

## Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz Explains the Book of Job

Some have said it is the single most important problem in religious philosophy. Religious philosophy deals with a lot of issues: how do you know there's God? How do you know there's Torah? But let's say a person believes in God, a person believes in Torah, 'I have no problem with that.' But the big problem that people do have is, 'Okay, I believe in God but God is supposed to be just and God is supposed to be kind. How can we live in a world where there is so much tragedy, where there's so much suffering, where bad things happen to good people and the other way around? Sometimes people who are evil-doers, they prosper and life goes very well for them, at least for a while.' And this is the problem known as theodicy, why do bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to bad people and the like. Now it is true that in the totality of Jewish theology, perhaps there are simple, relatively simple answers that one can talk about. There is after all the concept of a world to come so even if in this world things are bad, but in the world to come, there's going to be reward. Conversely, there's also a concept of reincarnation. Now this was developed, those of you that were in Tzfat, this was developed by the Kabbalists, it's not necessarily, it's certainly not in the Torah, it's not even in the Talmud. But there is an idea, similar to Buddhism that basically says, sometimes you suffer in this world because of the sins that you committed in your past life for which you need an atonement and the like. So, we either could focus on the world to come or we could focus on reincarnation and past lives as part of a partial answer. But still, it is a very, very perplexing and a very, very difficult issue.

Now, the first thing to know is that this was not an issue that only bothers modern man, in fact, Moses himself questioned the Almighty. If you remember in the Book of Exodus, in one of the verses, Moses says to God, show me Your ways. And the interpretation is, he wanted to understand why do righteous people suffer and why do evil-doers prosper? And the interesting thing is, he asks God that question, and God doesn't answer it. God simply says, I will be gracious to whom I choose to be gracious, I will be merciful to whom I choose to be merciful. In other words, you're asking Me a question, I'm not going to answer it, this is the way it is. That's pretty frustrating. Moses is all the way up there with God and in fact, this is the meaning of the Talmudic interpretation. There are 50 levels of understanding God and Moses reached 49. The 50<sup>th</sup> level is exactly this particular question.

There is an entire book of the Bible, not the Torah, but in the Bible that is devoted to this theme of the suffering of the righteous. And that book is, of course, the Book of Job. So, I want to talk a little bit about the Book of Job. It's a beautiful, magnificent literary structure. And Job is described as a

man, by the way, he is not identified as Jewish, and many commentaries assert he was not Jewish, in fact some commentaries assert he was just fictional. And the reason is, because what Job was describing is not a particular problem of the Jewish people, it is a human problem. And Job in some way is every man (no capital E), and that is why he is not described as Jewish, he is not described as keeping the mitzvot, he is described as God-fearing.

So, what is the storyline of Job? So, the storyline of Job is there's this righteous man called Job who is perfect in his faith. He fears the Almighty, he gives charity, he tries to do everything that he can do and he's living a good life. He's wealthy, he has a large family, he's well respected, he's admired. He's a paragon of virtue and a foundation of his community. Now we then switch the scene. Imagine this dramatically, we then switch the scene to Heaven and Job is not aware of this. We're aware of it and God is holding a Heavenly Court surrounded by angels, as if God is the Chief Justice, and there's this heavenly Council of angels, and God says to the angels, 'Have you ever seen such a righteous person as Iyov (as Job)? Isn't he the greatest you've ever seen?' So there is one dissenting voice and that dissenting voice is called Satan. This is very interesting. In the Christian tradition, Satan is a fallen angel, meaning he's an angel that got kicked out of heaven because he rebelled against God. And he became almost God's rival, whether it's the Antichrist or whatever it would be. In the Jewish tradition, first of all, I want to point out two things about Sa-tan. Sa-tan first appearance in the Book of Job, Sa-tan is Satan. Number one, Satan is actually not a name, it is a function. He is called Ha-Sa-tan, The Satan, and what is his function? It simply means the prosecutor. He is not a fallen angel. He's up there in the Heavenly Court. And he is literally what we would call the devil's advocate, when God says, 'Oh, this person deserves goodness and blessing.' So the Satan is the district attorney that is supposed to point out the negatives. So Satan is a respected entity, meaning he's part of the heavenly judicial process, whatever that means exactly. And the Satan speaks up to God and says, 'Hey God, Job isn't as righteous as you're making him out to be. Of course, he serves you because he gets a lot out of it. He's wealthy, he's respected, he has kids. Yeah, so of course he serves you, but start taking the stuff away from him and we'll see how righteous he is.'

So as you're reading this, you get the impression, very, very odd literary conceits that God and the Satan are engaged in a gambling bet, a wager. 'I bet you God if you start taking away stuff, Job is gonna rebel against you.' And God says, 'I accept the bet.' It's kind of outrageous. And immediately, Job has no idea that there was a bet made about him and God gives the Satan permission to start taking things away from Job, but he gave him one condition, he said, don't kill him. Reason is very simple; the experiment cannot be successful if the subject dies. The experiment is designed to see how much bad stuff can I do to him before he rebels against me. But if you kill him; what do they

say, the experiment was successful but the patient died, it's not going to work. So He gave [Satan] one instruction, do what you want to him, but don't kill him. However our Sages add two other things, that besides Job's life, there were two other things that he was spared. He was spared the loss of his wife, his wife was not killed, because that is equivalent, losing one's wife is equivalent to death and God also spares Job's friends. Because a life without friends is tantamount to death. But be it as it may, Job is totally clueless here, he doesn't know what's going on and all of a sudden, all sorts of things begin to happen.

First, what happens is that a bunch of marauders take all of his flocks, and they destroy his property. He's reduced to poverty. Second, a house collapses on his children that are having a party, he has seven sons and [three] daughters, building collapses, he loses all of them. And thirdly, he gets afflicted with loathsome illnesses that are so repulsive that people cannot even stand being in his proximity. So he loses his friends at the same time he loses his health. Right, he loses everything. And Mrs. Job has a very brief walk on appearance, she only has one line. She says to her husband, 'Why don't you just curse God so He'll strike you with lightning and take you out of your misery.' And Job utters the immortal words that to this very day we say at a funeral, 'God gives and God takes, may the name of God be blessed.' Shall we accept the good of the Almighty and not accept the evil? And in English, there's even an expression I believe Shakespeare might use it, I'm not sure, the patience of Job, the person who is long-suffering, the person who is patient, right, the person who says whatever happens to me, I accept with equanimity. But I have to say whoever coined that phrase, only read chapter one of the Book of Job and didn't keep on reading.

Because then when we read chapter two, something else happens and that is Job has three very dear friends and those friends come to comfort him and the Gemara even says that they actually lived a very long distance from him. And in those days there was no email or telephone or fast communication, how did they know to come? And the Gemara gives us an insight into friendship. They just had almost a telepathic sense that their friend needed help. Often mothers and children have that type of relationship, right? Mom kinda knows when you're in trouble. How did she know? She just knew. There the bond of souls can be so strong, that even without email, or Twitter or Facebook, there's just a sense of vibes that come from one end of the world to the other end of the world. He had friends like that, these were dear friends and they came and they sat with him for seven days and seven nights and they didn't say a word. And this, their conduct finds its expression in the halacha. You know that when, God forbid, someone loses a relative, loses a parent, loses a child, loses a spouse, so they mourn for seven days. This is called (as you know), sitting shiva. And they don't leave their house, people come to them to offer comfort. But you know, there's actually a halacha, we don't always follow it for various reasons, that when you come

to comfort a mourner, you don't initiate the conversation. Sometimes the mourner just wants silence, the mourner is not ready to talk, the mourner is not ready to hear words. And therefore, you sit in silence, until the mourner initiates conversation. And that is derived biblically from the behavior of Job's friends who sat with him. Seven days, seven nights, I'm not sure what that meant, it seems to be 24/7, they literally, you know, sat there, of course.

Again, halachically, things are a little different, because there's Shabbat, you know, okay, but obviously, as I say, these were not even necessarily Jewish people, so they weren't keeping all of these rituals. But this was the basic idea of comforting your friends in time of need. But apparently, it may have been a wrong strategy because during those seven days, Job was very silent. And you have to have the picture, I mean, he's lost all of his children. He lost all of his fortune. His body is covered with scabs and there's a loathsome smell coming from him. And he can't even wear clothes, it's as if to say his skin is so sensitive, that he's basically stripped to a loincloth and he's sitting in ashes. And his friends didn't talk to him, they were there, but they didn't talk to him. But at the end of the seven days, he erupted, this faithful patient, long-suffering person erupted in a fit of anger and accusation against God, in which he cursed the day that he was born. And he demanded an explanation from God, 'Why did this happen? I was righteous, I was good. I kept my side of the bargain. Where were You? What are You doing?'

And from that point, the Book switches from what you might call the story structure, to essentially a philosophical debate in which each of Job's friends states a position to kind of justify God. Job refutes it. So you really have three rounds, what you have is, friend one says something, Job responds, friend two says something, Job responds, friend three says something, Job responds. Then we have a second round, 1,2,3, with responses. And then in the third round, you only have friend one and two, friend three disappears, he seems to have left. And then there's a fourth friend that comes and at the end of the Book, you have God showing up, right? That's kind of the structure of the Book of Job and it's very, very complex and very rich and very deep. And if my words today encourage you to pick up the Book of Job and try to study it, that would be very, very worthwhile. Because number one, it's very interesting to identify what are the distinct positions of the three friends. But number two, how those positions change in successive rounds of the debate. Because friend one's position in the second round, is informed not only by Job's responses, but by what the other friends say. So, each one will then incorporate elements of the other and build on each other and interact with each other. So, it's a very, very fascinating literary structure but it deals with a theological problem of first importance. So we don't have the time right now, to distinctively identify what each of the friends are saying but let me just say that we can summarize in a

simplistic way that the friends are defending what you might call the conventional view of morality, which seems to be the one that's articulated in the Torah itself.

You read the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, that came directly from God. And the Torah seems to say, if you behave in accordance with God's will, you will have a good life. You will have rain, you will have prosperity, you will have health, you will have children. And if you don't obey God's law, you will have a bad life. And I want to emphasize, the Torah does not talk about this in terms of the world to come. That's kind of you know, our answer. The Torah talks about it in the here and now, I hope most of you said the Shema this morning, right? But if you didn't, be it as it may, you know what the Shema says, if you will keep My commandments, I will give you rain, I will give you prosperity, I will give you health and if you don't keep My commandments, then bad things are gonna happen to you in this world.

So Job's friends are trying to defend the conventional morality. But they got a problem. Well, one second here, do good, you're gonna live good, do bad you're gonna live bad. Job's living bad, how could that be? he was doing good. So their response was, 'Hey Job, it must be you're not as righteous as you thought you were' and their message was basically, nothing bad happens to you, unless you're a sinner. Sorry Job, I guess you got some sins that you have to work on. And it's fascinating how the tone escalates. Initially it's a very gentle tone, meaning nobody's perfect, we all have flaws, perhaps you can look into yourself, improve yourself, become better, but Job doesn't accept it. Job says, you know, I've done nothing wrong and the tone escalates. So by the end of the dialogue, Job's friends start saying there has never been a sinner as great as you since the beginning of the world.

It's like, it turns into anger, which means there's a secondary aspect of the Book of Job that besides the philosophical issue, it also deals with the psychological problems of how to be a support system for somebody in need. In other words, it sounds to me because you basically think it's like I, the nature again, I mean, hopefully, you have not experienced this, but sometimes people are called upon to be caregivers for loved ones who are in extreme situations, whether it's Alzheimer's, whether it's cancer, whatever it would be. And you will often find a phenomenon, that because of your helplessness in really being able to comfort them or help them or make them better, you will actually paradoxically, you will feel anger at them for not responding to your help [sometimes described as caregiver stress syndrome]. I know there's a, I've seen cases where a person breaks down and starts screaming at a cancer patient. Why can't you get better!? Why don't you know, respond to what I'm doing for you!? Makes no sense but psychologically, you can understand, because you get overwhelmed with your impotence, your inability to make a

difference. And you see that psychological transition in the fact that Job's friends are getting progressively disgusted with him.

In fact I would suggest, although I did not see this, this is why in round three, you'll recall I mentioned only friends one and two are there, friend three is not even there. I think the intimation is he just walked away in disgust. He says, I'm sick of this, I've given you my wisdom, I've given you my insight, you're not taking advantage of it. To hell with you, you know, suffer. This is what can happen. So, I'm gonna call this the conventional morality and it doesn't mean that it's not true, it's in the Torah, but we'll discuss it and they're making the arguments that if God is a compassionate God and God is a just God, he would not allow bad things to happen to people unless they deserved it. So if bad things happen, even though it looks like you don't deserve it, you apparently do deserve it. So do teshuvah, repent, become a better person and the like.

By the way, there is a certain comforting aspect in the conventional morality because it's a way to immunize ourselves. In other words I look at a person that's suffering, if I can say, 'Oh, he's suffering because the bus turned over because the kids weren't keeping Shabbos or this happened, or AIDS happened because this person was a homosexual.' That kind of allows me to separate them from me and that allows me to go through life without this horror of something bad happening. This is why there is a human tendency sometimes to try to identify some blame that somebody has, because then I can kind of take myself out of that predicament. Otherwise life is very horrifying and terrifying if any moment things can happen.

So we'll call this the conventional morality and this seems to be the morality structure that's in the Torah itself. And yet, Job refuses to accept it because Job says, 'I've done nothing wrong, I have been righteous, I've looked into my deeds, they are not wanting.' And this argument goes on and on and as I say, there are nuances that we're not touching upon between what the first friend says and what the second friend says and what the third friend says and they also modified their positions in the course of the debate. But as I say, our focus today is the forest not the trees, and this is the basic idea, okay. And Job keeps on saying to his friends, you guys are wind bags, the actual word that he uses, you guys don't know what you're talking about, I want to hear from God why this happened! Well, you know, the old saying, be careful for what you pray for because you might get it and at the end of the Book, can very dramatic scene, all of a sudden, there's a whirlwind, a tornado, very ominous. And the voice of God says to Job, I'm here, would you like to ask me some questions? And Job really doesn't ask anything at that point, God knows what the questions are and God proceeds to show him the equivalent of a National Geographic Special on the wonders of nature. In fact those of you that are nature lovers, the last few chapters of the Book of Job are one of the most outstanding and beautiful portrayals of the wonders of the universe that

is found in the Bible. He shows Job the stars and the planets, the constellations, the mountains, the valleys, the ice of the polar areas, and the magnificent emptiness of the deserts. He shows him the diversity of animal life, the hippopotamus and the elephant and huge animal. And each time there's a bit of a mocking tone, He says to Job, pretty good Job huh, could you do better? Could you do this? Could you do this? He talks about different phenomena, such as mountain goats, your mountain goats are always skipping around these sharp peaks and when they have to give birth, they have to give birth in exactly the position where the baby doesn't fall down the mountain and everything has to be timed, you know very much exactly. And every time He says to Job, hey, pretty good huh, pretty good, pretty good, pretty good. Could you do better? He seems to be mocking Job, again, superficially, he seems to be bullying Job into submission.

And yet, at the end of the Book, Job responds with only two words, *mihampti* Now I'm saying it in Hebrew, because *mihampti* actually has two translations and each translation is actually somewhat interesting. *Mihampti* means I have been comforted, God, you have comforted me. Oh, yeah, I forgot one thing. The one thing that God said to him was, Job, He gave him good news and bad news. Job, your friends are wrong and you're right. You don't deserve any of this. That's the good news. The bad news is, if I don't deserve any of this, why is it happening? In a way, if you were to tell me I deserved it, at least it would make sense to me, I'd have some answer. So God, at the same time that he validates Job's position makes the problem a much greater problem and that's when he shows him the National Geographic Traveler. And Job's response is *mihampti*, so *mihampti* either means I am comforted, *Na-hama* or *mihampti* means I regret my words, I regret what I said, I was wrong.

And the big question that one has to ponder is, what was God's answer? Job has a very legitimate question and God acknowledged it's a legitimate question. Job said, a righteous, merciful, compassionate and just God is not going to cause bad things to happen to people who don't deserve it. Why did this happen to me? The friend's answer was you must have deserved it, that's the friend's answer. God says, friends are wrong Job, you don't deserve it. So why? God shows him the wonders of nature. How is that an answer? And if it is, and Job seems to say it is an answer because Job says I am comforted. And then the Book kind of goes into a happy ending that Job instead of, he lost seven children, God gives him back 14 children and Job even lives not the proverbial 120 years, he lives 140 years as if to say, you know, there's like frosting on the cake there. What's going on? Well, this is a deliberately obscure book because this is the message of life and one can think about this and you can ponder this, and you can cogitate and come up with your own understandings. But let me just mention three overlapping understandings of what God is doing. The first which I'll mention quite quickly is not accepted by the Jewish tradition but in the

interest of honesty, I will tell you that some biblical commentators, modern biblical commentators utilize it. And they say, God is playing the bully, God is biased, I don't know if your parents ever told you, ever use this line on you. It says, you know, something like, you think this is bad, wait what I'll do to you when you come home. It's kind of, so He's telling Job, don't mess with Me guy, because I can do a lot worse. He's kind of showing him his power and he is cowering him into submission by saying, as bad as you think it's gotten, I have the power to make it a lot worse. But again, the Jewish tradition does not accept this image of God as bully. Because we very much do believe that although God has accountability, God has justice, but God is also a God of love and a God of mercy.

So a second explanation is the following: God is trying to communicate to Job the complexity and the interrelationship of the universe and that is, he says to Job the following, we as human beings exist in two dimensions. On one hand we are isolated people with our own lives and our own deeds, our good deeds and our bad deeds. And as isolated people, we might expect to be judged in accordance with our behaviors. But in addition to the isolated individual autonomous status that we possess, we are also cogs in the universe. You know, Shakespeare once remarked that all the world is a stage and it's been said that we are like actors in a cosmic play, which started thousands of years before us and will end thousands of years or more after us and we have a walk on part. Now imagine if you were an actor in a billion-page play and you were given one sheet to memorize and the play basically says, enter stage right, slip on a banana peel, break your leg. You might go to the director and say, this is unfair, I have one line and I'm supposed to break my leg. Why is this happening? And the director might say to you, you're an idiot. If you understood the thousands of pages that came before this, and the thousands of pages that came after this, you would understand that what happened to you had to happen to you to advance the overall plan of the drama. In a much more consequential way what God is trying to communicate to Job in this context is, and again this is highly abstract, and I know it may not be emotionally satisfactory, I'll mention some other aspects as well, is that the events that befall us are not always a function of our individual identities. But they are responses and precursors to processes that affect the world, affect the universe and therefore in a sense, he's showing Job you are a cog in a much larger process. And if you change any one thing, you know what it is said, it is said that (I know one of the students here is training to be a meteorologist is here today) but it is said that it is very difficult to accurately predict the weather in the long term and one of the reasons for that is that if somebody sneezes, that should generate some extra air currents that can ultimately turn into a tsunami somewhere when combined with other factors. Meaning, we live in a universe that is so interrelated that the smallest little change here can have great repercussions when you magnify it and combine it with many other causes. That is why we are so concerned about these little fish



that get extinct because even though they might be unimportant but you never know what's going to happen in the larger scale of things.

So God is showing Job then in a complex universe, you can't simply focus on the justice of what happens to you. You have to see the ripple effects and the interactions in all of these areas which are beyond human comprehension. And in fact in the Book of Job, there's even a sarcastic reference where God says to Job, if you could do a better job than I, I'll take a vacation and give you the reigns, see how you'd handle it. So that's one idea. And again let me give you a tangible mashal for this. You know in the Holocaust, when six million Jews died, there was a very, very great rabbi who died with his fellow Jews, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman. And again it's especially tragic because Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman was actually in the United States in 1938, one year before Hitler invaded Poland and started the concentration camps, as you know, although Hitler was from Germany, obviously, but the bulk of the concentration camps were not in Germany. The Germans didn't want to sully their land. The bulk of the concentration camps were in Poland. And the Poles were quite cooperative in assisting the Germans in doing their work, so really, although Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, the death camps began in earnest 39. So it's 39 to 45 were the years of the death camps. And Rav Elchonon Wasserman was in 1938 and it was already fairly known that Hitler would invade Poland at some point and he was given the opportunity to stay in the United States. He could have stayed here but he decided to go back to put his fate with his fellows, with his students, and then the Jewish community. So it's very sad. There's one photograph I remember seeing of Rabbi Elchonon on the ship back to Poland where he must have known he was going towards his death, and he's gazing out into the ocean with a great pensive thoughtfulness, very, very moving in light of the history that came later. But Rav Elchonon Wasserman did die a martyr's death in Lithuania. But there was one or two survivors who actually recounted his final message to the group, he actually gave the people a message of hope before they were led to their death. And he said, we don't understand why God is doing this. But he gave the following mashal (mashal is a parable): says there was a little boy who wanted to understand how we get bread. So his parents take him out to a very lush green pasture full of grass and bushes and the light shrubs and the child says this is so pretty. And then one day comes the tractors and they uproot all, cut all the grass, uproot all the shrubs and they convert this beautiful green pasture into a muddy field. And the child doesn't understand. Why did you destroy the beauty that was here? But they seeded it and a few months later, there are beautiful gold stalks of wheat that are growing. The child says now I understand. You destroyed the grass so there would be wheat. But then comes the harvesters and once again they destroy the field. Child doesn't understand, this was so beautiful, golden brown, now you've destroyed it. But what happens is they thresh the wheat and they have a pile of seeds, kernels. Now the child says I understand. But then the kernels

are ground into a colorless, tasteless powder, flour. Child doesn't understand. But you get the idea, then eventually it's made into bread, etc.

Meaning Rav Elchonon says, every stage of destruction can ultimately lead to a higher divine purpose. And we don't understand, couldn't have there been a well, for example, some people say, I'm just throwing this out, that the Holocaust was the reason why there was a State of Israel. That why did the United Nations which we know is pretty antisemitic, The United Nations is no lover of Jews, it never was and it's certainly not today. Why in 1948 was there almost a unanimous vote that there ought to be a Jewish state? Of course, it was God's doing but historically, it was very much connected to the Holocaust. There was a brief window in time in which the world either felt guilty or they felt compassion for a nation that suffered so much. Without the Holocaust there would not have been a State of Israel. Now I am not at all suggesting, I am not at all suggesting, this is an answer to the moral dilemma why there was a Holocaust because one might say with a certain amount of correctness that the deaths of a million and a half children, you know, do not. In other words, a State of Israel that does not justify the deaths of a million and a half children. Meaning to say: so don't have a state of Israel and don't have a holocaust! I'm not suggesting an answer, all I'm suggesting is that in the universe as we see it, the good and the bad are intertwined and there are causal associations. And that is the message that God is communicating to Job and that is, don't just look at yourself, what happens to you is necessary for the overall plan that God has for the universe. So that's a second interpretation of what God is trying to show Job.

But there's a third interpretation which is actually not an interpretation at all. Number one, Job has a question, meaning if I'm righteous, why is this happening? The friends are offering an answer. You must not be righteous. Job rejects that and God says Job is right. But that makes Job's question much more stronger. God is telling him, you know, they didn't give you an answer, good question. So what is God's answer? So some have suggested God is actually not answering the question at all. God is telling Job I am not going to answer the question. I just want you to know that I'm here, I want you to know that I'm with you. I want you to know that as you walk through the dark tunnel of life, there'll be so many things you're not going to understand and so many things that don't make sense. But I'm not here to intellectually give you an explanation. I am here so you will feel the reality of My presence and that in your suffering, you're not alone. And I will be here to give you strength, I will be here to give you hope, I will be here to give you resilience. And that's going to be enough. In other words, Job was looking for an answer, but he found God. And God didn't give him an answer but God took away the question. And that could be what the author is trying to convey to you. That in life there are going to be mysteries. In life there are going to be unanswered questions.

And it's fascinating, I want to give you a little snippet of information. Do you remember at the beginning of the talk I mentioned that Moses actually asked God this very question, why do bad things happen? And God basically said, none of your business, I'll be merciful to whom I decide. Now, there is one view in the Gemara, one view, that the author of the book of Job, that there was never such a person as Job. Job is a fictional character. And the author of the Book of Job was none other than Moses. Moses took a turn as a novelist after he got the Torah and the way in my own mind I reconstruct this is, Moses wanted an answer from direct divine revelation, he didn't get it. So he wrote a philosophical novel to try to explore the matter philosophically, through different protagonists. But there is a view in the Gemara, this is not just a modern view, that Job is a fictional work. But at the end, he comes out in the very place that he started off with, I don't have an answer, but I know there's God. It's a funny thing. In other words, God gave them the response all the way at the beginning, but he was looking for something more logical. And it came out that, you know, it's no better than the answer that he was given. And this is a very important idea in life. You know, imagine you might remember, you know, when you were a young child, right, and daddy or mommy, probably daddy was driving the car late at night. And a person has a sense of security that there's someone that loves them, someone that takes care of them, you know, once you've learned to be a driver, I know myself now, it's very hard for me to sit when someone else is driving, because I'm a very nervous driver, put on the brake, don't go so fast, you know, but before you knew anything about how to drive a car, you kind of just put yourself totally in someone's trust. The Book of Job ultimately, is not about answers. The Book of Job is ultimately about trusting that there are reasons, trusting there are purposes and trusting that your relationship to God can exist even when times are difficult. Because even if God doesn't, if I could quote hardly a religious source, Mick Jagger, forgive me even for mentioning him in the synagogue here, "You can't always get what you want, but you get what you need". That is a great line, that really is a great line. There's a lot of things in life we don't want. And there's a lot of things in life that we would choose quite differently. And why doesn't God give us what we want? I don't know. He certainly could but he gives us other things. He gives us the ability to cope. He gives us the ability to grow. He gives us the ability to become a better person through the difficulties that we go through. And that's also a gift. It's a gift that's a hard gift, it's a gift that's a tough gift, it's a gift that we wish we didn't have. But ultimately, it's also a gift.

May remember, Christopher Reeve, Christopher Reeve was Superman, Hollywood actor, handsome, successful, rich, played Superman, I guess other things too and then he had a horrible riding accident, which left him paralyzed. And he was so helpless. He wanted to commit suicide but he was so helpless he couldn't even kill himself; he was paralyzed. He was breathing through a respirator; he couldn't even make the decision to take his own life. So he had a wife who since then

has also passed away from cancer and she said, if you want me to kill you, I will do it. But we have to spend the night talking about it first. And she talked him out of it, she spent the night with him and she convinced him that his life still had value. His life still had purpose. He could be an inspiration to people. He could show people how to come back from difficulties. And she gave him a sense that his life mattered. And that gave him the ability to endure the unbelievably difficult situation that he faced. Talk about it, we talked Friday night, we talked about an Eshet Hayil, a woman of valor, I have to say she was not Jewish, but that is a woman of valor indeed. And what Christopher Reeve said later was, he would not wish his suffering on anybody. But he liked the person he became much more than the person he was. The person he was, was focused on success, on money, on power, on influence, on prestige, on popularity. The person he became learned to care about others, help others, inspire others. He likes the person he is now more than the person that he was before.

Is there an easier way? why couldn't God just make us loving, good people without this? I don't know, I don't know. But there's a process. Let me tell you another story. Leon Fleisher, now Leon Fleisher happens to be Jewish but not observant and ...if you're a musician, you would know. Leon Fleisher, I'm not sure if he's, I think he's still alive, he might be retired by now, is or was one of the greatest classical pianists in the world, really a great, great classical pianist. And in the 1970s, early 1980s, because he was obsessive in practicing, he would like practice, hours and hours a day, I knew some of his students, he began to suffer repetitive stress injuries in which his right hands got closed, he was not able to open and manipulate his fingers, at least with the skill that he needed as a pianist. So he had to give up his career and for a person of that nature he wanted to commit suicide because his life had no meaning. For a while he was doing left-handed pieces, I think there are five or six in the classical repertoire of piano pieces written for a left-handed pianist or whatever, so he could do some of that stuff but you know, not too many. And he tried treatments all over the world, all over the world. Surgery and cortisone and all sorts of things to try to regain the use of his right hand and he could not. And to him, this was death. How could he live without his music, and he wanted to commit suicide, he wanted to kill himself. But eventually he came together and he developed the idea that if he could not be the performer, he could be the teacher, he could instruct people how to do it, he could show them techniques, he could kind of live through them. And he switched careers, he became, as opposed to one of the great performing artists in the classical world, he became perhaps the most prominent teacher of classical performance. And he had many, many proteges who went on to have very, very successful careers. And great, great teacher, wonderful teacher. Well, what happened around five years ago, maybe more now is that there was some technique, deep tissue massage that was being developed in Japan and his wife read about it. And she said to him, gee Leon, why don't we go to Japan, try this

out. He didn't want to do it, he said, you know, I went through this already, I went through so many treatments, they all failed. I have adjusted to this new part of my life. I love teaching. How can I allow my hope to get up again, what's going to happen if I get disappointed? What's going to happen? I can't even go there. He didn't want to do it. She convinced him. He had deep tissue massage. Miraculously, after 25 years of not being able to play, he regained his proficiency in the use of his right hand. And because he had been teaching all those years, his skills had not atrophied that much and he began to play again.

Now, that's a nice story but why am I telling you this? What's the spiritual message? Listen to what he said. He said a remarkable thing. He said that when I was a performer my life was all about me. I got the glory; I got the applause. God did not want me to be egotistical and selfish. God wanted me to learn to care about others. So He took away my talent, He took away my ability, He forced me to concentrate on other people getting the applause and other people getting the accolades. And I did this and I eventually came to a place where their success was as sweet to me as my success. Their glory was my glory, their joy was my joy. And when God saw that I had learnt that lesson He gave me back my ability. Now, I well understand that not all stories have this neat arc of even 25 years. After all, in the Holocaust, six million people died, they died. They didn't rebuild their lives in any way. And no one is going to say that if there's any complete explanation, I think I'm gonna have to continue this next time as well, because there's a few more things I want to say. But it does indicate that difficulties and suffering in life are vehicles of self-transformation. And this is an important lesson, even in what you might call the minor frustrations of life. Obviously, illness, death, these are biggies. But there's all sorts of things that fall short of that, that can still be very significant. You didn't make the basketball team in middle school. You're sad. You didn't get into the med school you wanted to get into any medical school. And you have a choice. I can be bitter, resentful, cynical or I can look at life with hope and optimism and resilience, and can take my disappointments as vehicles of transformation, becoming a different person, becoming a greater person, learning from my disappointments in life, to feel the pain of others. And in that sense you can get a glimpse into what God was trying to do with all of this.

Here the classic book, by the way, in fact, I'm basically articulating the thesis of Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Viktor Frankl again, not a religious Jew, but he was spiritually very sensitive and intuitive, was a psychoanalyst who was in the concentration camps. And he developed the idea out of his own experience, see it would be pretentious for me to say it, but, because I was not in the camps, but he was there. And he said, we have very little freedom over what happens in our lives. Things happen, but the one freedom that we have, that is our unconditional freedom, is how we choose to respond to what happens to us. We can choose the

path of anger and bitterness and we can choose the path of courage and self-transformation and the mark of a righteous human being is how you make that choice. The externals are the externals, and then that way, the Satan is not making an arbitrary bet. The Satan is making a very good argument with God, he's saying, God, the measure of righteousness is how a person responds when things are not going his way, not when they are going his way. If you want Job to be righteous, you got to put him through this test. And this is important because this I think can help us with a perspective, not only on the major tragedies of life that God willing, we all should be spared, we hope. But even the minor frustrations of life that can get us down, how do we respond to them? They are vehicles of self-transformation. They are vehicles to train us and to teach us and to instruct us and to elevate us. You know, the old t-shirt saying and every saying on t-shirts are almost always accurate, when life gives you lemons make lemonade. And again, that's right. You can decide the meaning of any given events. Events happen, but events don't have meaning until they're processed and integrated into your life. And you decide what the meaning of any given event is going to be. So again, this is really such an important topic... But think about this, pick up Victor Frankle's book, it is really a masterpiece of the human spirit. And that's something that everybody, Jew and non-Jew needs to be aware of. And also go to the Book of Job itself and you'll see some, Baruch Hashem, that's part of our Bible. And you'll see the magnificence although complex and perplexing treatments of this very, very issue.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hidabroot - Torah & Judaism, 'The Book of Job - Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz', (YouTube, 14/1/2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9LB47o4Q9M>>.