

The Struggles of the Israeli People: How Can God Do This to Us?

Objective: Sometimes thinking about the struggles

“Does that mean that my suffering has no meaning?” That is the most significant challenge that can be offered to the point of view I have been advocating in this book. We could bear nearly any pain or disappointment if we thought there was a reason behind it, a purpose, to it. But even a lesser burden becomes too much for us if we feel it makes no sense.

Patients in a veterans’ hospital who have been seriously wounded in combat have an easier time adjusting to their injuries than do patients with exactly the same injury, sustained while fooling around on a basketball court or a swimming pool, because they can tell themselves their suffering at least was in a good cause. Parents who convince themselves that there is some purpose somewhere served by their child’s handicap can accept it better for the same reason.

Do you remember the biblical story, in Exodus 32, about Moses, how, when he came down from Mount Sinai and saw the Israelites worshiping the golden calf, he threw down the tablets of the Ten Commandments so that they shattered? There is a Jewish legend that tells us that while Moses was climbing down the mountain with the two stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments, he had no trouble carrying them although they were large, heavy slabs of stone and the path was steep. After all, though they were heavy, they had been inscribed by God and were precious to him.

Then one day, his wife and children were killed when a forest fire ravaged their home in the south of France. Gray was distraught, pushed almost to the breaking point by this added tragedy. People urged him to demand an inquiry into what caused the fire, but instead he chose to put his resources into a movement to protect nature from future fires.

He explained that an inquiry, an investigation, would focus only on the past, on issues of pain and sorrow and blame. He wanted to focus on the future. An inquiry would set him against other people—“was someone negligent? whose fault was it?”— and being against other people, setting out to find a villain, accusing other people of being responsible for your misery, only makes a lonely person lonelier. Life, he concluded, has to be lived for something, not just against something.

We too need to get over the questions that focus on the past and on the pain — “why did this happen to me?” — and ask instead the question which opens doors to the future: “Now that this has happened, what shall I do about it?”

(2) Bereshit 15:13-14

By way of the simple meaning of Scripture, the verse is stating: "Just as I decreed

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and they came to Egypt of their own free will! Instead, the reason [for the punishment of the Egyptians] is as I have written above

Our Rabbis already mentioned this matter when they said in Shmoth Rabbah: “This may be likened to a lord who told his son that he should work for a certain person who should not cause him any suffering. So he went and worked for him. Now even though he worked for him without recompense, the master did not cease causing him suffering. When the lord finally was reconciled with his son, he decreed death to those who caused his son suffering. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed that Israel be in servitude in Egypt. But the Egyptians overwhelmed them and enslaved them by force. “Said the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘You should have used them as servants who would do your needs. *I was but a little displeased, and they helped for evil.*’ Thus far [is the quote from the Midrash Shmoth Rabbah]. Now it is clear that throwing Hebrew children into the river was not included in the decree, *And they shall enslave them, and afflict them*, for this would result in their complete ^{completehis}