting, having some illness or injury every year. That means every year, any given year, ninety five percent of the population will have some type of illness or injury. But that's not the really scary part. One third of adults have five or more significant health problems. The last year they were able to gather the information from two thousand thirteen, but those were the statistics, one third of adults have five or more significant health problems in that year, and any given year.

But it gets even more frightening when you focus on the older spectrum of the population.

Twenty five percent of those eighty or older, reported having ten or more significant health complaints in the given year and nearly two thirds of people eight years or older had between five and nine.

Now when we mean significant health complications, that means really big deal stuff. From lower back pain, to neck pain, to migraine, to depression, to anxiety to schizophrenia, to issues that do not allow a human being to just simply enjoy life.

So if it's clear that ninety five percent of the population have at least one issue and different ages have far more, the question is gee golly why?

And not just that, it's clear that Hashem designed it and made it to be that way and the question is why?

And just for the fun of it, I would like to focus this question a little bit by really, really pointing out something that I consider eye-opening. When I was a kid, I spent many years I have a martial arts background, I spent many years in karate and I was a big fan of different people.

There was one fellow whose name was George Daleman. Now George Daleman was a very skilled, karate, martial artist. But George Daleman took himself very seriously, in fact a tad too seriously. You see he was a showman, the ultimate showman and he would put on various demonstrations, breaking first boards then bricks and then huge blocks of ice and eventually he ran out of something to top himself with.

So George decided he was going to put on the ultimate karate demonstration, he was going to fight a bear. Now you have to keep in mind the fact that obviously, a human being against a bear is not going to do too well, so George hired a circus bear, a trained bear and the trainer choreographed the fight scene with George. George was to duck, the bear was to swing wide and George was to hit the bear. And they choreographed the entire fight scene and the day of the demonstration, the curtain comes up, George steps out and the bear steps out to begin the battle.

Well as I mentioned, George took himself maybe a tad too seriously, he decided he wasn't going to go through the choreographed fight scene, he was going to actually knock the bear out.

The crowd has gathered, the bear swings wide and George ducks and George hauls off boom, smashes the bear full force in the chest. Now needless to say George did not succeed in knocking the bear out, but he did manage to get the bear angry, so angry that had the trainer not somehow stopped the bear, George wouldn't have been there at the end of that demonstration.

Because you see a bear is six hundred pounds of muscle, I don't care what rank, black belt you are, you cannot fight against a bear. So here's the question, clearly Hashem is capable of creating a bear that's mighty and strong, why didn't Hashem put me, the same I whom am talking to you, into a body that's powerful, mighty?

Have you ever been in the winter, shivering to the bone? I want you to think about the polar bear. The polar bear will cut a hole in the ice with its paw, go in for a dip in the frigid water. Come up and then sun itself in the arctic negative forty degree temperature.

The bear doesn't get cold because the bear is mighty, the bear has a layer of blubber under its skin and the bear is well equipped for life. Why didn't Hashem make us like that, mighty and strong, never to get cold?

When I walk by and a nail is sticking by, my skin rips open. That doesn't happen to most animals in the wild. Most animals in the wild are built rugged, are built sturdy. Why didn't Hashem make the human being that way?

And while we're asking questions, let's extend this a little bit. The next time you're in the dentist's chair, I want you to think about the shark. Why the shark? Because that mighty hunter of the sea, has twenty five rows of teeth so that when one of its teeth has a problem, the next one just pops it out and it comes in a new tooth.

Why didn't Hashem make the human being with twenty five rows of teeth so that when I have a wisdom tooth problem, pop, the next one comes in, pops it out and we're good to go?

And when you begin looking about the wild kingdom, you see many, many features that Hashem gave to all the very different animals, but didn't give it to man. And why not?

Laslos Gaslov who was a biochemist for the national institute of health, made an interesting discovery. He found that the African Claude Frog, didn't get diseased. He was performing surgeries on these frogs and he put them into the bacteria filled murky water and they never got an infection. He discovered the way, the body of this African Claude Frog, has a certain substance that it secretes that kills every known bacteria. The African Claude Frog does not get sick because it has an immune system that's impervious to bacteria.

Before penicillin, one of the greatest killers of man was bacteria and even now it causes quite a bit of havoc. Why didn't Hashem give that to the human being? Hashem is clearly capable, Hashem did this for all the various animals of the wild, why didn't Hashem take all the different features, all the different strengths, put them together in making the pinnacle called man, the purpose of all of creation is man anyway, why not take all the wonders, everything in the wild kingdom, make a super man and let man enjoy his stay on the planet?

And while we're asking questions, let's ask one more. If you exercise regularly, you're familiar with the fact that there's something called 'runners high'. After a vigorous, intense exercise session, usually forty five minutes into it or so, after a certain while, your body begins secreting different hormones, different neurochemicals and there's a certain sense of euphoria. It will usually begin maybe an hour, hour and a half after the workout and you have this sort of sense of wow, you just feel wholesome and happy.

Now scientists study what brings this about. There's a very specific set of neurotransmitters that the body secretes during exercise. The thalamus, that part of the brain that's receptive to this, receives that message and the sense of aah, washes over man.

Now here's the question, clearly Hashem is capable of creating these neurotransmitters, clearly Hashem made the thalamus, why didn't Hashem just give the human being a much more sensitive thalamus, why didn't He just create many more of these neurotransmitter cells so that the human being can be awash in pleasure all day long.

Imagine I wake up in the morning, stretch, aaah, a healthy dose of those neurotransmitters pass through my body. I drink my first glass of orange juice, a new set of euphoria comes upon me. If Hashem can create it and Hashem did create it, why not give it in greater abundance to man?

And at the risk of being irreverent, I do believe that if I were given the mission of creating man, I could do a much better job than Hashem did. And excuse my being just that irreverent but imagine a *bas kol* comes out, imagine a powerful voice from heaven Shafer go, I was sent from Hashem, what what? I was sent to tell you, you don't like the way Hashem made man, go ahead, you make man.

Okay so I've got my mandate, I get to choose whatever feature I want, and I get to make man.

My man would be powerful like the polar bear, my man would go weeks without needing water like the camel. My man would have super hearing like the bat, my man would have such a powerful neurotransmitter system that he'd be awash in constant joy. Oh and another couple of things, you know that thing called envy? Not in my man, didn't do man any good. That thing called jealousy? Forget it, I wiped that part out altogether. Anger, nah I don't think so.

I would create a super man. And the reason why this question isn't irreverent, the reason why this question is very relevant is because it underscores a very specific purpose and that is that Hashem is quite capable and yet Hashem created man exactly as Hashem created man. Incredibly dependent, incredibly weak, incredibly susceptible to diseases and pain and various situations. And the *Mesilas Yesharim* explains that no thinking person, no intelligent human being could ever believe that Hashem would have created the human being for his condition on this world only.

Because if Hashem created us for this world and it ends in the grave, when Elsie the cow dies and her *nefesh* evaporates, imagine that the same things happens to you and I. if that were true, then there are so many features in the human being that Hashem never would have created.

But you see the way the *Mesilas Yesharim* phrases it is very important to recognize and I want to read to you the words, “*vutireh bu’emes*” you’ll see in truth, “*shelo yuchal shum bal sechel*” no intelligent person could possibly believe that the purpose of man’s creation is for his station in this world alone because what is man’s station in this world? How many years does he live and who is it that’s really happy? Who is it that’s really satisfied?

“*yumei shnosenu bohem shivim shanah*” a man lives seventy years, “*vu’im bigvuros shmonim shanah*” maybe eighty years and most of his days are pain, issues, troubles and strife. With so many different types of suffering, so many different types of *tirdus*, of worries and after all of that, death.

Explains the *Mesilas Yesharim*, the human condition screams out that Hashem had a much greater purpose. He says, don’t you realize, look at your body, look at your situation and you’ll

quickly see the greatest proof in the world to the fact that Hashem created you for a much bigger purpose and it has nothing to do with this world.

This world is the corridor, this is the gym. We're put here to grow and to accomplish many, many situations were given to us specifically to challenge us, many situations are not for our benefit, many situations don't help us, here. But they sure do shape me as a person. They sure do challenge me as a human being, they sure do force me to make choices, to either transcend and grow or to shrivel up. But chose I must.

And when you study the human condition, what you quickly see is, it's impossible for Hashem to have created the human being for his stay in this world because all of the things we see, would not be there.

And I'd like to share with you what I consider a very, very critical observation. If an atheist were to ask me advice, imagine our local atheist were to ask me for advice, I would tell him one thing, I would say Sir, if you'd listen to me, I would suggest to you that you climb to a very high building and immediately jump off. I highly recommend that you end your life now. Why? Because let's face it guy, your life makes no sense.

You're gonna suffer pain, poverty, illness, disease, issues, troubles, why go through it. How much pleasure do you really have? How much fun really is life? Okay, I know that life has moments, and life is beautiful but at the end of the day if you hit the grave and it's over and there is no purpose, what are you living for and what are you going through all this troubles and issues and worries for? Most of your time on the planet is not going to be spent in pleasures upon pleasures. Most of your time on the planet is going to be working and dealing and troubles and

issues and interspersed in that will be good times. But the vast majority of your life isn't that way.

Now if you understand that there's a much greater purpose, if you understand that this is the gym and you understand you're here to grow and accomplish and you understand that every single situation in life really isn't relevant, they're but the staged settings to allow me to become the great human being I could become, then life fundamentally makes sense. Certainly .life is worth leading and I make sense of my existence.

But if you do not understand that there's a world to come, then my suggestion to you is jump, end it. There's no point anyway. And the only reason why our local atheist doesn't jump is because he's not really thinking, he's not really challenging himself, he's not really being critically intellectually, honest.

And I love it when they get philosophical, oh I'm doing it for the children, for the next generation, I work very hard, I make that money, I spend that money, I make that money, I spend that money. It's true There's very little purpose to my existence but I'm leaving a legacy to the next generation so that they can work so hard, make that money, spend that money, make that money, spend that money and they and die. So that they can leave it to their children so that they could work, spend that money, make that money spend that money, then they die.

It's purposeless, it's folly, it's foolish, find a roof and jump.

And again, the only reason why our local atheist doesn't jump is because he's not really thinking. Because the *Mesilas Yesharim* is telling us that any thinking person will immediately recognize, life makes zero sense. If the corridor which I'm in now is the end all and be all, jump because it

doesn't really benefit you. What are you living for? What's the point of it, suffering and pain and issues and troubles and what do you gain from it? Zero. Nothing.

And when you're done, you're dead. So why go through it? And this point is not just a philosophical point, it underscores everything that you're ever going to go through. Do you know what the most painful, painful thing in life is, to suffer when there's no purpose. To suffer and go through things that have no rationale, no reason. And if you don't understand that there's a world to come, you're going to suffer needlessly, you're going to suffer pains and troubles and issues and it's every imaginable disease and every imaginable pain and every imaginable trouble because we all have stuff.

And if there's no world to come, my goodness, it's meaningless, empty, purposeless.

And I think the point that the *Mesilas Yesharim* is saying to us is very, very clear. Sometimes it's hard to relate to the world to come. Maybe I don't see it so clearly. Look at your life. Look at your existence, it screams out the world to come. And if I recognize that Hashem is loving and kindly and I recognize that I'm in pain, oh my goodness, clearly it's worth it. More than I love me, Hashem loves me. More than I feel my pain, Hashem feels my pain and yet I have to go through this oh my goodness, what it must be worth. What's awaiting me and this world if you understand it, if you focus, is the greatest *mussar* lesson in the world to prove the world to come. It's the greatest demonstration of the value of the world to come because if Hashem is the most kindly, loving, giving, benefactor and there is so many diseases and illnesses and pains and issues, know and understand there is a grand purpose, a much, much bigger purpose, lofty and way, way above anything in this world.

And when you understand this, life itself fundamentally makes sense and if you don't, nothing makes sense whatsoever.

Focusing, thinking, putting the brain on on is something that we human beings don't do. A person can spend his entire life never dealing with this issue, why did Hashem make me the way Hashem made me? Why are there pain receptors? Why is my skin sensitive? Why do I get sunburns and headaches and stomach aches and cramps, what, who needs this?

And explains the *Mesilas Yesharim*, you need it. You may not understand the exact answers, you may not understand exactly why now, but the more you focus on it, the more you'll see that Hashem didn't create us for this world. This is the passageway, this is the hallway, we go through it quickly and we're done and then forever, for eternity, I am what I shape myself into.

When you understand this fundamentally, life makes sense. When you understand this, you wake up in the morning with a sense of zeal, with energy, let's go. Even though I know that there are going to be troubles, even though I know that there are going to be issues and problems, it doesn't matter, it's more than just worth it, life fundamentally is precious, is beautiful.

But more than anything, the *Mesilas Yesharim* is explaining to us, when you study the human condition, you see the world to come clearly in front of you, but you have to put the brain on on, you have to think. When you do that, you see the majesty, the beauty of this, Hashem's world, you understand maybe not with total clarity, but you understand the general picture and you have to greatest proof to the fact that Hashem created us for a much greater purpose, not for this world but for our purpose in the world to come.