

The Problem of Evil and a Good God

1. Deut. 11:13-21

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the ETERNAL your God and rendering service with all your heart and soul,

I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—

I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill.

Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them.

For GOD's anger will flare up against you, shutting 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 GOD is assigning to you.

Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, and teach them to your children—reciting them when you

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לֵאמֹר אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וּלְעַבְדּוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם:

וְנָתַתִּי מִטֶּר-אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּת
דְּגָנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ:

וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לִבְהֶמְתְּךָ וְאָכְלָתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ:

הַשְׁמָרְוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לִבְבְּכֶם וְסָרְתֶם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם
אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם:

וְחָרָה אַף-יְהוָה בְּכֶם וְעָצָר אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה
מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת-יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבֹתָם מִהֲרָה
מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נָתַן לָכֶם:

וְשָׁמַתֶּם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי עַל-לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם
וְקִשְׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטָפֹת בֵּין
עֵינֵיכֶם:

וּלְמַדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם לְדָבָר בֵּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ
בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל-מְזוֹנוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ:

stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up;

and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates—to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that GOD swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.

לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר לָהֶם כִּי יִמְיֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
עַל־הָאָרֶץ

2. Psalm 44 vs. 9-27

In God we glory at all times,
and praise Your name unceasingly. *Selah.*

Yet You have rejected and disgraced us;
You do not go with our armies.

You make us retreat before our foe;
our enemies plunder us at will.

You let them devour us like sheep;
You disperse us among the nations.

You sell Your people for no fortune,
You set no high price on them.

You make us the butt of our neighbors,
the scorn and derision of those around us.

You make us a byword among the nations,
a laughingstock among the peoples.

I am always aware of my disgrace;
I am wholly covered with shame

at the sound of taunting revilers,
in the presence of the vengeful foe.

All this has come upon us,
yet we have not forgotten You,

or been false to Your covenant.
Our hearts have not gone astray,
nor have our feet swerved from Your path,

though You cast us, crushed, to where the sea monster is,
and covered us over with deepest darkness.

If we forgot the name of our God
and spread forth our hands to a foreign god,
God would surely search it out,
as the One who knows the secrets of the heart.

It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long,
that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Rouse Yourself; why do You sleep, O my Sovereign?
Awaken, do not reject us forever!

Why do You hide Your face,
ignoring our affliction and distress?

We lie prostrate in the dust;
our body clings to the ground.

Arise and help us,
redeem us, as befits Your faithfulness.

What problem does Psalm 44 identify with reward and punishment theology?

What is the response?

3. Babylonian Talmud Menachot 29b, as quoted by Neil Gillman, The Way Into Encountering God in Judaism, p. 99

“LORD of the universe, You have such a man and You give the Torah through me!”

God replied, “Be silent, such is my decree.”

Then said Moses, “Lord of the universe, You have shown me his Torah, show me his reward.”

God replied, “Turn yourself around.”

Moses turned and saw them weighing out his [Akiva’s] flesh at the market stalls.

“Lord of the universe,” Moses cried, “such Torah and such a reward!”

God replies, “Be silent, such is my decree.”

How do we make sense of God allowing suffering?

4. Neil Gillman, The Way Into Encountering God in Judaism p. 104

Most of us believe that the victims of the Holocaust were blameless. We are then left with the first two claims: God is righteous or God is omnipotent. Intuitively, we would prefer to maintain both, and the most common strategy for accomplishing this is to insist that the Holocaust was not the work of God but rather of human beings. Once God created us free, God has to stand by even if people behave toward each other in the most terrifying ways....This God is limited not intrinsically but because of a decision that God has made- namely, to create people with free will....We call this God a “self-limiting” God...

This resolution may work for the Holocaust, where the perpetrators were human beings acting freely, but it has absolutely no impact in the case of Harold Kushner’s son, where the “perpetrator” was nature.

What are the pros and cons of a “self-limiting” God?

5. Rabbi Harold Kushner, as quoted by Neil Gillman in *The Way Into Encountering God in Judaism*, p. 102-3

God helps by inspiring people to help...God gives us the strength and perseverance to overcome [calamity]...[God] plant[s] in me a little bit of God's own divine outrage at injustice and oppression...

It may be that God finished God's world of creation eons ago and left the rest to us. Residual chaos, chance, and mischance, things happening for no reason, will continue to be with us, the kind of evil that Milton Steinberg has called "the still unremoved scaffolding of the edifice of God's creativity." In that case, we will simply have to learn to live with it, sustained and comforted by the knowledge that the earthquake and the accident, like the murder and the robbery, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of God's will, and which angers and saddens God even as it angers and saddens us.

What are the pros and cons of a limited but loving God?

6. Rabbi Doctor Bradley Shavit Artson, "An Evolving Torah from an Evolving God," [theTorah.com](https://www.thetorah.com/article/an-evolving-torah-from-an-evolving-god).
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God is often depicted as an unchanging Being distinct from the universe, and in complete control of everything that occurs, imposing coercive power while we and the rest of the cosmos are simply passive recipients of whatever this God doles out. This, however, is a projection of human cruelty onto the cosmos, as if God is akin to some giant bully in the sky. Instead, process theology posits that we need to think of God as the human term for the unity and dynamism of the universe, the cosmic companion who permeates all of us and everything.

We live in a universe of dynamic and constant change. We are swirling centers of energy, experiencers of the world *and* creators of experience, constituting each other's ecology, and God makes this all possible, facilitating all relating and all connection. How we respond to each other

in this dynamic universe is something intuitive, internal, and immediate.

We thrive in a universe that is on the way, *be-Derekh*, a universe that has been evolving over the last 14 billion years towards greater complexity, emerging into stable-enough solar systems, one at least, has regular reliable seasons and water, allowing the beginnings of self-organizing organic material.

What are the implications of process theology for the problem of evil?

How might God be shaped by us? What Jewish concepts does this relate to?

How can we partner with God to help both God and us?