

Imagine. It is a calm quiet Tuesday evening. The sun is setting and the children are walking home from school. Businesses wind down for the day, and mothers rush home from work in time to make dinner. Salt fish and rice simmers on the stove. Mission workers sort supplies into backpacks and meet with their teams to plan for tomorrow’s excursion into the green hills. Yes, the area is poor and people are hurting, but many work hand in hand to help those in need.

Suddenly the ground under your feet begins to move. The jolt is so strong you feel vibrations up your legs into the small of your back. You reach for something to steady you, maybe a chair or a table, or something, but they are moving as well and offer you no support. Then it hits you -- literally and figuratively. Something just happened. Did a bomb drop? What? And as the walls fall down around you, you stagger out the front door.

You run into the street shouting for your family. You run back into the crumbling house trying to save those inside. You are lucky you pull your kids to safety and you survive. But you watch in horror as other Haitians are not so fortunate.

Later on you discover that you and your family and all of Haiti are victims of an earthquake – one of the most powerful ever recorded in the world.

More than one hundred thousand of your friends, neighbors and fellow citizens have been killed. One hundred thousand souls -- each created in the image of G-d, have been killed by a giant wave.

So we ask ourselves an important question:

Is this tragedy something that G-d sent to the world? Back in 2004, my colleague Rabbi Michael Gold wrote an article titled: “Tsunami: An Act of God?” Rabbi Gold’s wisdom prompted my thoughts about the earthquake in Haiti.

We ask ourselves, if G-d truly loves the world, where was G-d on that Tuesday?

How could G-d permit this thing to happen to the people G-d created?

As a rabbi like Rabbi Gold, this is not the first time for me to hear this question. In the past people have asked me, “Rabbi, during the Holocaust, where was G-d?”

Believe it or not, it is easier for me to answer THAT question. The Holocaust was an act of evil -- evil done by humans against other humans. When my father (z”l) served as one of the liberators of the Buchenwald camp and witnessed things he never could imagine, he did not ask, “Where was G-d?”

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He asked, “Where was mankind? Where were the other people who could have stopped this tragedy but chose not to?”

But the earthquake is a different thing. The splitting of the earth was not an act of evil. The earthquake was an act of nature.

But we continue to ask, “Where was G-d when the ground gave way and the buildings crumbled? “Where is G-d when the earthquakes come?” And “Where is G-d when the hurricanes come? Or the cancer cells, or the car wrecks or the birth defects?” Where is G-d and does G-d cause all of these tragedies of nature?

The Bible gives us our answer. In First Kings, Chapter 19 we read about the prophet Elijah. He is running away, trying to save his life because King Ahab and his wife Jezebel want to kill him.

Elijah runs to the mountain of the Lord which many scholars believe was Mount Sinai. Then the Lord appeared to Elijah on the mountain.

We read that there was a great and mighty wind, but G-d was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake but G-d was not in the earthquake. There was fire also but G-d was not in the fire. Finally there was a “kol d’mama daka” a “still small voice.” The Bible tells us that that is where G-d was. G-d was in the still small voice.

What does this mean to us? It means that G-d CREATED nature but G-d is not IN nature. Nature works according to its own laws.

A long time ago there was a farmer who came to his rabbi with a question. A neighbor had stolen all of the farmer’s wheat. The farmer watched as the neighbor planted the stolen wheat.

So the farmer asked the rabbi. “My neighbor stole all my wheat. Then he planted all my wheat on his land. If G-d is just and righteous, then my wheat which was stolen from me and planted by a thief -- my wheat should not grow for him.”

The rabbi looked at the farmer and said, “*olam k’minhago na’hag*, the world behaves according to the laws of nature.”

If the old rabbi was correct, and I believe that he was, then we ask, “Why did G-d make laws like this? G-d should have made different laws, ones that are fairer.”

Our sages tell us that when G-d began to create the world, G-d made natural laws so that, eventually, human beings could emerge.

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Human beings are made of carbon because that is the best chemical to build life. But, on the other hand, the same forces that make carbon come out of the rocks are the very same forces that cause earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis.

When G-d made the world, G-d looked at it and saw that it was *Tov Maod*, “very good.” *Tov Maod*, very good. But not perfect.

So G-d created each human being to help G-d to make a perfect world. That is the concept of *Tikkun Olam*. G-d asks us to work with Him to perfect the world.

In the Jewish tradition there is a story about a king who had two sons. He could not decide which son was worthy to inherit the kingdom.

One day the king asked the two sons to come to him. He said, “I will give each one of you a bag of wheat. Take care of it well. Return to me in 30 days to show me what you have done.”

The first son returned to the king. “Here is your wheat,” he said. “See how it remained in the bag! I guarded it night and day. Water did not touch the wheat. Bugs did not eat it. Thieves did not steal it. I return the wheat to you in exactly the same way that you gave it to me.”

The second son entered the room. He said, “Father, I have perfected your wheat.” Then the son handed the king a loaf of bread.

Who do you think inherited the kingdom?

In this story we have the answer to our question about the earthquake and “Where was G-d?”

The Kabbalah tells us that G-d made a world in a precise manner so that human beings could be born.

After that G-d has a job for us to do. G-d asks us to be partners with Him in creation so that we can join with Him in perfecting the world. But how?

From this tragedy we have learned that we need to share technology so that scientists all over the world can predict the coming of an earthquake.

In California and now in Tennessee reptologists and seismologists are working with meteorologists to see if the strange phenomenon of snakes emerging from their underground nests days or weeks before an earthquake holds the secret to knowing when an earthquake will strike.

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If we work to perfect this technology and share it with the entire world, then we are doing G-d's work.

Meanwhile, we can do G-d's work in a smaller way. We can listen to the "still small voice" and we can act. We can donate one dollar, one quarter or even one penny to any one of dozens of organizations that sends help to the victims. And we can continue to contribute, long after the earthquake story is no longer front page news, because we know that the survivors will need help for years to come.

Jewish tradition teaches us that from every tsuris (suffering) come many brachot (blessings). From this terrible tragedy we can search for blessings.

There are blessings in the new ways people of different faiths can now work together. The way the Israeli relief workers sprang into action even though there is no active Jewish community in Haiti.

There are blessings in the selfless acts of so many people around the world, and in the contributions made by different governments, often in conflict with each other, but now united in their efforts to help.

And there are blessings for each one of us if we listen to the still small voice of G-d, a voice that tells us that every good deed we do for another, no matter how small it seems, is extremely important. In the words of our sages, "He who saves a life saves the world entire."

In this terrible tragedy, if every one of us does one little thing for just one victim, this is how we listen to G-d's voice. This is one way to repair our world.

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