*****Ancient Texts Modern Dilemmas***

**The World is Suffering is it Our Fault**

Rabbi Sammy Bergman- [sbergman@torontotorah.com](mailto:sbergman@torontotorah.com)

1. **Rabbi Natan Slifkin, Why Did God Send The Coronavirus?**

<http://www.rationalistjudaism.com/2020/04/why-did-god-send-coronavirus.html>

So, following Rambam's approach to the Destruction, here we would say similarly. There's no need to view it as a punishment, in the popular understanding of the concept, but rather to see the consequences of ignoring God's laws of the universe. We've learned, the hard way, that we need to be better planned for the future. And we've learned, the hard way, that we need to care much more about advances in medical science.

1. **Rabbi Shomo Aviner, What is Coronovirus a Punishment for?**

**Kipa.col.il**

We don’t know. We don’t have prophets. No one knows.

**Biblical and Talmudic Perspectives**

1. **Devarim Chapter 28:15-20**

טו וְהָיָה, אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֺתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם--וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, וְהִשִּׂיגוּךָ. טז אָרוּר אַתָּה, בָּעִיר; וְאָרוּר אַתָּה, בַּשָּׂדֶה. יז אָרוּר טַנְאֲךָ, וּמִשְׁאַרְתֶּךָ. יח אָרוּר פְּרִי-בִטְנְךָ, וּפְרִי אַדְמָתֶךָ--שְׁגַר אֲלָפֶיךָ, וְעַשְׁתְּרֹת צֹאנֶךָ. יט אָרוּר אַתָּה, בְּבֹאֶךָ; וְאָרוּר אַתָּה, בְּצֵאתֶךָ. כ יְשַׁלַּח יְהוָה בְּךָ אֶת-הַמְּאֵרָה אֶת-הַמְּהוּמָה, וְאֶת-הַמִּגְעֶרֶת, בְּכָל-מִשְׁלַח יָדְךָ, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה--עַד הִשָּׁמֶדְךָ וְעַד-אֲבָדְךָ מַהֵר, מִפְּנֵי רֹעַ מַעֲלָלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עֲזַבְתָּנִי.

But if you do not obey the LORD your God to observe faithfully all His commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect: Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock. Cursed shall you be in your comings and cursed shall you be in your goings. The LORD will let loose against you calamity, panic, and frustration in all the enterprises you undertake, so that you shall soon be utterly wiped out because of your evil doing in forsaking Me.

1. **Talmud, Berachot 5a**

אָמַר רָבָא, וְאִיתֵּימָא רַב חִסְדָּא: אִם רוֹאֶה אָדָם שֶׁיִּסּוּרִין בָּאִין עָלָיו — יְפַשְׁפֵּשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׂיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״נַחְפְּשָׂה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחְקֹרָה וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד ה׳״. פִּשְׁפֵּשׁ וְלֹא מָצָא — יִתְלֶה בְּבִטּוּל תּוֹרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״אַשְׁרֵי הַגֶּבֶר אֲשֶׁר תְּיַסְּרֶנּוּ יָּהּ וּמִתּוֹרָתְךָ תְלַמְּדֶנּוּ״. וְאִם תָּלָה וְלֹא מָצָא — בְּיָדוּעַ שֶׁיִּסּוּרִין שֶׁל אַהֲבָה הֵם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהַב ה׳ יוֹכִיחַ.

Rava, and some say Rav Ḥisda, said: If a person sees that suffering has befallen him, he should examine his actions. Generally, suffering comes about as punishment for one’s transgressions, as it is stated: “We will search and examine our ways, and return to God” (Lamentations 3:40). If he examined his ways and found no transgression for which that suffering is appropriate, he may attribute his suffering to dereliction in the study of Torah. God punishes an individual for dereliction in the study of Torah in order to emphasize the gravity of the issue, as it is stated: “Happy is the man whom You punish, Lord, and teach out of Your law” (Psalms 94:12). This verse teaches us that his suffering will cause him to return to Your law. And if he did attribute his suffering to dereliction in the study of Torah, and did not find this to be so, he may be confident that these are afflictions of love, as it is stated: “For whom the Lord loves, He rebukes, as does a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:12).

1. **Talmud, Shabbat 55a-55b (Translation adapted from Davidson Edition)**

אָמַר רַב אַמֵּי: אֵין מִיתָה בְּלֹא חֵטְא, וְאֵין יִסּוּרִין בְּלֹא עָוֹן. אֵין מִיתָה בְּלֹא חֵטְא — דִּכְתִיב: ״הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחוֹטֵאת הִיא תָמוּת בֵּן לֹא יִשָּׂא בַּעֲוֹן הָאָב וְאָב לֹא יִשָּׂא בַּעֲוֹן הַבֵּן צִדְקַת הַצַּדִּיק עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה וְרִשְׁעַת הָרָשָׁע עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה וְגוֹ׳״. אֵין יִסּוּרִין בְּלֹא עָוֹן — דִּכְתִיב: ״וּפָקַדְתִּי בְשֵׁבֶט פִּשְׁעָם וּבִנְגָעִים עֲוֹנָם״. …מֵיתִיבִי: אַרְבָּעָה מֵתוּ בְּעֶטְיוֹ שֶׁל נָחָשׁ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: בִּנְיָמִין בֶּן יַעֲקֹב, וְעַמְרָם אֲבִי מֹשֶׁה, וְיִשַׁי אֲבִי דָוִד, וְכִלְאָב בֶּן דָּוִד. …מַנִּי? אִילֵּימָא תַּנָּא דְמַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת, וְהָא אִיכָּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן! אֶלָּא לָאו, רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר הִיא. וּשְׁמַע מִינַּהּ יֵשׁ מִיתָה בְּלֹא חֵטְא וְיֵשׁ יִסּוּרִין בְּלֹא עָוֹן, וּתְיוּבְתָּא דְרַב אַמֵּי — תְּיוּבְתָּא.

There is no death without sin, as it is written: “The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20) And there is no suffering without iniquity, as it is written: “Then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with strokes” (Psalms 89:33).…The Gemara raises an objection from what was taught in the following baraita: Four people died due to Adam’s sin with the serpent, in the wake of which death was decreed upon all of mankind, although they themselves were free of sin. And they are: Benjamin, son of Jacob; Amram, father of Moses; Yishai, father of David; and Kilab, son of David…The Gemara now clarifies the matter: Who is the tanna of the baraita that states that four people did not die due to their own sins? If you say that it is the tanna who taught the conversation between the ministering angels and God, it is difficult, as weren’t there also Moses and Aaron who did not die due to their own sins? Rather, it must be Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar, who holds that even Moses and Aaron died because of their own sins. Learn from it then that, in principle, he agrees that there is death without sin and there is suffering without iniquity, and this is a conclusive refutation of the opinion of Rav Ami. The Gemara concludes: Indeed, it is a conclusive refutation.

1. **Talmud Chagiga 4b (Davidson Edition Translation)**

רב יוסף כי מטי להאי קרא בכי: ויש נספה בלא משפט אמר: מי איכא דאזיל בלא זמניה? - אין, כי הא דרב ביבי בר אביי הוה שכיח גביה מלאך המות. אמר ליה לשלוחיה: זיל אייתי לי מרים מגדלא שיער נשייא. אזל אייתי ליה מרים מגדלא דרדקי. אמר ליה: אנא מרים מגדלא שיער נשייא אמרי לך! - אמר ליה: אי הכי אהדרה! - אמר ליה: הואיל ואייתיתה - ליהוי למניינא.

When Rav Yosef reached this verse, he cried: “But there are those swept away without justice” (Proverbs 13:23). He said: Is there one who goes before his time and dies for no reason? The Gemara answers: Yes, like this incident of Rav Beivai bar Abaye, who would be frequented by the company of the Angel of Death and would see how people died at the hands of this angel. The Angel of Death said to his agent: Go and bring me, i.e., kill, Miriam the raiser, i.e., braider, of women’s hair. He went, but instead brought him Miriam, the raiser of babies. The Angel of Death said to him: I told you to bring Miriam, the raiser of women’s hair. His agent said to him: If so, return her to life. He said to him: Since you have already brought her, let her be counted toward the number of deceased people.

**Medieval Perspectives**

1. **Rabbeinu Chananel on Chagiga 4b**

ויש מי שאומר כענין חלום ראה דברים הללו. ולא עוד אלא רב ביבי בן אביי היה מתעסק בראיית השדים לפיכך יש לומר כדרך הזה ראה ואין סומכין עליו ופתרון יש נספה בלא וגו' כגון אדם שהרג חבירו.

There are those who say that he saw these things in a dream. Not only this but Rabbi Bibi the san of Abaye dealt with demons and therefore one can suggest he saw this vision in that way. We don’t rely on him.

1. **Rambam, Guide of the Perplexed 3:17**

Another fundamental principle taught by the Law of Moses is this: Wrong cannot be ascribed to God in any way whatever; all evils and afflictions as well as all kinds of happiness of man, whether they concern one individual person or a community, are distributed according to justice; they are the result of strict judgment that admits no wrong whatever. Even when a person suffers pain in consequence of a thorn having entered into his hand, although it is at once drawn out, it is a punishment that has been inflicted on him [for sin], and the least pleasure he enjoys is a reward [for some good action]; all this is meted out by strict justice; as is said in Scripture, "all his ways are judgment" (Deut. 32:4); we are only ignorant of the working of that judgment….

We, however, believe that all these human affairs are managed with justice; far be it from God to do wrong, to punish any one unless the punishment is necessary and merited. It is distinctly stated in the Law, that all is done in accordance with justice; and the words of our Sages generally express the same idea. They clearly say: **"There is no death without sin, no sufferings without transgression."**

1. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah Laws of Fasts Chapter 1 (translation by Rabbi Francis Nataf)**

וְדָבָר זֶה מִדַּרְכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה הוּא. שֶׁבִּזְמַן שֶׁתָּבוֹא צָרָה וְיִזְעֲקוּ עָלֶיהָ וְיָרִיעוּ יֵדְעוּ הַכּל שֶׁבִּגְלַל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם הָרָעִים הוּרַע לָהֶן כַּכָּתוּב (ירמיה ה כה) "עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִטּוּ" וְגוֹ'. וְזֶה הוּא שֶׁיִּגְרֹם לָהֶם לְהָסִיר הַצָּרָה מֵעֲלֵיהֶם:

אֲבָל אִם לֹא יִזְעֲקוּ וְלֹא יָרִיעוּ אֶלָּא יֹאמְרוּ דָּבָר זֶה מִמִּנְהַג הָעוֹלָם אֵרַע לָנוּ וְצָרָה זוֹ נִקְרָה נִקְרֵית. הֲרֵי זוֹ דֶּרֶךְ אַכְזָרִיּוּת וְגוֹרֶמֶת לָהֶם לְהִדַּבֵּק בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם הָרָעִים. וְתוֹסִיף הַצָּרָה צָרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת. הוּא שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה (ויקרא כו כז) "וַהֲלַכְתֶּם עִמִּי בְּקֶרִי" (ויקרא כו כח) "וְהָלַכְתִּי גַּם אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם בַּחֲמַת קֶרִי". כְּלוֹמַר כְּשֶׁאָבִיא עֲלֵיכֶם צָרָה כְּדֵי שֶׁתָּשׁוּבוּ אִם תֹּאמְרוּ שֶׁהִיא קֶרִי אוֹסִיף לָכֶם חֲמַת אוֹתוֹ קֶרִי:

And this thing is from the ways of repentance. For when a trouble comes and they yell out about it and sound [trumpets], everyone will know that it was because of their evil deeds that this bad was done to them. As it is stated (Jeremiah 5:25), "It is your iniquities that have diverted, etc." And this is what will cause them to remove the trouble from upon them.

But if they do not cry out and sound [trumpets], but rather say, "What has happened to us is the way of the world, and this trouble is merely happenstance" — **it is surely the way of cruelty**, and it causes them to stick to their bad deeds. And the trouble will add other troubles. About this is it written in the Torah (Leviticus 26: 27-28), "but walk arbitrarily with Me. Then I will (also) walk arbitrarily with you in fury." That is to say, "When I will bring upon you troubles — if you will say that it is arbitrary, I will increase the fury of this arbitrariness."

1. **Maharal, Baur Hagolah Chapter 4**

זה כי לא דברו חכמים מהטבע כי בודאי שיש טבע מחייב את הרעשה כמו שמבואר בספרי הטבע, אבל חכמים לא יביטו אל הטבע, ודעתם כי אף כי יש טבע פועלת, מכל מקום מן השם יתברך התחייב הטבע. ודבר זה הוא בכל הנבראים, שאין ספק כי הטבע פועל יצירת האדם כאשר ידוע, מכל מקום אין ראוי שיהיה נתלה הדבר בטבע בלבד כ"א בשם יתברך

**Modern Perspectives**

1. **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Sermon for Vayechi 1991**

ובנדון–דידן: השמדת ששה מליון יהודים באכזריות הכי גדולה ונוראה – שואה איומה שלא היתה (ולא תהיה רחמנא–לצלן) דוגמתה במשך כל הדורות – לא יכולה להיות בתור עונש על עונות, שכן, אפילו השטן עצמו לא יוכל למצוא חשבת עונות בדור ההוא שיהיה בו כדי להצדיק ח"ו עונש חמור כזה, אין לנו שום הסבר וביאור כלל וכלל על השואה. אין לנו שום הסבר וביאור (ע"פ חכמת התורה) כלל וכלל על השואה, כי–אם רק ידיעת העובדה ש"כך עלה במחשבה לפני", ואשר "גזירה היא מלפני" … ובודאי ובודאי לא ההסבר דעונש על עונות.

An in our case, the murder of six million Jews in the greatest and cruelty, a horrific Holocaust that had no precedent (and will not happen again May the Merciful Save us) throughout all the generations- can’t be a punishment for sins, for the Satan himself couldn’t find a calculation of sins in that generation to justify Heaven forbid such a punishment. We have no explanation at all for the Holocaust. We have no explanation or reason (based on Torah wisdom at all for the Holocaust, rather we just know that “this was the thought that ascended in front of Me”, and that “it’s decree in front of me” and certainly not a punishment for sins.

1. **Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, Kol Dodi Dofek pg. 8, Translated by David Z. Gordon**

We do not wonder about the ineffable ways ‎of the Holy One, but ‎instead ponder the paths man must take when evil leaps up at him. We ask ‎not about the reason ‎for evil and its purpose, but rather about its rectification and uplifting. How ‎should a man react in a ‎time of distress? What should a person do so as not to rot in his affliction?‎ The halakhic answer to this question is very simple. Suffering comes to elevate man, to purify ‎his ‎spirit and sanctify him, to cleanse his mind and purify it from the chaff of superficiality and ‎the ‎dross of crudeness; to sensitize his soul and expand his horizons. In general, the purpose ‎of ‎suffering is to repair the imperfection in man’s persona. The halakhah teaches us that an ‎afflicted ‎person commits a criminal act if he allows his pain to go for naught and to remain without ‎meaning ‎or purpose. Suffering appears in the world in order to contribute something to man, in ‎order to ‎atone for him, in order to redeem him from moral impurity, from crudeness and lowliness ‎of spirit. ‎The sufferer must arise there from, purified, refined, and cleansed.

1. **Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, Aish Kodesh Parshat Hachodesh 1942**

But as was mentioned before He may He be blessed is in the inner chambers and crying, and someone who pushes inside and goes close to Him with Torah cries there with the Holy One Blessed Be He and learns Torah with Him. This is the difference. The crying and the pain that a person experiences by themselves can cripple them until they are incapable of doing anything. But the crying he cries with the Holy One Blessed Be He together strengthens him. He cries and is strengthened, is broken and gathers the courage to learn and serve.