

Faith in Suffering

By Abraham J. Twerski

Probably the question most frequently asked by human beings is, “Why me?” If someone breaks a leg while driving recklessly, he may be in severe physical pain, but he is not psychologically tormented. He knows why he is hurting.

However, often misery strikes for no apparent reason, and the victim’s suffering is intensified because it appears to be unjust. Why should the innocent suffer?

People who do not believe in God say that there is no “why?” There are deadly tornadoes and children afflicted with malignant diseases because the forces of nature do not operate according to just and logical laws.

But when one believes in God and in His providence, one looks for a reason.

One tenet of our belief is that everything that God does is ultimately good; sometimes, we are worthy of seeing that the “bad” was actually a blessing in disguise.

One of my patients, a woman in

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recovery from alcoholism, once told me the following:

When I lost my job, I was angry at God. “Why did you do this to me?” I asked. When my husband left me, I felt that my life was over. Now, after seven years of sobriety, I can see that God took away from me those things that I did not have the sense to give up myself. I

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am now getting my master’s degree, which I never would have gotten had I stayed at that job. And I was in a bad marriage but will soon be married to a wonderful man.

I’ve seen the pattern in my life. Bad things are a prelude to good things. Now, when something bad happens, I anticipate the good thing that is sure to follow.

Often, however, it is difficult to see the blessing in hardship and tragedy; thus, the question of the suffering of the righteous presents an ongoing challenge. Vexed by this question, Moses asked God for an explanation. God told him that the answer is unknowable as long as one inhabits a physical body. According to one opin-

ion, Moses then wrote the Book of Job, where he attempts, but does not succeed, to resolve the mystery of theodicy.

Shortly before his death, however, Moses said, “The Rock!—perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice; a God of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4). In other words, Moses found the only true answer to the suffering of the righteous: *faith*.

Recently, I had an experience that has better enabled me to accept Moses’ answer. I went to visit a seven-year-old child who was brought from Israel to undergo open-heart surgery. Post-operatively, the child’s lungs had to be suctioned daily to prevent pneumonia. I was with the father when the child was taken into the treatment room. The child cried bitterly, “That hurts me! Abba! Don’t let them do this to me!”

“Yossi,” said the father, “don’t you want to go home? If they give you this treatment, you will be able to return home soon.” But while the father and I understood the obvious need for the painful treatment, seven-year-old Yossi was bewildered and upset by it.

The gap between our intellect and God’s wisdom is far greater than that between Yossi and his father. The Torah tells us that though we cannot understand the benefits of suffering, we have to have faith. This understanding should give us the strength to undergo times of hardship and struggle. **JA**