

## BIG QUESTIONS: THE RAV ON SUFFERING

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### 1. David Shatz, “Does Jewish Law Express Jewish Philosophy? The Curious Case of Theodicies,” in *Jewish Thought in Dialogue*

The objective of a theodicy is to make our *peace* with evil. But the objective of ethical and halakhically mandated action is to make *war* with evil.

If we focus too much on the ultimate reasons for God’s allowing evil, we lose our appreciation of its horror. We see it as part of a beautiful, harmonious whole, as leading to a greater good. All seems right with the world.

Clearly, though, as moral agents and halakhic agents, we must not let the aim of theodicy, namely, to render evil palatable, override the aim of ethical response, which treats evil as unacceptable. To put it another way, if we were to build a philosophy of evil out of halakhic requirements for responding to suffering, we would not conclude that evil is justified and rationalizable in the larger picture. In the realm of theodicy, then, we confront a seeming disconnect between Halakhah and Jewish philosophy

### 2. “A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne Tradition 17 (spring 1978)

One learns much from father: how to read a text—the Bible or the Talmud—how to comprehend, how to analyze, how to conceptualize, how to classify, how to infer, how to apply, etc...

What is *torat imekha*? ...Most of all I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to *mitzvot*. I learned from her the most important thing in life—to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.

The laws of Shabbat, for instance, were passed on to me by my father; they are a part of *mussar avikha*. The Shabbat as a living entity, as a queen, was revealed to me by my mother; it is a part of *torat imekha*. The fathers knew much about the Shabbat; the mothers lived the Shabbat, experienced her presence, and perceived her beauty and splendor.

The fathers taught generations how to observe the Shabbat; mothers taught generations how to greet the Shabbat and how to enjoy her twenty-four hour presence.

### 3. *Halakhic Approach to Suffering*

The dominant idea which underlies this metaphysics of evil developed by the thematic Halakhah is basically that suffering as a subjective experience—an emotion, an affect, a feeling—and evil as a reality are not identical. The fact that people in distress, the distraught individuals who find themselves in a crisis, ascribe their misery to some outside agency called “evil” or “Satan”—the name is irrelevant—and identify their subjective experiences with a destructive fiend or enemy of man, does not prove that evil actually exists and that it reveals itself through the pathetic mood to the passionate mood

Can such a metaphysics bring solace and comfort to modern man who finds himself in crisis, facing the monstrosity of evil, and to whom existence and absurdity appear to be bound up inextricably together? Is there in the transcendental and universal message a potential of remedial energy to be utilized by the

rabbi who comes, like Zofar, Bildad and Eliphaz, the three friends of Job, to share the burden and to comfort his congregant in distress? We know that the friends of Job were not that successful in convincing Job about the nonexistence of evil. Can a rabbi be more successful? Can he succeed where the biblical friends of Job failed miserably? I will be frank with you; I do not know.

**The topical halacha will not gloss over the absurdity of evil...**The topical Halakhah always held the view that evil exists and that man must face it in perplexity and embarrassment

There for the this is not a metaphysic of evil where we want to know the ontological reason for suffering from within, as a way to justify or deny, but rather the ethic of suffering is where one confront the evil and rather than succumb to the overwhelming force they give it a directedness and sense.

#### 4. **Kol Dodi Dofek**

...against your will you were born and against your will you will die but you live of your own free will... You may be an object but you can live like a subject- to subdue the create to innovate. As long as you are in fate then you can only have theoretical-philosophical questions if you assume the control of the destiny- you recognize the world for what it I you do not try to gloss over or deny evil

#### 5. **Ibid**

When the "Child of Destiny" suffers, he says in his heart, "There is evil, I do not deny it, and I will not conceal it with fruitless casuistry. I am, however, interested in it from a halakhic point of view; and as a person who wants to know what action to take. I ask a single question: What should the sufferer do to live with his suffering?" In this dimension, the emphasis is removed *from* causal and teleological considerations (which differ only as to direction) and is directed *to* the realm of action. The problem is now formulated in the language of a simple halakhah and revolves around a quotidian (i.e. daily) task. The question of questions is: What does suffering obligate man to do? This problem was important to Judaism, which placed it at the center of its *Weltanschauung*. Halakhah is just as interested in this question, as in issues of *issur* and *heter* and *hiyyuv* and *p'tur*. 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?"

#### 6. **Sacred and Profane in Gesher**

Teshuva ...it is a psychological- changing the vectoral force and direction- we can mine sin to be a springboard- the effects of sin are not predetermined- man can give it a direction and destination.

#### 7. **David Shatz ibid**

Self examination is mandated specifically during a time of suffering even if the introspection will not pinpoint the true culprit, and even if there is no culprit sin at all. My suffering can lead me to improve myself, to grow and develop in spiritual character, to strengthen my prayer and my charity, to remove my arrogance and sense of being almighty, to empathize, to create meaning in my existence, to move me from a life of fate to a life of destiny. The logic of responding as Halakhah requires does not depend on my being able to explain a *particular* evil as a result of my deficiency. Rather, Halakhah's mandate could be explained by the purpose of God weaving evil into existen

#### 8. **William Hasker, *On Regretting the Evils of This World***

Had major or significant events in the worlds past history been different then they were, then in all probability neither I nor the persons whom I love would ever have existed.

9. **R. Soloveitchik, Letter to Dr Dan Vogel, Dean of Stern College, dated 04/15/65, in *Community, Covenant, and Commitment*,**

The gist of my discourse was that Judaism did not approach the problem of evil under the speculative-metaphysical aspect. For such an inquiry would be a futile undertaking. As long as the human mind is unable to embrace creation in its entirety and to gain an insight into the very essence and purposiveness of being as such, it would not succeed in its attempt to resolve the dilemma of evil. The latter is interwoven into the very fabric of reality and cannot be understood outside its total ontological configuration. Job was in error because he tried to grasp the nature of evil. Therefore, Judaism has recommended that the metaphysical inquiry be replaced by the halakhic ethical gesture. Man should not ask: Why evil? He should rather raise the question: What am I supposed to do if confronted with evil; how should I behave *vis-à-vis* evil?... instead of philosophizing about the nature of evil within the framework of a theodicy, Judaism wants man to fight it relentlessly and to convert it into a constructive force.

10. **Emmanuel Levinas *Useless Suffering***

From Sarajevo to Cambodia humanity has witnessed a host of cruelties in the course of a century when Europe, in its "human sciences," seemed to reach the end of its subject, the humanity which, during all these horrors, breathed—already or still—the fumes of the crematory ovens of the "final solution" where theodicy abruptly appeared impossible. Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality—or the drifting—of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, and which spare the conquerors, whom the wicked must join? Or, incapable of adhering to an order—or to a disorder—which it continues to think diabolic, must not humanity now, in a faith more difficult than ever, in a faith without theodicy, continue Sacred History, a history which now demands even more of the resources of the self in each one, and appeals to its suffering inspired by the suffering of the other person...