

# When God Silenced Moshe:

## The Problem of Evil in Jewish Thought

### 1. Babylonian Talmud, Menaḥot 29b

[Moshe] said before God: Master of the Universe, You have shown me [Rabbi Akiva's] Torah, now show me his reward. God said to him: Return. Moshe went back and saw that they were weighing Rabbi Akiva's flesh in a butcher shop. Moshe said before Him: Master of the Universe, this is Torah and this is its reward? God said to him: Be silent! This is my decree.

### 2. The Problem of Evil

- P1. An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists.
- P2. Evil (or bad things) exist that should be prevented by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God.
- ∴ An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God cannot exist.

ANSWER 1A: DENY EVIL – IT IS JUSTICE

### 3. Deuteronomy 11:16–17

<sup>16</sup>Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. <sup>17</sup>For the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning you.

### 4. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b

Due to what reason was the First Temple destroyed? Due to three reasons: idolatry, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. ... But then why was the Second Temple destroyed, given that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, *mitzvot*, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause.

### 5. Psalm 92

<sup>7</sup>A brutish man cannot know, a fool cannot understand this: <sup>8</sup>though the wicked sprout like grass, though all evil-doers blossom, it is only that they may be destroyed forever.

### 1. תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף כט עמוד ב

אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם הראיתני תורתו הראני שכרו. אמר לו חזור [לאחורך]. חזר לאחוריו – ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין. אמר לפניו רבש"ע זו תורה וזו שכרה? א"ל שתוק! כך עלה במחשבה לפני.

### 3. דברים פרשת עקב פרק יא

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסִרְתֶּם וְעַבַּדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: "וְיָחַרָה אַף־ה' בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבַדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן לָכֶם:

### 4. תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף ט עמוד ב

מִקֵּדֶשׁ רִאשׁוֹן מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב? מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים שְׁהָיוּ בוֹ: עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, וְגִלּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, וּשְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים. ... אָבָל מִקֵּדֶשׁ שְׁנִי שְׁהָיוּ עוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּבְגִמְלוֹת חֲסִדִּים, מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב? מִפְּנֵי שְׁהִיתָה בוֹ שִׂנְאֵת חֲנָם.

### 5. ספר תהילים פרק צב

אִישׁ־בָּעֵר לֹא יֵדַע וּכְסִיל לֹא־יָבִין אֶת־זֹאת: "הַכִּפְרוֹחַ רִשְׁעִים | כְּמוֹ־עֵשֶׂב וַיִּצְצוּ כָל־פְּעָלֵי אָוֶן לְהַשְׁמָדָם עַד־עַד:

**6. Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40b**

To what are the righteous compared in this world? To a tree standing wholly in a place of cleanness, but its bough overhangs to a place of uncleanness; when the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of cleanness. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, brings suffering upon the righteous in this world, in order that they may inherit the future world.

**6. תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף מ עמוד ב**

למה צדיקים נמשלים בעולם הזה? לאילן שכולו עומד במקום טהרה ונופו נוטה למקום טומאה, נקצץ נופו: כולו עומד במקום טהרה. כך הקב"ה מביא יסורים על צדיקים בעולם הזה, כדי שיירשו העולם הבא.

**7. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Out of the Whirlwind (2003) 97**

I believe that this is a very clearcut, unequivocal example of how the thematic Halakhah has handled evil. It is a radical approach of course, simply disposing of it. Sometimes, if a problem is too embarrassing and too tormenting, one simply puts it in the waste basket and ignores it.

**8. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Fate and Destiny (1992) 4**

Evil is an undeniable fact. There is evil, there is suffering, there are hellish torments in this world. Whoever wishes to delude himself by diverting his attention from the deep fissure in reality, by romanticizing human existence, is nought but a fool and a fantasist.

**9. Peter van Inwagen, The Problem of Evil (2006) 60**

If we think of soldiers making mothers watch while they throw their babies in the air and catch them on the points of their bayonets, or of the ancient Mesopotamian practice of moloch – of throwing living infants into a furnace as a sacrifice to Baal ... we shall, I hope, find it impossible to say that evil is not real. Bad things really do happen. Anyone who, like [Alexander] Pope, says that we call certain things bad only because we don't see them *sub specie aeternitatis* [from an eternal level] is in grave error.

**10. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, “Rabbi Lichtenstein to Zionist rabbis: “Some humility, please” Walla! March 15, 2011**

*Unlike many Zionist rabbis, you refrained from expressing an opinion on the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Why?*

“To express a position is a fine thing when you have a position, when things are clear, unequivocal, when you have the sense that you understand not just the intricacies of the political moves but also what God would want. I didn’t feel I had the tools or ability to express a position. I don’t have God’s phone number, the way some others seem to have. I was raised on the words of the Talmud about Balaam: he claimed having knowledge of ‘the will of the Supreme.’ He couldn’t even tell what his own beast wanted, and he claimed to know the will of the Supreme?!

“Please, have a little humility. Not the fake kind, but the kind that rises from a person’s understanding of who the Almighty is and who man is – a base, ignominious creature. I understand there were people for whom it was clear where the disengagement was leading and what God wanted. That’s not how I grew up. Humility is not only an expression of religious awe but also an expression of wisdom.”

*Are you insinuating criticism of the rabbis who opposed the disengagement?*

“I don’t have to insinuate anything. It’s no secret that there are large, self-confident segments of the public, that have the sense that you can take a chapter of the book of Isaiah or Malachi and find a perfect match between the text and what’s happening before our eyes. I’m not comfortable with that; I’m uncomfortable with that also from a religious perspective. It’s true: those of us within the religious Zionism camp have for years continued to march forward spiritually, economically and socially, with trust in God. Without that belief, it is doubtful that the religious Zionist stream would have come into existence to begin with. It began out of belief and hope, out of the feeling that mankind has a role to play in history. But the difference between that and the sense that I can explain exactly why a bus explodes and kills 22 children is enormous. It is religious arrogance. It also smacks of people over-stepping their limitations.