

## The Problem of Evil

### 1. Avot de Rabi Natan, 1.38

רשב"ג יושב ותוהה בדעתו ואומר אוי לנו שאנו נהרגין כמחללי שבתות וכעובדי ע"א וכמגלי עריות וכשופכי דמים. אמר לו רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע רצונך שאומר לפניך דבר אחד.א"ל אמור. א"ל שמא כשהיית מסיב בסעודה באו עניים ועמדו על פתחך ולא הנחתם שיכנסו ויאכלו.אמר לו השמים אם עשיתי כן אלא שומרים היו לי יושבין על הפתח כשהיו העניים באים היו מכניסין אותן אצלי ואוכלין ושותין אצלי ומברכין לשם שמים. א"ל שמא כשהיית יושב ודורש בהר הבית והיו כל אוכלוסי ישראל יושבין לפניך זחה דעתך עליך. אמר לו ישמעאל אחי מוכן אדם שיקבל את פגעו

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was sitting in a state of great anxiety, and he said, 'woe unto us, that we shall be killed like Shabbat violators, idolators, people who break the laws of sexual conduct, and murders.' Rabbi Yishamel ben Elisha said to him, 'May I say one thing before you?' 'Yes', he replied. He said, 'Maybe when you had a meal, poor people can and stood at your door, and you didn't invite them in to eat with you.' He responded: 'Heaven forefend that I should have done such a thing, rather, I had guards, sitting at the gates, and when the poor came, they would bring them in to me, and they would eat and drink with me, and make blessing for the sake of heaven.' He said, 'Maybe, when you were sitting expounding laws on the Temple Mount, and all of the masses of Israel sat before you, your ego swelled.' He responded: 'Yishmael, my brother, a man is ready [i.e., I am ready] to receive his [mortal] blow.'

### 2. Tractate Brachot 5a

אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: כל העוסק בתורה יסורין בדילין הימנו... אמר ליה רבי יוחנן: הא אפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותן, שנאמר אמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה' אלהיך והישר בעיניו תעשה והאזנת למצותיו ושמרת כל חקיו כל המחלה אשר שמת במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני ה' רופאך! אלא: כל שאפשר לו לעסוק בתורה ואינו עוסק - הקדוש ברוך הוא מביא עליו יסורין מכוערין ועוכרין אותן, שנאמר נאלמתי דומיה החשיתי מטוב וכאבי נעכר, ואין טוב אלא תורה, שנאמר: לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתני אל תעזבו...

אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו - יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה' פשפש ולא מצא - יתלה בבטול תורה... ואם תלה ולא מצא בידוע שיסורין של אהבה הם, שנאמר: כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח

R. Simeon b. Lakish says: If one studies the Torah, painful sufferings are kept away from him. ... R. Johanan said to him: This is known even to school children. For it is said (Exodus 15:26): And [Moses] said: 'If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His eyes, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee.' Rather [you should say]: If one has the opportunity to study the Torah and does not study it, the Holy One, blessed be He, visits him with ugly and painful sufferings which stir him up. For it is said (Psalm 39:3): 'I was dumb with silence, I kept silence from the good thing, and my pain was stirred up.' 'The good thing' refers only to the Torah, as it

is said (Proverbs 4:2): 'For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not My teaching.'...

Raba (some say, R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said (Lamentation 3:40): Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord. If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah... If he did attribute it [thus], and still did not find [this to be the cause], let him be sure that these are chastenings of love. For it is said (Proverbs 3:12): For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.

### **3. David Shatz, 'On Constructing a Jewish Theodicy,' pp. 314-5, *Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil***

Because the righteous are righteous, God gives them an opportunity – as a privilege, a benefit, a reward – to connect to God even more closely through suffering, or to display further virtue: the virtue of faith, of acceptance of God's will, of loving God. On the verge of being executed by the Romans for teaching Torah, the sage Rabbi Akiva is said to have been joyful over the opportunity to fulfill the commandment to "Love God *with all of your soul*" – that is, love Him even when your soul will be taken (Jerusalem Talmud, *Sotah* 5:5). This theodicy involves a move we may call the axiological shift. If a feeling of closeness to God, or faith and strength of spirit, or love of God, or knowledge of God, are greater goods than material welfare, then the problem of evil dissipates; and the sufferer achieves tranquility through adopting this perspective (see Chapter 15). "As for me, the nearness of God – that is the good" (Psalms 73:28).

### **4. Moed Katan 28a**

אמר רבי אממי: למה נסמכה מיתת מרים לפרשת פרה אדומה - לומר לך: מה פרה אדומה מכפרת - אף מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת. אמר רבי אלעזר: למה נסמכה מיתת אהרן לבגדי כהונה - מה בגדי כהונה מכפרין - אף מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת.  
...אמר רבא: חיי, בני ומזוני, לא בזכותא תליא מילתא, אלא במזלא תליא מילתא. דהא רבה ורב חסדא תרויהו רבנן צדיקי הוו, מר מצלי ואתי מיטרא, ומר מצלי ואתי מיטרא. רב חסדא חיה תשעין ותרתין שנין - רבה חיה ארבעין, בי רב חסדא - שיתין הלולי, בי רבה - שיתין תיכלי. בי רב חסדא – סמידיא לכלבי ולא מתבעי, בי רבה - נהמא דשערי לאינשי, ולא משתכח.

Said R. Ammi, Wherefore is the account of Miriam's death placed next to the [laws of the] red heifer? To inform you that even as the red heifer afforded atonement [by the ritual use of its ashes], so does the death of the righteous afford atonement [for the living they have left behind]. R. Eleazar said, Wherefore is [the account of] Aaron's death closely followed by [the account of the disposal of] the priestly vestments? [To inform you] that just as the priest's vestments were [means] to effect atonement, so is the death of the righteous [conducive to procuring] atonement.

...Rava said: [Length of] life, children and sustenance depend not on merit but [rather on] mazzal (astrology). For [take] Rabbah and R. Hisda. Both were saintly Rabbis; one master prayed for rain and it came, the other master prayed for rain and it came. R. Hisda lived to the age of ninety-two, Rabbah [only] lived to the age of forty. In R. Hisda's house there were held sixty marriage feasts, at Rabbah's house there were sixty bereavements. At R. Hisda's house

there was the purest wheaten bread for dogs, and it went to waste; at Rabbah's house there was barley bread for human beings and that not to be had.

### **5. Shatz, pg. 319**

Antitheodicy emphasizes responding to evil as opposed to theorizing about why it exists. Our reaction to evil must be to combat it, to relieve suffering, and to repair our faults, not to theorize about why evil is there. "We do not inquire about the hidden ways of the Almighty, but rather about the path wherein man shall walk when suffering strikes . . ." (Soloveitchik 2002, 156). The fundamental question is not why people suffer, but rather "What obligation does suffering impose upon man?" (Soloveitchik 2000, 56) In short, "Response, not explanation, is focal" (Lichtenstein 1999; see also Carmy 1999). "Responses" here obviously denote responses other than theorizing. (See Sokol 2007.) [See Shatz for references]

### **6. The Bahir, trans. Arie Kaplan, 1989, pp. 77-8**

מפני מה צדיק וטוב לו צדיק ורע לו, מפני שהצדיק הזה כבר היה רשע לשעבר ועתה נענש, וכי מענשין על ימי הנערות, והאמר ר' סימון שאין מענשין בבית דין של מעלה אלא מבן עשרים שנה ומעלה, אמר ליה אנא לא בחיי אמרי, אנא דאמרי שכבר היה לשעבר  
Why is there a righteous person who has good, and [another] righteous person who has evil? This is because the [second] righteous person was wicked previously, and is now being punished. Is one then punished for his childhood deeds? Did not Rabbi Simon say that in the Tribunal on high, no punishment is meted out until one is twenty years or older? He said: I am not speaking of his present lifetime. I am speaking about what has already been previously.

### **7. Dovid Gottlieb, *The Informed Soul*, 1990, pg. 152**

It may even be that appropriate punishment requires that [the subject] be ignorant of the reason for his suffering while it is happening. For example, one type of punishment we often employ with children is to make the wrongdoer experience what he has done to others. ("You took his toy; now you lose your toy for today.") In this way he learns what it feels like. Now imagine a pirate who kidnaps infants and sells them as slaves. Those infants experience pain, terror, deprivation, etc., *never knowing why*. How could the pirate experience that? Only if as an infant in a future life he experiences it! Of course *eventually* full memory will be restored and he will see the relevance of the punishment to the crime.

### **8. Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, pg. 48**

I shall never forget how I was roused one night by the groans of a fellow prisoner, who threw himself about in his sleep, obviously having a horrible nightmare. Since I had always been especially sorry for people who suffered from fearful dreams or deliria, I wanted to wake the poor man. Suddenly I drew back the hand which was ready to shake him, frightened at the thing I was about to do. At that moment I became intensely conscious of the fact that no dream, no matter how horrible, could be as bad as the reality of the camp which surrounded us, and to which I was about to recall him.

## 9. Menachot 29b

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעה שעלה משה למרום, מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות, אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, מי מעכב על ידך? אמר לו: אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמהדורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו, שעתיד לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות. אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, הראהו לי, אמר לו: חזור לאחורך. הלך וישב בסוף שמונה שורות, ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים, תששכחו; כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד, אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבי, מנין לך? אמר להן: הלכה למשה מסיני, נתיישבהדעתו. חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה, אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה ע"י? אמר לו: שתוק, כך עלה במחשבה לפני. אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, הראיתני תורתו, הראני שכרו, אמר לו: חזור[לאחורך]. חזר לאחוריו, ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין, אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, זו תורה וזו שכרה? א"ל: שתוק, כך עלה במחשבה לפני.

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab, When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in affixing coronets to the letters. Said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Who stays Thy hand?' He answered, 'There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws'. 'Lord of the Universe', said Moses; 'permit me to see him'. He replied, 'Turn thee round'. Moses went and sat down behind eight rows [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master 'Whence do you know it?' and the latter replied 'It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai' he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast such a man and Thou givest the Torah by me!' He replied, 'Be silent. So it arose in thought before me'. Then said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast shown me his Torah, show me his reward'. 'Turn thee round', said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls. 'Lord of the Universe', cried Moses, 'such Torah, and such a reward!' He replied, 'Be silent. So it arose in thought before me'.

## 10. Mei Hashiloach, Parshat Bereshit

וַיֵּצֵא ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן תֵּאָכַל  
מִכָּל וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל, לֵעֲשִׂי  
כִּשְׂתִּיחֹקֵן חֲטָא אָדָם הִרְאָתוֹן אִז יְהִי לִירֵךְ הַפְּסוּקִי  
מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן אֲכַל תֹּאכַל וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע  
לֹא תֹאכַל, הִיִּינוּ הַטּוֹב שְׂנֵהֲאִילָן יֹאכַל דַּק הַרַע לֹא  
יֹאכַל, וְהַסִּי יִצְרֵר כִּי לֹא אֲכַל דַּק הַטּוֹב וְהַחֲטָא לֹא  
הִי דַק לְפִי דַעַתוֹ כְּקִלְיֹת הַסּוּס וְלֹא יוֹתֵר .

And The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree in the garden, you may eat, and from the tree of good and evil, do not eat.' In the future, when the sin of Adam is fixed, then the flow of the verses will read, 'From any tree in the garden, you may eat, *and* from the tree of good', and [only] afterwards [we will read], 'And, from the evil do not eat.' That is to say, the

good which is in the tree you shall eat, only the evil don't eat. And Hashem, may he be Blessed, will clarify [retrospectively] that [Adam] only [in fact] ate from the good, and the sin didn't happen, except for in his mind, like the peel of a garlic, and nothing more.

### **11. Degel Machane Efrayim, Emor (Rav Moshe Chayim Efrayim, grandson of the Bal Shem Tov)**

שמעתי מן אב"ז זללה"ה כי חטא אלופו של עולם מוותר בו ודברי פי חכם חן, ופירוש כי האל"ף היא אינה נגלית ואינה ניכרת במבטא והיא באחרונה וכן בתיבת טמא רחמנא ליצלן גם כן הא' הוא מובלע באחרונה, ולהבין זה כי האדם העובר עבירה חס ושלום אז הוא הסתלקות הדעת מעליו כמאמרם ז"ל (סוטה ג' א) אין אדם עובר עבירה וכו' ואז הוא מחשב בודאי שעזב ה' את הארץ ואינו משגיח בה כי אם היה יודע ומאמין בזה שנגד ה' כל מפעליו שהוא משגיח עליו בכל עסקיו בודאי לא היה עובר עבירה כלל ובאמת הוא בודאי שקר גמור כי בודאי גם שם יש השגחתו מאתו יתברך כי אם יצויר העדר השגחתו משם אף רגע אחד מיד היה מת באותו רגע ולא היה כח בו לעשות שום דבר אך שבודאי שם גם כן הוא הקב"ה אך בהעלם ובהסתר מאוד ועל זה מרמז הסתרת הא' שהוא אלופו של עולם והוא באחרונה: I heard from my Master (the Bal Shem Tov) that the *Alufo shel Olam* (Master of the world) is hidden within sin, and the words of a wise man are gracious [Ecclesiastes 10:12;]. That is, the letter alef cannot be heard when pronouncing the word [sin, which has a silent alef], and it is written last. So too in the word "impure", God protect us, the alef is also silent and last.

Understand this! For when a person sins, his awareness of G-d leaves him, as the Sages said, "A person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him" (Sotah 3a). He imagines then that G-d has abandoned the world and is unaware of him. For if he knew and believed that all of his actions are in front of Hashem and that His providence extends over him in all that he does, he would never sin. And in truth, it is a total falsehood, for G-d's providence is there too [even in the moment of sin], for if you could imagine that He were to remove His influence for even an instant, G-d forbid, the person would immediately die. He would not have the power to do anything [even a sin]. The Holy One is certainly there, though greatly concealed. This is alluded to by the silent alef, which refers to the *Alufo shel Olam* [literally the "Chief of the World"], and it is at the end [of the word].

### **12. At Swim Two Birds, Flann O'Brien – excerpts:**

The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer could be despotic. In reply to an inquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. It was undemocratic to compel characters to be uniformly good or bad or poor or rich. Each should be allowed a private life, self-determination, and a decent standard of living. This would make for self-respect, contentment and better service. It would be incorrect to say that it would lead to chaos.

It may be usefully mentioned here that I had carefully considered giving an outward indication of the son's semi-humanity [since the son that we're talking about was the child of an author and that author's female character, and thus not fully human] by furnishing him with only the half of a body. Here I encountered further difficulties. If

given the upper half only, it would be necessary to provide a sedan-chair or litter with at least two runners or scullion-boys to operate it. The obtrusion of two further characters would lead to complications, the extent of which would not be foreseen. On the other hand, to provide merely the lower half, *videlicet*, the legs and lumbar region, would be to narrow unduly the validity of the son and confine his activities virtually to walking, running, kneeling, and kicking football. For that reason I decided ultimately to make no outward distinction and thus avoided any charge that my work was somewhat far-fetched.