

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

HAVE A POSITIVE OUTLOOK!

One of monotheism's most difficult practices is worshipping the same God that brings you good and that brings you misfortune. Yet, that is what the mishnah demands.

Mishnah: One must bless [God] for the evil in the same way as for the good, as it says, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5)" "With all your heart" means with your two impulses, the evil impulse as well as the good impulse. "With all your soul" means, even though He takes your soul. "With all your might" means with all your money. Another explanation of "with all your might" is whatever treatment he metes out to you. (M. Berachot 9:5)

Rabbi Akiba had infinite trust in God's wisdom and strove to take a positive outlook on everything:

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav citing Rabbi Meir, and so it was taught in the name of Rabbi Akiba: A man should always accustom himself to say, "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good", [as exemplified in] the following incident. R. Akiba was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused. He said, "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good." and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a cock, an ass and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the map, a weasel came and ate the cock and a lion came and ate the ass. He said, "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good". The same night some brigands came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. He said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Whatever the All-Merciful does (61a) is all for good'?"

How could Akiba praise God's goodness when he could not find lodgings, his map blew away, his lamp blew out and his ass and cock were eaten? Because he had an intense trust in God. Had he been in the town, he would have been captured. Had his lamp not been blown out, the robbers might have seen him and had his animals not been killed they might have drawn attention to Akiba and so put him at risk. Akiba was quite advanced along his path of spiritual growth. He alone of the four who entered "Paradise", i.e. mystical speculation, was unharmed. He was able to brave danger because of his trust in God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you personally able to bless God for the pain in your life as well as your blessings? How do you manage it?
2. If we attribute evil and suffering to "randomness" or a force besides God can we say we are still monotheists, i.e., still Jews?
3. Garth Brooks sings a song that says, "Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers." Can you give an example of such a case?