

Responding to Tragedy with Halacha and Purpose

1) M'pnini HaRav – p. 60-61

ברכת דיין האמת: ידוע מאמרו של ר' עקיבא (ברכות ס:) שלעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל מאי דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד. והוא תמוה, הלא כשהאדם שרוי בצער, חלילה, ומרגיש שמקורו של המאורע במדת הדין, הלא מצווה הוא לזעוק בכל כוחו אל ד' שיסיר מעליו את הגזרה הרעה, והיאך שייך שיאמין באמונה שלמה שהכל היה לטובה, הלא שתי תחושות אלו מנוגדות הן, ומכחישות זו את זו. וביאר בזה רבנו, שכאשר האדם שרוי בצרה, עליו להרגיש ולהאמין שלמרות מה שעשוי באמת רע הוא, **סופו של הענין בעתיד** יהיה לטוב, ובגלל כן קבעו חז"ל שתי ברכות שונות, **דהשומע בשורות טובות מברך הטוב והמטיב**, ואילו על שמועות רעות הרי הוא מברך דיין האמת, ואין הכונה במאמרו של ר' עקיבא "לטב עביד" שהרעה גופא מהווה טובה, דאילו כן היינו תמיד מברכים הטוב והמטיב, אלא כאמור. (כן כתב הר"ר מרדכי גרין, שיחי, בשמו בהדרום, אלול, תשנ"ה, עמ' קי"ב וק"ה. ועיין בספר בעקבי הצאן עמ' רכ"ד.)

3) Out of the Whirlwind p. 99-100

being.)

Can such a metaphysic 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 question is not an easy one. On the one hand, we know that this metaphysic has worked miracles with our people, whose history is a continuous tale of martyrdom and suffering. The Jewish community found, in this metaphysic of evil, relief, hope and courage. Yet what seemed apodictic and simple to our

ancestors, inspired by indomitable faith and a passionate transcendental experience, might prove to be an extremely complicated matter for contemporary egotistic man, who is spiritually uprooted, homeless, and perplexed. I can state with all candor that I personally have not been too successful in my attempts to spell out this metaphysic in terms meaningful to the distraught individual who floats aimlessly in all-encompassing blackness, like a withered leaf on a dark autumnal night tossed by wind and rain. I tried but failed, I think, miserably, like the friends of Job.

2) B'Ikvei HaTzon p. 124

וכמדומה לי ששמעתי מכב' מו"ר הגריד"ס, ז"ל, לבאר כוונת התפילה [שנהגו להתפלל בשעת קידוש לבנה] – שתמלא פגימת הלבנה ולא יהי בה שום מיעוט, דמה איכפת לנו אם הלבנה פגומה, וכי זוהי הצרה הכי מעיקה לכלל ישראל – מה שהלבנה פגומה. וביאר בזה, דענין פגימת הלבנה מורה על ענין זה דבעיית הרע שבעולם, אשר היא שאלת משה רבנו על צדיק ור"ל ורשע וט"ל, דנראה כאילו – חלילה – שתי רשיות הן, שמי שמנהיג את העולם הטבעי לא זהו מי שנתן את חוקי התורה, מחמת הסתירות (המדומות) שבין הנהגת העולם לבין שמירת המצוות ע"י בני האדם, וזוהי כוונת הגמ' בחולין (ס:) – הביאו עלי כפרה על שמיעתי את הירח, כלי, דבעוה"ז נראה כאילו אין הקב"ה

ז. כתיבת השם ירושלים – חסר יו"ד ועי' תשו' היכל יצחק (אה"ע ח"ב סי' נ"ז), דשם העיר ירושלים מופיע בתנ"ך תרנ"ו פעמים, ורק בג' מקומות נכתב מלא. ובס' ג"פ מבואר שנהגו לכתבו חסר בגטין. ועי' צ"ח לברכות (נח). דבעוה"ז שאין הכסא שלם נכתב שם העיר ירושלים – חסר, כי ירושלים נקראת כסא ד' בנבואת ירמיה, כאשר הבאנו לעיל. אך לעת"ל – לאחר מחיית עמלק, אז תהיה כתיבת שם העיר מלא – ירושלים. ובפשוטו נראית כוונתו כנ"ל, דירושלים עפ"י דין היא עיר הבירה של מלכות ד' בא"י, ובכדי להראות שכל זמן שעמלק קיים אין הכסא שלם, כלומר, כל זמן שקיימת אצלנו הקושיא של צדיק ורשע לו, ורשע וטוב לו, [דעמלק הוא הסמל של הצלחת דרך רשעים] אשר קושיא זו מורה לכאורה כאילו [אף שבודאי אין הדבר כן] אין הקב"ה שליט (או שלכה"פ אין לו שלטון גמור, חלילה) בעולמו, זהו הנקרא אין הכסא שלם, דענין מלכותו ית' היינו – מה שבנ"א מבינים שיש ממשלה בלעדית להקב"ה בעולמו, ואם בנ"א לא מבינים את זה, וחושבים בדעתם (לו) היא שטעות הוא בידם) שאיננו שליט לגמרי, זוהי בודאי פגימה במלכותו ית', [דמלוכה

4) Community Covenant and Commitment p. 331-2

Dear Dr. Vogel:

I received your letter. Of course, you may quote me.

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. The latter is a powerful challenge to man and it is the duty of man to meet this challenge boldly and courageously.

Suffering, in the opinion of Judaism, must not be purposeless wasted. Out of suffering must emerge the ethical norm, the call for repentance, for self-elevation. Judaism wants to convert the passionate, frustrating experience into an integrating, cleansing and redeeming factor.

Man was summoned to defy evil and try to eliminate it. However if he fails temporarily to defeat evil he must see to it that the confrontation be a courageous one, heroic and useful. In a word, 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.

Mo'adim le-simhah,

Sincerely,

Joseph Soloveitchik

5) Halachik Man p.73

subject confronting man. However, when man succeeds in transforming death-subject into death-object, the horror is gone. My father related to me that when the fear of death would seize hold of R. Hayyim, he would throw himself, with his entire heart and mind, into the study of the laws of tents and corpse defilement. And these laws, which revolve about such difficult and complex problems as defilement of a grave, defilement of a tent, blocked-up defilement, interposition before defilement, a vessel with a tight fitting cover upon it in a tent in which a corpse lies, etc., etc., would calm the turbulence of his soul and would imbue it with a spirit of joy and gladness. When halachic man fears death, his sole weapon wherewith to fight this terrible dread is the eternal law of the Halakhah. The act of objectification triumphs over the subjective terror of death.⁸⁶ The mysterious relationship in effect between the cognizing subject and the object that is comprehended, even though it is logical and not psychological, results in any event in man deeming himself lord and master with respect to the thing that is about to be comprehended. The subject rules over the object, the person over the thing. Knowledge, by definition, is the subjugation of the object and the domination of the subject.⁸⁷

7) Kol Dodi Dofek – chapter 2

The Holy One said to the friends of Job, “Now, therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering, and My servant Job shall pray for you” (Job 42:8). Behold, I will test Job yet another time. . . .

Then you shall know that Job was redeemed from the narrow straits of egotism and entered into the vistas of communal empathy; and that social isolation has ended and communal affiliation has appeared in its stead. A wonderful thing happened. Job suddenly understood the nature of Jewish prayer. He discovered in one moment its plural voice and the attribute of loving-kindness that sweeps man from the private to the public domain. He began to live a communal life, to feel the community’s hurts, to mourn its disasters and rejoice in its moments of celebration. Job’s sufferings found their true repair in his escape from the prison in which he had found himself, and God’s wrath was assuaged. As it is written: “And the Lord changed the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends” (Job 42:10).

8) Out of the Whirlwind p.5

Before burial, in the stage of *aninut*, man mourned in total darkness and confusion, and his grief expressed itself in an act of resignation from his greatness and chosenness. After burial, in stage two, man mourns in an enlightened mood, and his grief asserts itself in the awareness of human greatness and human election.

The ceremonial turning point at which *aninut* is transformed into *avelut*, despair into intelligent sadness, and self-negation into self-affirmation, is to be found in the recital of *Kaddish* at the grave.

6) Out of the Whirlwind 133

The same is true of the man of sorrow. When the blow strikes, the first question which pops up upon the lips of the sufferer is: Why me? Why should I be different from others? Why was I selected to explore the valley of sorrow? A feeling of envy fills out the heart of the afflicted. He envies everybody, pauper and prince, young and old. They were spared, while I was picked out.

When I eulogized my uncle, R. Velvel Soloveitchik, *zt”l*, in the auditorium of Yeshiva University while knowing of my affliction, one nagging thought assailed my mind. All these thousands of people are healthy and expect to live a long and happy life, whereas I am not certain that I will be able to accompany my daughter to the wedding canopy. While these thoughts are passing through one’s mind with the speed of lightning, one feels forsaken, forlorn and lonely. I am different; I have met with a strange destiny. No one else is like me.

Gradually this feeling of loneliness pervades one’s whole being with ever-increasing predominance; the whole self becomes immersed in solitude and the awareness of being taken away from the community. The man who is bound to others by countless invisible threads is torn loose from his social bearings. He makes his exit from the community and retreats into him-

self because he was singled out. Elisha, upon being elected, abandoned his father and mother. The elected retreats even from his closest friends and beloved ones, not excluding wife and children.

The night before my operation, when my family said goodbye to me, I understood the words of the psalmist, “*Ki avi ve-immi azavuni, va-Hashem ya’asfeni*. When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up” (Ps. 27:10). I had never understood this verse. Did ever a parent abandon his child? Of course not! Yet in certain situations, one is cut off even from his parents or his beloved wife and children. Community life, togetherness, is always imbued with the spirit of cooperation, of mutual help and protection. Suddenly one realizes that there is no help which his loved ones are able to extend to him. They are onlookers who watch a drama unfolding itself with unalterable speed. They are not involved in it. This realization brings to an abrupt end the feeling of togetherness. I stand before God; no one else is beside me. A lonely being meeting the loneliest Being in utter seclusion is a traumatic but also a great experience. These two experiences, that of non-being and that of

The *Kaddish* marks the beginning of a new phase of courageous and heroic mourning to which the message of salvation is addressed. What is the relationship between the proclamation of the solemn doxology and burial? Through the *Kaddish* we hurl defiance at death and its fiendish conspiracy against man. When the mourner recites “Glorified and sanctified be the Great Name . . . ,” he declares: No matter how powerful death is, notwithstanding the ugly end of man, however terrifying the grave is, however nonsensical and absurd everything appears, no matter how black one’s despair is and how nauseating an affair life is, we declare and profess publicly and solemnly that we are not giving up, that we are not surrendering, that we will carry on the work of our ancestors as though nothing has happened, that we will not be satisfied with less than the full realization of the ultimate goal—the establishment of God’s kingdom, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life for man.