



Accepting *Yisurim* – *Chodesh Elul*

As we enter the *Yemei haRachamim*, it is time to reflect upon our spiritual condition and our relationship with Hashem. These days are dedicated to *Teshuva* and *Selichos*.

Looking back on the past year, both as a community and as individuals, we see a mix of blessings and challenges. While we've been fortunate in multiple ways, we have also faced significant *Yisurim*. *Klal Yisrael* has endured many painful blows in 5784, and many of us have struggled with personal hardships.

With the *Yemei Din* approaching, we should remember the role of *Yisurim* in our lives. These trials can cleanse us of our sins, potentially leading to mercy and atonement.

First, we must understand that all suffering occurs for a reason. *Chazal* teach us, "A person does not hurt even his finger below unless it is decreed from upon High" (*Chulin* 7b). This means that every instance of *Yisurim*, no matter how fleeting, is carefully measured in *Shamayim* and serves a purpose. Even if we forget our past struggles, God remembers them. The Gemara elaborates upon this concept (*Arachin* 16b):

What is the extent of [what can be deemed] Yisurim? R' Elazar said: Anybody for whom a garment was woven but it does not fit him. Rava Ze'ira asked – some say it was R' Shmuel bar Nachmeni: [Chaza"l] said that [the definition of Yisurim] goes further: Even if they intended to dilute [his wine] with hot water but diluted it with cold water or [they intended to] dilute his wine with cold water but diluted with hot water. And you say all this?¹ Mar brei d'Ravina said: Even if his cloak turned inside out.² Rava [said] – some say it was R' Chisda, some say it was R' Yitzchak, and some say it was taught in a Braisa – that [Yisurim are] even when a person puts his hand into his pocket to take out three [coins] and he only withdraws two.

These seemingly trivial nuisances, which are minor inconveniences, are also classified as *Yisurim* and have been ordained by Hashem.

Yisurim in this world provide more effective *Kaparas Avonos* (atonement) than punishment in the next world, *Chalila*. The *Gra* once told a student who studied the descriptions of the terrible punishments of *Gehinom*, *Lo Alenu*, in the *Sefer Reishis*

¹ *I.e.*, that it is considered suffering only if the garment that he ordered does not fit?

² *Rashi* explains that he has to remove the garment to turn it inside out and put it on again.

Chochma that while everything stated in the Sefer is true, even a small measure of *Yisurim* in this world achieves a great deal of atonement in the next, significantly reducing the punishment that one would receive.

This is also evident in the comments of the *Ben Yehoyada* to *Ta'anis* 8a. He extols one who accepts *Yisurim* with equanimity and does not lash out or resent them. Of course, man cannot naturally rejoice in *Yisurim*, but understanding that the trials are only temporary and shield us from greater hardships in the future can lead to acceptance. With this perspective, a person can find contentment even amid *Yisurim*.

In his Sefer "*Sha'arei haYamim haNora'im*", R' Yehuda Chesner asserts that a person can find particular contentment or joy in his daily difficulties by being cognizant of the reduction of his punishment in the next world. *Yisurim* can be viewed as "*Tashlumin*", a series of small payments that pay off a large debt.

When a person experiences particularly difficult *Yisurim*, he should not judge himself harshly for occasionally feeling that the burden is too much to bear and that he cannot tolerate them any longer. It is important to recognize that these feelings are not a lack of *Emuna*, *Chas v'Shalom*. The pain is real and at times overwhelming, and it is natural to feel despair. However, as a believing Jew, he should find moments – perhaps once daily – to reflect on Hashem's kindness in granting life and other blessings. This practice can cultivate acceptance and even love for his *Yisurim*.

Perhaps he could say to himself: "I have already suffered these *Yisurim* and they have now passed. I thank Hashem that He has granted me the possibility to atone for my sins. May He grant me future opportunities for atonement, but not through *Yisurim*."³

It is important to internalize the belief that at every moment that a Jew is in pain, the *Shechina* stands with him and suffers together with him. This is stated in the *Mishna* in *Sanhedrin* (6:5): "R' Meir said: When a person is in distress, what does the *Shechina* say, so to speak? 'My head hurts, my arm hurts'."

R' Chaim Volozhin (*Nefesh haChaim* 2:11) expresses a truly uplifting idea regarding Tefila due to *Yisurim*:

The Halacha is stated in the Gemara that an individual is permitted to add something new to his Tefila regarding his own needs or distress, each Bracha according to its subject. However, even this Tefila should not be mainly directed at his distress. This is not the correct approach for those whose hearts are upright. For, in truth, it is greatly surprising: how may a person supplicate Hashem at all to take away his pain and Yisurim? In the case of medical care, a

³ This is similar to the Tefila that we recite in *Krias Shema al haMita* [Editor's note: and in *Viduy* on *Yom Kippur*.]

physician may make a patient drink strong medications, or, in some cases, he may need to amputate one of his limbs so that an infection does not spread the disease further. Would the patient beg the physician not to make him drink the medication or not to amputate the limb? The patient hired him to do exactly that! Likewise, how can a person pour out his heart in prayer to Hashem to remove his Yisurim? They are nothing more than a bandage and life-giving medication to atone for his sins! As Chazal say, "There are no Yisurim without sin" (Shabbos 55a). If not for them, how could a sinful soul be atoned for?

This should be the direction of his Tefila. It should be for the needs of Heaven. For there is Chilul Hashem when the Jewish people are in distress. People will say, "This is the nation of God yet they are afflicted and beaten". We are obligated to Daven and pour out our Tefilos to Hashem over the disgrace to His name. We should only act for the sake of His name. And even when it is an individual [praying] due to his distress – though there is no Chilul Hashem in the matter – there is still a basis for Davening to Hashem due to the great distress in Heaven when a person is in distress on Earth.

With this, we can suggest an additional explanation of Chazal's statement, "Whoever Davens on account of his fellow and he also needs that matter – he will be answered first." "His fellow" can also mean Hashem, so to speak... When a person has pain and Yisurim, Hashem is also distressed. In that situation, it is proper for a person to direct his Tefilos to the pain of the holy Shechina that is in distress. This way, his Tefila will be more readily accepted... "Whoever Davens on account of his fellow – namely, the Shechina – he will be answered first. Hashem will remove his Yisurim and then the Shechina will no longer be in distress."