

# Divine Patience and Human Acceptance

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz - Yerachmiel Seplowitz. "Hey, What About The Other 603?"

YISRO (Exodus, 18:1-20:23)

(From the Archives--Message from four years ago) "Divine Patience and Human Acceptance"

(I would like to thank you all for your prayers and good wishes on behalf of my uncle. This week's message is dedicated in memory of Shmuel ben Zev.

May G-d console my mother, my aunts, and my cousins among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.)

When Moses returned to Egypt to lead his nation to freedom, he left his wife and children in Midian. They stayed with Moses' father-in-law Jethro, the retired High Priest of Midian. Now that Moses was traveling in the desert, Jethro brought his daughter and grandsons to be re-united with Moses.

Jethro was impressed by what he saw and heard. "Now I know that G-d is greater than all the gods, because of the way they had conspired against them (the Israelites.)" (Exodus, 18:11)

Rashi explains that Jethro saw G-d's greatness in the fact that the Egyptians sinned with water (drowning the newborn boys in the Nile) and were subsequently punished with water (drowning in the Red Sea). This concept is called "Middah K'negged Middah -- measure for measure.? Whether rewarding or punishing, G-d repays in kind.

Why did Jethro find this so impressive? Perhaps his background had something to do with it. Jethro had given up his belief in idols. He had experimented with every religion; he knew them all. When he said, "Now I know that G-d is greater than all the gods..." he was speaking from experience.

Most cultures at that time believed in many gods. There was the sun god, the moon god, the Super Bowl god, etc. Each god's powers were limited to its own domain. Hence, mythology is replete with legends about wars between competing gods.

The Egyptians had thought they could thwart G-d's plans to take the Israelites out of Egypt. They knew that a baby was going to be born who would grow up to lead them to freedom. Therefore, they started drowning Jewish babies in the Nile. Their success at committing this atrocity indicated to them that perhaps the G-d of Israel was powerless to stop them.

Perhaps the god of the Nile was stronger than the G-d of Israel. After all, it seemed, He could not stop them from sinning with water.

Once Jethro saw that G-d was able to punish them through water, he understood that G-d is all-powerful. It was not that G-d COULDN'T stop the murders. Rather, in His sometimes-hard-to-understand wisdom, He CHOSE NOT TO stop the murders. He was not being weak; He was being patient, and waited to punish them at the Red Sea.

---

Sometimes G-d's patience with Evil is difficult to understand.

A famous Jewish author has sold millions of books, claiming to explain why bad things happen to good people. His basic theory is that G-d can't help it. (R"L) This author describes G-d as an impotent, grandfatherly figure who is powerless to save people from disease and other tragedy. The G-d, (or should I say, "god") of this man's theology is there as a shoulder to cry on; someone to turn to for inspiration; little more.

I call this approach "religious atheism." You don't have to be angry at G-d and you don't have to deny His existence. You can believe in Him; just pretend that He is confronted by powers that even He can't overcome, and you can still be a "believer."

It is very comforting. The only problem is that it isn't Judaism. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik <http://www.ou.org/about/judaism/rabbis/jbsolov.htm> once wrote (not an exact quote) that anyone who could explain the tribulations of Job would actually be doing a disservice to religious people. Serving G-d requires us to maintain our faith in spite of the questions that gnaw at our souls.

Unlike Jethro, the above-mentioned author prefers to view G-d's silence in the face of tragedy as weakness. That author would be well-advised to have the humility to recognize that G-d sometimes CHOOSES to be silent.

Such an approach does not make faith an easy job. G-d hears every prayer, and He answers every prayer... Sometimes the answer is "No."

The struggle lies in our ability to accept it.

Have a great Shabbos.  
Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

-----  
>From last year's message -- "Honor thy --- Self!"

We're all familiar with the famous picture of Moses carrying the two Tablets of the Ten Commandments. You know, the guy with the flowing beard and horns sticking out of his head, carrying in each hand a tall stone tablet, rounded at the top. Well, while it is quite possible that Moses had a long, flowing, beard, it seems that Michelangelo got the rest of the picture wrong. The Tablets, each a cubit (somewhere between 18 and twenty-four inches) high, a cubit wide, and a half-cubit thick were made of sapphire and were carried by a hornless Moses in one hand. They were not rounded. Held together they would form a perfect cube.

Each Tablet was engraved with five of the Ten Commandments. It has been pointed out that the Commandments on the first Tablet deal with man's relationship with G-d, while the second Tablet addresses his relationship his fellow man.

An examination of second tablets seems to agree with that explanation. The prohibitions of 6)

murder, 7) adultery, 8) kidnaping, (the Eighth Commandment is not a ban on stealing -- that prohibition is in Leviticus, 19:11 -- but that's a Torah Talk for some other day.) 9) bearing false witness, and 10) coveting what your neighbor has are all Mitzvahs that govern getting along with other humans.

Most of the first Tablet appears to work as well. 1) Belief in G-d, prohibitions of 2) idol worship and 3) swearing falsely in G-d's name, and 4) observing the Sabbath are all Mitzvahs that tell us how to properly respect our Creator.

So, the explanation of "G-d-Mitzvahs" on Tablet #1 and "Humanity-Mitzvahs" on Tablet #2 is at least 90% accurate. Where we run into trouble is at Commandment #5 -- Honor your father and your mother. The last time I checked, parents are human beings (although some teenagers might tend to disagree!) What are parents doing on G-d's Tablet?! Shouldn't the Mitzvah of honoring one's parents fall in the category of Mitzvahs between fellow human beings?

The answer is obvious. Our Sages tell us that there are three partners in the creation of a human being. While one's human parents are the physical creators of a child, it is G-d who provides the soul that gives life and spirituality to an otherwise lifeless clump of DNA. One might be tempted to honor only G-d as the REAL Creator. (And, of course, the need to honor one's parents does not override his obligation to honor G-d. If a parent tells a child to violate the Torah, the Torah exempts him from obeying the parent's command. It is the approximate equivalent of a sergeant telling a private to disobey the General. Perhaps that's why honoring one's parents is the LAST of the first five!) The Torah tells us that by honoring our parents, we are honoring G-d as well.

The G-d/parent correlation assists us in relating to both. We refer to G-d in human terms. He is "our Father, our King..." Did you ever wonder what G-d's voice sounds like? Is it high-pitched or low? Is He a bass or a tenor? Well, apparently, G-d uses different voices when speaking to different prophets. The voice Moses heard at the Burning Bush was that of Amram, his father! I guess if you and I were prophets, you would hear your Dad, and I would hear mine!

Seeing G-d as a father assists us in realizing that the all-powerful Master of the World loves us dearly. It helps us to see that even when He does something that we don't understand, it is done with love and compassion. It is something that our Father, in His Infinite Wisdom knows to be in our best interest. (See ""Divine Patience and Human Acceptance" <http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576217>)

It also allows us to see our parents in the proper light. Our parents are G-d's partners in bringing us into the world. He would not have made them His partners had He not given them the Divine inspiration and wisdom they would need to guide us. If our parents tell us something, we should not be too quick to dismiss them. (For those times when our parents seem NOT to demonstrate such Divine inspiration, see three paragraphs above, and one paragraph below.)

It also sends an important message to us as parents. You are G-d's partner in raising your child. G-d is relying on you to take your job seriously. You are not your child's friend. You are his guide. You are your child's mentor; you are her

rabbi. Take the job seriously. Your child is looking for you for guidance. (Whether he admits it or not!) Don't let him or her down. Don't let HIM down. You can be a good role model. You MUST be a good role model. After all, you've been given top billing on the Tablets. You represent your Divine Partner.

And, one more thing, moms and dads. Are you scared, frustrated, at your wits' end? Are you overwhelmed by your parental responsibilities, and unsure what to do next?

Ask your Partner for help. He knows how to assist you. He's been in this business for quite a while.

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576517>

---

>From two years ago -- "Ouch!"

Jethro, the high priest of Midian, was impressed. His son-in-law, Moses,... had led his People out of Egypt. He had led them triumphantly through the Red Sea, and presided over the defeat of the Amalekites who had attacked them.

Jethro heard about it all, and wanted to join Moses in celebrating G-d's salvation ... Jethro brought offerings and sacrifices to G-d.

The miracles of the Exodus changed Jethro's life. He had already given up his life of idol worship, but had not yet found the true religion. He now embraced Judaism...

But, something was amiss. Jethro was ill at ease...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576417>

---

>From three years ago -- "The Sword and the Stone"

... It's relatively easy to become a Priest. The son of a Kohain is a Kohain. REMAINING a Priest is a bit more challenging. There are things that can disqualify a Kohain. One of the disqualifiers is having killed someone...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576417>

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576117>

From five years ago -- "Hey, What About The Other 603?"

...There was a time when the Ten Commandments were recited as part of the morning service...the rabbis of the Talmud removed it from the liturgy and banned public readings of the Ten Commandments...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576117>