

COVID-19 and Tisha b'Av: A World of Confusion Can We Question G-D?



בקץ הדרכים עומד ר' לוי יצחק דורש תשובת רם, אורי צבי גרינברג
Uri Tzvi Greenberg, R' Yitzhak Levi Berdichev Stands at the End of the Road
And Demands a Reply

...
לא לא, רבונו של עולם! הנני ממאן,
שכן הלאה ילך מהלך זמן המנודים והדם בעמי!

...
איננו רוצים גלויות שהן בארות נפט מודלקות
ואנו בהן לפידים בלילי הגויים
איננו רוצים עוד חזון לגאולה צמא דם לבלי קץ
איננו רוצים להיכנס השמימה דרך שערי האש
ולא דרך גלי נהרות בגויים
איננו רוצים לשכב לרקב בכל שדות העולם
שגם מצבתנו בגורל גויותנו לבסוף
איננו רוצים להיות אפר שדות

אבל עכשיו לא יסב הגלגל, ריבוני!
לא אתן,
לא לא!
לכאן או לכאן!
אני לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב, דורש תשובת רם!
ענה, אל אן זה הכל?
עוד הלאה והלאה כשטוף ים לבלי חוק,
תחת הרבה מאד שחק עירום?
לא לא!
...
דבר אל בני ישראל... וידעו
אני. לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב. דורש תשובת רם!

עכשיו רבי לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב אומר: ריבונו של עולם!
אני עומד באמצע עולם כולו גוי, שתחתיו יהודים רקבים,

...
ולי לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב ודאי יהיה כה עצוב
עד אין דומה לעצבי:
שלא יהיו עוד שבתות ומועדים, תפילות שחרית וערבית,
שלא יהיו עוד יהודים בטלית ותפילין בעולם כולו גוי,
שיחדל זמן יהודי בעולם,
שלא יטול יהודי את שתי ידיו הקדושות ממי הבאר
הצוננים וישב לברך על הלחם,
שיד כזו לא תאסוף פרורים ממפה
ותביאם אל אדן החלון למען ציפוריך, אלוקים!
שעל פרות אילן ושדה לא יברכו עוד ברכה
זקנים ונערים ונשים ואף טף... אללי!
שלא ישמע עוד נגון כניגון היוצא מחזהו
של פשוט בעם, בשבת, כאילו עוגב בחובו,
או כינורו של דוד וחליליו.

ובחצות לילה אצא בעולם, יהודי יחיד מכואב
ואביט בשמים וכוכביהם, כשהביט אבינו הראשון,
ואקרא "קריאת שמע" כקריעה בלב... בלחשה,
ואפול על פני אל אדמת עולם כולו גוי
שעליה הלכו יהודים לאלוקים,
ואבך אבך כמה שיכול לבכות לב.

1) ברכות ט:ה

[*]חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שהוא מברך על הטובה שנא' (דברים ו) ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך בכל לבבך בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר רע ובכל נפשך אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך ובכל מאדך בכל ממונך דבר אחר בכל מאדך בכל מדה ומדה שהוא מודד לך הוי מודה לו במאד מאד

2) ספרי דברים שז

דבר אחר הצור תמים פעלו כשתפסו את רבי חנינה בן תרדיון נגזרה עליו גזירה לישרף עם ספרו אמרו לו נגזרה עליך גזירה לישרף עם ספרך קרא המקרא הזה הצור תמים פעלו, אמרו לאשתו נגזרה על בעלך גזרה לישרף ועליך ליהרג קראה המקרא הזה אל אמונה ואין עול, אמרו לבתו נגזרה גזירה על אביך לישרף ועל אמך ליהרג ועליך לעשות מלאכה קראה המקרא הזה +ירמיה לב יט+ גדול העצה ורב העלילה אשר עיניך פקוחות אמר רבי כמה גדולים צדיקים אלו שבשעת צרתם הזמינו שלשה פסוקים של צידוק הדין

'The Rock, His deeds are complete (Devarim 32)' – When they caught R' Chanina ben Tradyon, it was decreed that he would be burned with his scroll. They informed him of this, and he recited, 'The Rock, His deeds are complete.' They told his wife, 'It has been decreed that your husband will be burned and you will be executed,' and she recited, 'A faithful Gd, with Whom there is no corruption.' They told his daughter, 'It has been decreed that your father will be burned and your mother will be executed, and you will be forced into slave labor,' and she recited, 'Great in counsel and deeds, Whose eyes are open.'

Rabbi Yehudah haNasi declared: How great are these righteous people! In their time of trouble, they invoked the three passages of justifying the verdict.

3) דברים לב:ד

ד הצור תמים פֶּעֱלוּ, {ס} כִּי כָּל-דַּרְכָיו מִשְׁפָּט: {ר} אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עֹל, {ס} צְדִיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא.
4 The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.

ברוך דין אמת *General Bracha of*

It may perhaps be understood as follows: It is often taught in sacred literature that faith is not simply confidence substituting for certainty. Faith is the light and holiness of God inside the Jew. This inner light resonates to the holiness of God's brilliance and is tied and bound to it. Faith is intrinsic to Jews; it is an inheritance passed down to us from our ancestors, and therefore we say in our prayers, "God, our God, God of our Fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . ." [from the silent *Amidah* (the standing benediction)]. The fact that He is our God and that we believe in Him has nothing to do with reason or logic. He is God, our God, because we are tied to Him through our ancestry. Only Abraham the patriarch did not inherit faith, and so of him it is said, "Abraham believed in God, and He considered it righteous-

4) R'Klaynamous Kalman Shapira hy"d

ness." It is not said of the Jews of Egypt that their faith was considered an act of righteousness because faith was already instilled inside them as an inherited trait. Even for our patriarch Abraham, the Torah tells us, it was only his faith that was considered an act of righteousness. It is not written that God considered his meeting other challenges, such as the *Akedah* (binding of Isaac), [as] acts of righteousness. Even though the *Akedah* was the sternest of tests, it depended on the level of Abraham's faith. The greater and more powerful the faith, the stronger and more capable of self-sacrifice is the worshipper. Only Abraham's faith was remarkable, and considered a righteous act. His sacrifice of Isaac in the *Akedah* was nothing more than the natural consequence of his faith.

Because worship depends on faith, a Jew's faith must be wholehearted; for it is only total, selfless faith that enables Israel to give its life for God. If the faith is flawed, and only halfhearted, how can it empower anyone to self-sacrifice? Total, selfless faith means continuing to believe in Him even in times of *hester panim* (concealment of God's face) with faith that everything comes from Him, that everything is beneficial and just, and that all the agony and anguish is filled with God's love for the Jewish people.

To our grief, we see that even among those whose belief was always wholehearted, there are now certain individuals whose faith has been damaged. They question God, asking, "Why have You forsaken us? If we are being tortured in order to bring us closer to Torah and worship," they argue, "then why, on the contrary, is the Torah and everything holy being destroyed?"

Now if a Jew utters these words in a form of prayer or supplication, as an outpouring of his heart before God, it is a good thing. But if, God forbid, he really is questioning—even if not God directly but his internal faith, God forbid—then may God protect us!

Faith is the foundation of everything. If the faith of a person is, God forbid, damaged, then the person is torn asunder and distanced from God. Souls condemned to Gehenna (hell) emerge purified and cleansed after having repented. We hope to God that all those suffering these tortures now will rise, cleansed, purified, and closer to Him. But the soul of someone whose faith is damaged is like a soul enduring Gehenna while continuing to add

offenses to its sins. After a time, upon examining itself, the soul sees the situation and asks itself, "What have I achieved with all this suffering, if I am just as sullied now as I was before?"

In all honesty, what room is there, God forbid, for doubts or questions? Admittedly, Jews endure suffering of the sort with which we are currently afflicted only every few hundred years. Still, how can we expect or hope to understand these, God's actions, and then allow our faith to be damaged, God forbid, upon finding that we cannot understand them? If one blade of grass created by God is beyond our understanding, how much more unfathomable is the soul; and if we do not understand a soul, how much less do we understand an angel, and how much less even than this can we understand the mind of God? How could we possibly expect to grasp with our mind what God knows and understands?

What excuse does a person have to question God and have his faith damaged by this prevailing suffering more than all the Jews who went through suffering in bygone times? Why should a person's faith become damaged now, if it was not damaged when he read descriptions of Jewish suffering from antiquity to the present day in Scripture, the Talmud, or Midrash? Those who say that suffering such as this has never befallen the Jewish people are mistaken. There was torture comparable to ours at the destruction of the Temple and at Betar, etc.² May God have mercy and call an end to our suffering; may He save us now, immediately, forthwith and forever.

The reason why today's suffering can damage someone's faith more so than it did in the past is only because he is more self-centered than he used to be. His pain affects him more than it once did. If someone says he flinches only at seeing the torture of others, it may in fact be true that he is feeling compassion for his fellow Jews, but the truth is also that deeper down, inside himself, his compassion is really terror of being forced to go through such terrible torture himself. It is this that

damages his faith and feeds his doubts, God forbid. As we have already said, a person must relinquish his life, his self-centeredness, and his bias, for only then will his faith be undamaged. He will be able to continue affirming with perfect faith that everything happening is just and a manifestation of God's love for the Jewish people. With our limited perspective, we suggest that there may be a hint of this in the Talmud [B. T. *Berakhot* 61^b]: "R. Akiba was reciting the *Shema* ['Hear O' Israel, the Lord is One'] while his flesh was being raked with iron combs. His students asked, 'Our Rabbi, thus far?' He answered them, 'All my days I have been at pains over this verse in the *Shema* [Deuteronomy 6:5] "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." "When will I ever have the opportunity of fulfilling it properly?" I asked myself. But right now, I have the opportunity to love God with all my soul. Should I not grasp it?"

If we approach this at the simple level, then the well-known question arises, why would the students of R. Akiba—who were themselves remarkable for their individual piety—have asked, "Our Rabbi, thus far?" They were well aware that every Jew is prepared to give his life for God. Furthermore, why did R. Akiba answer them by referring to himself when he might have answered more directly by simply quoting the verse "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul," even if God demands your soul?

With what we have said above, this can perhaps be explained in a way that teaches us something about our own plight. The terrible tortures R. Akiba endured caused such great suffering in his disciples that they were provoked to ask the same question that was asked by Moses when he was shown this same event [B. T. *Menahot* 29^b]: "Is this Torah and this its reward?" The disciples were afraid that, God forbid, they might have doubts, however fleeting, as a result of their emotional and visceral response, and that their faith might be damaged. They wanted their

teacher, who was so powerful in his faith, to speak of his belief, so that his faith might inundate them. When they asked, "Our Rabbi, thus far?" they were saying, "Can you be our teacher thus far, even into the circumstances of this terrible death?" Perhaps they did not articulate their question fully, or make it more specific, but merely hinted at it in order to avoid invoking the response that the Talmud [ibid.] says had already been given to Moses: "Be silent."

R. Akiba understood that the students were not questioning God but rather begging him to bestow upon them some of his faith, and so he told them something about himself and his own aspirations to faith: "All my life I was in pain over this verse. . . . Right now I have the opportunity to love God with all my soul. Should I not grasp it?"

At that time, in R. Akiba's epoch, when the divine decree was against only the ten martyrs who were put to death by the Roman emperor, the students sought a bolstering of their faith through the words of R. Akiba. Now, however, when the decree of martyrdom is upon the whole Jewish people, God forbid, we must look to strengthen our faith by looking at the decree of martyrdom itself.

It is a well-known teaching from the Rav [R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, I,25] that even the least sincere Jew, who commonly finds himself unable to resist the urge to sin, is nevertheless prepared to give his life for God when tested. This is because when his enemies try to extinguish the spark of his soul with their heresy, may the Merciful One protect us, the tiny spark burns into flame and grows stronger and more powerful, as is well known.

If only people would bear in mind that it is not because we robbed or did anything wrong to anyone that we are being persecuted, but because we are Jews—children of Israel, bound to God and to His holy Torah. First, it would explain why our enemies are not satisfied with just killing us or extinguishing the divine spark inside us but feel they have to annihilate simultaneously both [the] body and soul of the Jew. Then, if we could only bear it in mind, our faith and our cleaving to God and to the Torah would, on the contrary, burgeon and strengthen. But because we tend to feel only our physical pain and not the spiritual pain, and because we fail to remind ourselves that what we

are enduring is actually a war upon God and the Torah, therefore there are certain individuals who experience a weakening of their faith.

The Hellenes in Hasmonean times also tried "compelling them to neglect Your Torah and stray from Your desired statutes." They did this with the torture and oppression of Israel, as is recorded in the writings of Josephus, and through the spread of Hellenic culture among the Jews. It reached a point where they said to Jews, "Write upon the horn of your ox that you have no portion in the God of Israel," as is known from the *midrash* [*Tanḥuma, Tazria, Perek 11*]. At that time the Jews knew that the purpose of all the physical suffering was to make them forget the Torah, to make them "stray from Your desired statutes." This is what they worried about; it was the chief cause of their pain; and so their faith grew stronger and God's salvation came to them in merit of their faith. Thus the liturgy reads: "At the time of distress, You in Your great mercy stood up for them. You took up their grievance, avenging their wrong." The distress of the people of Israel was not at their physical pain but at the efforts of the Hellenes to destroy God's Torah and worship. That is why "You stood up for them, and You saved them."

Mishpatim (Exodus 21:1–24:18),

14 February 1942 *

And these are the judgments that you must set before them.

—Exodus 21:1

We learn in the Talmud [B. T. *Berakhot* 3^a], R. Jose said: "I was once traveling on the road, when I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah the Prophet, of blessed memory, appeared and waited for me at the door until I had finished my prayer. Whereupon, he said to me, 'Peace be with you, son, why did you enter this ruin?' I replied, 'To pray.' . . . He said to me, 'My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin?' I replied, 'I heard a Divine Voice, cooing like a dove, saying "Woe to Me, that I razed My house, burned My temple, and exiled My children among the Gentiles!"' He said to me, 'By your life and by your head! It is not only now that God exclaims thus, He does so thrice each day!

5) Kinnos

איכה אצת באפך, לאבד ביד אדומים אמונך.
ולא זכרת ברית בין בתרים אשר ברית לבהונך.

ובכן בטינו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה גערת בגערותך, לגלות ביד גאים גאיליך.
ולא זכרת דליגת דלוג דרך, אשר דלגת לדגליך.

ובכן דברנו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה הגת בהגיתך, להדוף ביד הזללים המונך.
ולא זכרת ועוד ותק וסת, אשר ועדת לועזיך.

ובכן וקוננו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה זנחת בועמך, ללול ביד זרים ובויליך.
ולא זכרת חתנו חקי חורב, אשר חקת לחמוליך.

ובכן חוינו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה טרחת בטרחתך, לטוף ביד טמאים טלאיך.
ולא זכרת יקר ידידות ישר, אשר יחדת ליודעיך.

ובכן יללנו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה בונת בכעסך, לכלות ביד כושלים פרמך.
ולא זכרת לא לונח לעולם, אשר למדת לקוחיך.

ובכן להגנו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה מללת במאסך, למחות ביד מונים מנשאיך.
ולא זכרת נשיאת נוצת נשר, אשר נשאת לנשואיך.

ובכן נהינו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה סחת בסערך, לסגור ביד סעמים סהדיך.
ולא זכרת עו עדי עדיים, אשר עשרת לעבדיך.

ובכן ענינו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה פצת בפחדך, לפגור ביד פריצים פלאיך.
ולא זכרת צהלת צבי צדק, אשר צמנת לצבאיך.

ובכן צעקנו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה קראת בקריאתך, לקנות ביד קמים קרואיך.
ולא זכרת רגש רכב ובתים, אשר רצית לרעיך.

ובכן רגנו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

איכה שאפת בשאפתך, לשלות ביד שוללים שלמיך.
ולא זכרת תקון תלתלי תאר, אשר תכנת לתמיך.

ובכן תאננו. וכו' יהוה מדהיה לנו:

תאננו לשפך כמים / על מה ביום זה נשבינו פעמים / וכרי בהיותי
וישבת בשלוח ביושלים / רגנתי, ועתה אאדה עד חוג שמים:

איכה How could You rush Your wrath,
ruining Your loyal people at the hand of Rome,
and not remember Your covenant with Abraham,
who met the challenge of Your trials?

And so, we exclaim, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You scorn us with Your scorn,
exiling at the hand of the haughty, those You freed from Egypt,
and not remember the rapid road You once opened for the
banner-bearing tribes?

And so, we speak, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You pronounce such words,
thrusting Your masses into wanton hands,
and not remember the assembly place You designated for Your followers?
And so, we lament, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You abandon Your Sanctuary in Your rage,
allowing strangers to defile it,
and not remember the wedding vows at Horeb,
which You etched in stone for Your dear ones?
And so, we state, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You so diligently toil
to allow brutes to tear Your lambs to pieces,
and not remember the precious friendship
with those whom You singled out to receive the Torah?
And so, we ululate, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You aim Your anger,
enabling sinners to despoil Your vineyard,
and not remember the lesson You taught to the ones
You took to Yourself, not to abandon them?
And so, we howl, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You reject us,
permitting oppressors to exterminate those who exalt You,
and not remember how You carried us on the wings of eagles?
And so, we moan, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You condemn us in Your fury,
imprisoning Your faith-witnesses in the hands of fiends,
and not remember the glorious crowns with which
You bedecked Your servants?
And so, we answer, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You utter in Your frightening anger,
defiling Your wonderful ones at the hands of the lewd,
and not remember the beautiful Temple songs so special to Your people?
And so, we shout, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You issue a declaration,
selling Your special servants to slave masters,
and not remember the thousands of angels present at Sinai?
And so, we sigh, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

איכה How could You open Your mouth and long for
the looting of Your loyal ones at the hands of pirates,
and not remember the resplendent curls of hair which
You arranged for Your innocents?
And so, we cry, Remember, God, what has happened to us!

תאננו We cry in anguish, pouring out our hearts like water.
Why, on this day, have we fallen captive twice?
How well do I remember dwelling tranquilly in Jerusalem!
I grieve, and now I [let my laments] soar to heaven!

The Unique Permission to Ask "Eikhah" on Tish'ah be-Av

Kinot are different from *piyutim*, or liturgical poetry. *Piyutim* were composed for two reasons. First, to teach people. On Pesah we recite *piyutim* about *hametz* and *matzah*, the *seder*, and similar topics. It was impossible for us to teach without the *piyutim* because the government did not allow us to do so more directly. Second, *piyutim* enable us to express our praise and thanksgiving, *hallel ve-hoda'ah*, to *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*.

By contrast, *Kinot* are made up of questions and complaints. *Eikhah* means "how" or "why": "How is it possible?" "How could You have done it?" "Why did You do it?" "I don't understand." But this raises a very serious question. What right do we have to say *Kinot*, to ask and to complain? Normally, the rule is to the contrary; we are *not allowed* to ask such questions. On any other day, if, God forbid, disaster strikes, the law is that a Jew cannot ask *eikhah*, "why." The very question of *eikhah* is intolerable. Who am I to ask *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* to explain anything to me? What do you mean, "how" or "why?" Who are you to understand? What allows you to be so bold? What right do you have to address yourself to *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* this way? "*Kakh alah be-mahshavah lefanai*" (*Menahot* 29b), says the Gemara in the name of God. This is My will, and that is all! In situations of distress, we never ask questions of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*. If someone, God forbid, loses a member of his family, he does not rend his garments with the word *eikhah*. On the contrary, when a Jew finds himself in a catastrophic situation, he says, "Blessed be . . . the true Judge" (*Berakhot* 54a). He acknowledges that the judgment of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* is true and just, and that is all. He says "I sinned," and immediately recites the *Vidduy*. Normally our words do not consist of questions but of *vidduyim*, confessions. We say, "*Al het she-hata'nu*," [We ask forgiveness] "for the sin we have committed," and nothing more.

When tragedy strikes, the Jew says *tzidduk ha-din*. He acknowledges the justness of the decree of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of truth and without iniquity, righteous and fair is He" (Deut. 32:4). "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and gracious in all His works" (Ps. 145:17). We never find the question of *eikhah* in the ordinary course of events. So-called theologians ask this question, but the question itself is illegitimate. There is no need to explain the will of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*, God's inscrutable will, in our rational categories, and, as a matter of fact, it is forbidden to do so. Basically, therefore, we should have no right to say *Kinot*.

The Mishnah (*Berakhot* 54a) says that one has to praise *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* even in times of distress, in times of disaster, just as one is supposed to thank Him in times of triumph, in moments of happiness. We are not allowed to ask *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* questions with regard to our private lives. A person who has met with disaster, who is confronted with misfortune, must accept it in the same manner as he accepts a happy event. No questions can be asked of the Almighty, no questions at all. We accept the judgment of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*. We engage in *tzidduk ha-din*.

But why is today different? Why are we allowed to do something today that is prohibited to us every other day of the year? Our right to ask on Tish'ah be-Av comes from the precedent set for us by Jeremiah. A special license is granted *Keneset Yisrael* that allows them to ask *eikhah* on Tish'ah be-Av because Jeremiah wrote a book in the biblical canon that begins with the word *eikhah*. *Sefer Eikhah* is not the introduction to the *Kinot*, it is *kinot*. In fact, *Sefer Eikhah* is known not as *Megillat Eikhah* but as *Megillat Kinot* or *Sefer Kinot*. The first *sefer ha-kinot* was *Eikhah*. If Jeremiah had not written the Book of *Eikhah* with divine inspiration, we would have been enjoined from asking the question *eikhah*. We cannot just ask questions and say *kinot* on our own; we have to begin by first reciting the *kinot* that were said prophetically and committed to writing. Since Jeremiah asked *eikhah* and *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* did not reject it, we have a right to ask *eikhah*. In fact, many *kinot* revolve around a word in *Eikhah*. They have to do so, for otherwise we would be prohibited from reciting them.

That is why we do not say *Kinot* right after *Ma'ariv* on the night of Tish'ah be-Av. The right to say *Kinot* is established only by reading the Book of *Eikhah* first. And that is why there is no interruption then between the Book of *Eikhah* and the *Kinot*. The *Kinot* we recite are simply a continuation of the

True Mourning

6) בבא קמא נט

אליעזר זעירא הוה סיים מסאני אוכמי וקאי בשוקא דנהרדעא, אשכחוהו דבי ריש גלותא וא"ל: מאי שנא הני מסאני? אמר להו: דקא מאבילנא אירושלים. אמרו ליה: את חשיבת לאיתאבולי אירושלים? סבור יוהרא הוה, אתיוה וחבשוה. אמר להו: גברא רבה אנא, אמרו ליה: מנא ידעינן? אמר להו: או אתון בעו מינאי מילתא, או אנא איבעי מיניכו מילתא, אמרו ליה: בעי את.

7) בראשית יט

(יח) ואַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהוָה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעָצוֹם וּנְבָרְכוּ-בוּ כָל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ:
(יט) כִּי יִדְעִיתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת-בְּנֵי וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ יִקְוֶה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבְיֵא יִקְוֶה עַל-אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר-דָּבַר עָלָיו:

(כג) וַיִּגַּשׂ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֵף תִּסְפָּה צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע:

(כד) אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הָאֵף תִּסְפָּה וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא לְמַקּוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּה:

8) Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Man is not alone"- in *Wrestling with God*

The prophets do not speak of the *hidden God* but of the *hiding God*. His hiding is a function, not His essence, an act, not a permanent state. It is when the people forsake Him, breaking the Covenant which He has made with them, that He forsakes them and hides His face from them.⁴ It is not God who is obscure. It is man who conceals Him. His hiding from us is not in His essence: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior!" (Isaiah 45:15). A hiding God, not a hidden God. He is waiting to be disclosed, to be admitted into our lives.

The direct effect of His hiding is the hardening of the conscience: Man hears but does not understand, sees but does not perceive—his heart fat, his ears heavy.⁵ Our task is to open our souls to Him, to let Him again enter our deeds. We have been taught the grammar of contact with God; we have been taught by the Baal Shem that His remoteness is an illusion capable of being dispelled by our faith. There are many doors through which we have to pass in order to enter the palace, and none of them is locked.

As the hiding of man is known to God and seen through, so is God's hiding seen through. In sensing the fact of His hiding we have disclosed Him. Life is a hiding place for God. We are never asunder from Him who is in need of us. Nations roam and rave—but all this is only ruffling the deep, unnoticed, and uncherished stillness.

The grandchild of Rabbi Baruch was playing hide-and-seek with another boy. He hid himself and stayed in his hiding place for a long time, assuming that his friend would look for him. Finally, he went out and saw that his friend was gone, apparently not having looked for him at all,

please God to destroy me; that if He would cut off my hand and cut me off, then should I yet have comfort, yea, I would exult even in my pain; let Him not spare me, for I have not denied the words of the holy One" (Job 6:9–10). Wells gush forth in the deserts of despair. This is the guidance of faith: "Lie in the dust and gorge on faith."⁶

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

How Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thy hand, and plantedst them; how Thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.

For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor unto them.

Thou art my king, O God, command deliverances for Jacob.

Through Thee will we push down our enemies: through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.

For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.

But Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.

In God we boast all the day long: and praise Thy name for ever. Selah.

But Thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.

Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves.

Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat: and hast scattered us among the heathen.

9) Professor Eliezer Berkowitz, Faith after the Holocaust

torial in the agony of one's soul. He who approaches the problem cleverly, using it as proof, vulgarizes. Only the believer in the living God of Israel is involved in the crisis of faith of the death camps; only he can lose his faith on account of it. Undoubtedly, for our generation Auschwitz represents the supreme crisis of faith. It would be tantamount to a spiritual tragedy if it were otherwise. After the holocaust Israel's first religious responsibility is to "reason" with God and—if need be—to wrestle with Him.

The "reasoning" with God is a need of faith; it issues from the very heart of faith. When in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, at the hanging of the little boy, someone asks: "Where is God now?" it is the right question to be asked. Not to ask it would have been blasphemy. Faith cannot pass by such horror in silence. Faith, because it is trust in God, demands justice of God. It cannot countenance that God be involved in injustice and cruelty. And yet, for faith God is involved in everything under the sun. What faith is searching for is, if not to understand fully, at least to gain a hint of the nature of God's involvement. This questioning of God with the very power of faith stands out as a guidepost at the earliest beginnings of the Jewish way in history. Abraham wrestled with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. We note how the man, who in the humility of his piety sees himself as mere "dust and ashes" yet has the audacity to challenge God with the words: "The judge of all the earth shall not do justice?!" There is no contradiction here. The man of faith questions God because of his faith. It is the faith of Abraham in God that cannot tolerate injustice on the part of God. This is also the essence of Job's dilemma. The sustained fire of his plaint is not derived from his personal plight, but from the passion of his faith. There is no weakening of faith here. On the contrary. It is the very power of the faith that lends force to the accusation. What has happened to Job is wrong; it is terribly wrong because it is judged by the ideal of justice that Job formed for himself on the strength of his faith in God. That Job will not accept the arguments of his friends in defense of divine providence is not a matter of stubborn self-righteousness, nor is it due to a sense of exaggerated self-importance. What the friends attempt to do is to defend a wrong as justice. By doing so, they—without being aware of it—degrade Job's idea of God. Because of

10))https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3372829/jewish/I-Will-Teach-You-to-Sing.htm

In light of this extraordinary epistle, those who are familiar with Wiesel's writings can see how that long night in the Rebbe's quarters in Brooklyn was indeed, as Wiesel says, "a turning point in my writing." Wiesel not only went on to write many books on biblical, midrashic, talmudic and chassidic themes. In retrospect, he came to appreciate his entire corpus as an expression, howbeit gnarled and broken, of *emunah*. As he states in his *Memoirs*:

I have never renounced my faith in G-d. I have risen against His justice, protested His silence and sometimes His absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside it. I admit that this is hardly an original position. It is part of Jewish tradition. [. . .] Abraham and Moses, Jeremiah and Rebbe Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev teach us that it is permissible for man to accuse G-d, provided it be done in the name of faith in G-d. If that hurts, so be it. Sometimes we must accept the pain of faith so as not to lose it.⁷

By the end of the long soul-searching session with the Rebbe, Wiesel came to confess, or rather to discover, why he really came to see the Rebbe. ". . . You asked me what I expect of you, and I said I expect nothing. I was mistaken. Make me able to cry."

In the original Yiddish version of the book that came to be called *Night*, Wiesel recalls how the death of his father in Buchenwald had traumatized his capacity for tears. The light of his world was extinguished, he writes. "But I did not cry, and this is what causes me the most grief: this inability to cry. The heart had petrified, the fountainhead of tears had dried up."⁸ When Wiesel pleads with the Rebbe, "Make me able to cry!" we understand that this is not some incidental request blurted out during that *yechidus*, or some flourish added to a fictional novel for dramatic effect. The request is nothing less than Wiesel's secret reason for coming to the Rebbe. He did not come expecting the Rebbe to change the past. And if he came in order to challenge the Rebbe and to hear him fail to defend G-d, he was disappointed in this, as we have seen. Wiesel came to the Rebbe for the same reason that anyone ever went to Rebbe: he went to discover his *true request*. And so the face-to-face with the Rebbe, the being-seen by the Rebbe, allowed him to see his true self, and to articulate his deep-felt need to become transparent to himself. "Make me able to cry!"

And the Rebbe's response? Did the Rebbe put his arms around the broken man and allow him to experience his long-awaited catharsis? Did he come forth with his famous paternal love, and allow Wiesel to weep on his shoulder and mourn for the father lost in Buchenwald?

Again the Rebbe responded in an unexpected manner. Yes, he did encourage Wiesel to find the needed catharsis for his grief. But not in weeping. Because weeping is not an adequate form of catharsis for the colossal suffering of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. The Rebbe shook his head. "That's not enough. I shall teach you to sing." "Grown people don't cry; beggars don't cry." The Rebbe added, "Crying is for children. Are you still a child, and is your life a child's dream? No, crying is no use. You must sing."⁹

11))Anne Frank, April 11th 1944

Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly up until now? It is God who has made us as we are, but it will be God, too, Who will raise us up again. Who knows, it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and only that reason do we suffer. We can never become just Netherlanders, or just English or representatives of any country for that matter. We will always remain Jews.