Booklets in *this* series:

- Israel and the Jew
- Explaining Suffering
- The Chosen
- Future Worlds
- The Place of Doubt

United Synagogue Youth and Community Services
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ISSUES IN JEWISH THOUGHT

EXPLAINING SUFFERING

— a personal view

SECOND SERIES

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Foreword

Orthodox Judaism has long accepted and even encouraged the questioning mind. As Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, President of Bar Ilan University has put it:—

> "A Jew dare not live with absolute certainty, not only because certainty is the hallmark of the fanatic and Judaism abhors fanaticism, but also because doubt is good for the human soul, its humility, and consequently its greater potential ultimately to discover its Creator."
>
> *("One Man's Judaism")*

The problem for the modern Jew is not that he has questions but that he does not know where to find the answers. It is in the spirit of Rabbi Rackmans' advice that Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks in this series "Issues in Jewish Thought" provides a route map for the journey to greater understanding. The booklets are brief and to the point, providing an introduction to Jewish thinking on each of the issues treated. The booklets should be particularly useful in forming the basis of an adult education programme or a study or discussion group at local synagogues. We are fortunate in having in Rabbi Sacks, a teacher who combines breadth and depth of learning with great clarity of exposition.

This series is part of an ambitious programme of publications on which the United Synagogue is embarked and in which Rabbi Sacks, holder of the Sir Immanuel Jakobovits Chair in Modern Jewish Thought at Jews College will play a prominent part. This is the second volume in the series and a third is being planned.

The programme also includes plans to produce a substantial series of practical guides to Judaism, the first volume being on Shabbat, and more basic pamphlets of instruction in Jewish ritual and practice. Through this range of publications it is hoped that members of the United Synagogue will increase their understanding of and strengthen their commitment to traditional Jewish values and practices, and thus enrich their experience of Jewish living.

Leslie Wagner
Chairman, Adult Education
and Publications Committee

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United Synagogue Youth and Community Services

The problem of suffering is the most acute of all dilemmas in the life of faith. And it is sometimes difficult to know whether religious belief makes it easier to understand, or merely more intractable.

There is a famous Midrash about Abraham's earliest thoughts about God: "An analogy. There was a man who was travelling from place to place when he came upon a palace in flames. He asked: is it possible that the palace lacks someone to look after it? The owner of the palace looked out and said, 'I am the owner of the palace.' So, because Abraham our father said, 'Is it conceivable that the world lacks someone to look after it?' the Holy One, blessed be He, looked down and said, 'I am the owner of the world.'" (Bereishith Rabbah 39:1)

Many writers have treated this passage as if it were a form of the Argument from Design, that is, that Abraham was convinced that the world displayed order and purpose, just as the architecture of a palace does; so it must have been created; so it must have a Creator. It may show some signs of disorder and injustice — the building is on fire — and this leads to the thought that possibly its Creator has forsaken it. God looks down and announces His presence, and Abraham is reassured.

But this takes away the sting from what is surely a remarkably enigmatic and profound metaphor. That the world is created is the least important element of the passage. Had the traveller merely seen a palace he would not have given it a second thought. What arrests Abraham's attention is the spectacle of a world on fire. The wrong people flourish; the innocent suffer; injustice prevails and there is no-one to protest. For someone who had no faith this would not be a problem. The blind play of forces, the relentless rule of the strong over the weak, does not lead to the expectation of justice. But because Abraham believes in God he is caught in a contradiction. Is it possible that He who made the world has left it to moral chaos? God appears and declares that He is still resident in the universe. That solution therefore vanishes: God has not departed after the seven days of Creation to sit, like a Greek philosophical deity, above and in ignorance of the fleeting sufferings of His creatures.

And there the passage ends. No nearer a solution. Two answers have indeed been ruled out: that there is no God, or that God is indifferent to the fate of men. But this only serves to intensify the question. Why do people suffer? Why do the *wrong* people suffer?

The Midrash contains its own implicit answer — a radical one, which we will consider at the end of our analysis. But it reveals an important fact about the fate of the problem of suffering in rabbinic thought. It is never to be treated as non-existent, or susceptible of simple, superficial

solution. Three facts are clear. First: there is pain, unhappiness, suffering, death. Second: its allocation seems to follow no obvious rules; it does not, in any obvious way, correspond to what people deserve. Third: God is just, and when He is not just, He is merciful. The questions arise as soon as we put these together. But we can deny none of them. To reject the first is to ignore the facts. To reject the third is to lose faith. The pressure thus moves to the second: are things what they seem?

Yet the anguish is inescapable. And it is directly proportional to faith. The stronger our sense of God's fairness, the sharper our pain at seeing things that seem incompatible with it. We need faith to see the problem at all; and every resource of faith to cry out at it as Abraham did. Still more do we need faith to refuse to be silenced by an answer that is no answer.

For example: the tragedy of children who die young. There is an obvious explanation within Jewish tradition: "visiting the sins of the fathers upon their children" (Shemot 20:5). The child is innocent, but he does not die unjustly: his loss is a punishment for someone's sin, if not his own. But the following is a passage taken from the Zohar, the great source-book of Jewish mysticism. It is talking about just this kind of suffering, and just this kind of explanation:

"Most grievous is the sorrow surrounding those 'oppressed ones' who as still sucklings are taken from their mothers' breasts. On their account, truly, the whole world weeps; the tears that come from these babes have no equal, their tears issue from the innermost and farthest places of the heart, and the entire world is perplexed and says: Eternally righteous are the judgements of the Holy One, blessed be He, and all His paths are paths of truth. Yet, is it needful that these unhappy infants should die, who are without sin and without blame? In this, where is the rightful and just judgement of the Lord of the world? If it is the parents' sins that are the cause of their death, then indeed they 'had no comforter.' (Kohelet 4:1)" (Zohar, II, 113b)

THE FORM OF THE PROBLEM

'Either God cannot abolish evil or He will not. If He cannot, then He is not all-powerful. If He will not, then He is not all-good.' This is the classic formulation of the dilemma in the Christian tradition, as stated by Augustine. But this way of putting it, and the answers it evokes, are altogether foreign to Judaism.

For a simple reason: we find no difficulty in ascribing evil to God. Indeed we insist on it. "I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7). To deny this leads inevitably to one of two heresies: either to a dualism which sees the Divine realm as a struggle between the god of good and the god of evil (the devil, in one or other of his many guises); or to a mysticism which declares evil — and hence the world of the senses — to be an illusion, a view at odds with the demands of the halachah.

So important was this principle that the verse from Isaiah was placed at the very beginning of the blessings before the *Shema* in the morning service (S.P.B. 38, 176) — with a slight change to avoid the explicit mention of evil — to guard against any intrusion of dualistic thinking into Judaism.

Why, then, was evil necessary? Why did God create it? It follows from two premisses: man's freedom, and God's justice. In any situation in which people have the desire and the physical ability to do wrong, some evil will result. In the first instance it will be brought about by those who, in pursuit of their own interests, harm others who stand in their way. Such wrong may either be punished or tolerated. If it is tolerated, not only will justice not be done, but more evil will ensue. In any society, therefore, for both moral and practical reasons there are institutions for penalising wrongdoing. Evil is repaid with evil. There is no alternative.

The suggestion that God's goodness implies a love and benevolence towards all things and all acts, rests on a confusion. A private individual as such may and should forgive the wrong done to him (Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot, 6:9). But a judge, as judge, may not. If he does, he is in dereliction of his duty; and society as a whole will suffer. God is related to us in many ways: as father, as king, but also as judge. Therefore the bad men do must be met with bad. Were there no justice, God's love would be empty of content. Maimonides defines the moral limit of compassion: "Pity for wrongdoers and evil men is tantamount to cruelty with regard to all creatures" (Guide, III,39).

The sages recognised that the Divine creation of evil entered the scheme of things with the making of man. They noted that the Torah says of every other creation, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was *very* good." (Bereishith 1:31). Whatever the word 'very' *(Me'od)* implies, it suggests something other than *simple* goodness. This gave rise to a series of paradoxical interpretations: "Behold, it was very good" — this refers to the evil inclination, to sufferings, to *Gehinnom* (hell), to punishments, to the angel of death. (Bereishith Rabbah 9:7-11). All of these are constituents of goodness in a world where there is the possibility of evil.

Why, in that case, create man? A question to which there is no simple answer. Two thousand years ago the school of Shammai had concluded that it would have been better for man not to have been created (Eruvin 13b). But it is worth noting — and this is no mere conundrum — that had he not been created, the problem of evil would not have been solved at the cost of ensuring that there would have been no-one in existence to appreciate either the solution or the problem.

So Judaism does not ask Augustine's question, Why is there evil? but the different question, Why does evil befall the wrong people? It is puzzled not by evil's *existence* but by its *distribution*. The classic rabbinic formulation is: "Why are there righteous men who suffer and evil men who prosper?"

In this form the question is as old as Judaism itself. it is voiced, in the Torah, by Moses, Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk. Perhaps the most famous is Abraham's plea, upon hearing that God proposed to destroy the cities of the plain: "It would be sacrilege even to ascribe such an act to You — to kill the innocent with the guilty, letting the righteous and the wicked fare alike. It would be sacrilege to ascribe this to You. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" (Bereishith 18:25). Abraham's argument is based on the assumption that within the cities there must be at least some righteous people. The real answer is given in the next chapter, when an assault is made on Lot's house — with the intention of sexually abusing his guests, the angels — by "young and old alike, all the people from every quarter" (19:4). As Rashbam notes, the purpose of including this detail is to establish that there were no innocents on whose behalf the cities might be spared.

Four points emerge from the narrative which have a major bearing on the question. The first is that however incomprehensible the nature of God is, and however true that "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9), nonetheless the word 'justice' means the same whether applied to man or to God. 'Justice' is what God wishes Abraham to teach his children (18-19), and it is what Abraham, in the same revelation, asks of God. If Divine justice is hard to understand, it is not because of any obscurity in the concept.

The second is that man is entitled — indeed invited — to ask questions about the justice of God. This is the unmistakable implication of God's words: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (18-17). He invited him to question and to pray. This does not mean that either Abraham or any of the other Biblical figures who followed his example ever doubted God's justice: quite the contrary. *Knowing* that God was just, they sought an explanation for what *seemed* to be otherwise.

Thirdly, even a single instance of unjustified suffering would represent an overwhelming problem for faith. The conversation between Abraham and God ends at the point where the cities would be saved for the sake of ten righteous men — two for each of the five towns. But as the next chapter explicitly reveals, there were in fact none. This is crucial. The problem of evil is not resolved by approximations — that *by and large* the innocent do not suffer. Hannah, said the rabbis, prayed for a child by arguing that God created nothing in His universe in vain. Why then did He make her a woman and deprive her of a child? (Berachot 31b). It is as if a single unmerited tear refuted the meaning of creation, so strong is our conviction of the rightness of God.

Fourthly, and most importantly for our understanding of the issue, the question of suffering is essentially *a request for further information*. Abraham's problem is this: the towns are about to be destroyed; therefore, all the inhabitants will suffer; there is no town without some righteous men; therefore some of the suffering will be undeserved. What turns out to be mistaken is not his *moral* stance, but his *factual* assumption. As it happens, no-one is innocent (Isaac Arama was to point out that in a society, like Sodom, of institutionalised injustice, even passive acceptance of the law is a crime. See also Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 9:14). Our problem is not so much in understanding the nature and morality of Divine justice, as in knowing who has done wrong and with what results. It is not that we do not know the *principles* of the Divine tribunal, but that we do not know the *evidence* brought before it. "A single merit may outweigh many sins. . . A single sin may counterbalance many merits. . . The weighing is done by the knowledge of God who knows all." (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah, 3:4).

PERSPECTIVE AND PRINCIPLE

But this last point might lead us to think that there was a too-easy answer always available to us: wherever there is suffering, there was sin, and if the sufferer seems blameless, that is because we lack the eyes of God. This is essentially the argument of the friends of Job.

The sages did not think this way. There is, for example, a passage in the Talmud which begins: "If a man sees painful sufferings come upon him, let him examine his conduct. . . If he examines it and finds nothing wrong. . ." (Berachot 5a). We do not need to complete the sentence to see what is remarkable about it. Its author contemplates the possibility that we might suffer and yet find nothing in our conduct that would

allow us to see it as punishment. Yet it was a commonplace assumption amongst the rabbis that "There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." (Kohelet 7:20). Everyone sins; but not every sin explains every suffering.

In a slightly different direction, some of the sages were perplexed by the harsh punishment prescribed by the Torah for the 'stubborn and rebellious son' whose actual offence was relatively trivial (Devarim 21: 18-21). "Did the Torah decree that the rebellious son shall be brought before the Bet Din and stoned merely because he ate a *tartemar* of meat and drank half a *log* of Italian wine?" (Sanhedrin 71a,72a). The question reflects another principle of justice: Not only shall the punishment be related to the offence, but the *severity* of the punishment should mirror the *gravity* of the wrong.

To be able to see justice in misfortune it was not enough that the person should have had some sin in his past. It had to be the right *kind* of sin, and a sin of sufficient gravity. And it is this which underlies the most important principle by which the sages understood the acts of God: the idea of *measure for measure.*

Although the term is rabbinic, the idea is amongst the most pervasive in the Bible. Jacob misleads his father by disguising himself as his elder brother Esau. The same deception in reverse is practised on him by Laban. He disguises his elder daughter Leah as Rachel and Jacob marries her by mistake. The Torah makes an almost explicit comment when it ascribes to Laban the words, "It is not done *in our place* to give the younger before the first-born." (Bereishith 29:26). God Himself, at the outset of Moses' mission to Pharaoh, describes the measure-for-measure quality of what was to be the tenth plague: "This is what God says: Israel is My son, My firstborn. I have told you to let My son go and serve Me. If you refuse to let him leave, I will ultimately kill your own first-born son." (Shemot 4:22-23). The theme is deeply embedded in the Biblical vision.

The result is that for suffering to be intelligible as punishment it has to be a *precise reflection* of a wrong done by the person. If he had done no such sin — however many other sins he had committed — the problem remained. This is why evil resisted the easy solution.

A single Talmudic passage will illustrate three of their most characteristic responses. The question, placed here in the mouth of Moses, is: Why do the righteous suffer? (Berachot 7a). The first answer proposed is that in such cases, we discover that the righteous man is the son of a wrongdoer. This is the idea of transferred or vicarious punishment, of "visiting the sins of the fathers on the children". It suggests that wherever there is suffering there is sin, but it may have to be traced back a generation.

Now in fact the rabbis rejected such a suggestion. To them it offended against a cardinal rule of justice, that the person punished must be the person who sinned. They were not innovators here, for Moses himself had said: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin." (Devarim 24:16). Elsewhere the rabbis dramatised the contradiction between this verse and those stating vicarious punishment: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children', Moses said: 'Sovereign of the Universe, how many wicked people have had righteous children? And is it right that the righteous should be punished for their father's sin? 'Then the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'You have taught Me. I swear by My life that I shall revoke My words and fulfil yours.'" (Bamidar Rabbah 19:33; see also Makkot 24a).

This suggests that our standards of justice have changed: what seemed perfectly fair at one time, now — and in the days of the sages — seems harsh. But this is not the explanation of the change. From the earliest times to the present, the Jewish conception of justice has insisted that the person who does wrong should be the person who suffers. What has changed is not our idea of *justice* but our concept of *person.* It seems difficult for us to understand this now, but there were times when the boundaries of personal identity were not clearly drawn. Children were at times regarded as an extension of the *self* of the father: punishing them meant punishing *him.* "That a man is requited for his own deeds is a theme of the earliest sources. He is not, however, conceived of as an isolated entity, but as inextricably bound up with his family, tribe, people, city and land." (Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, p.330). As soon as the boundaries between one generation and the next became clearly perceived, the prophets refused to think that God might punish one for the sins of the other. Ezekiel delivers a long tirade against the idea, insisting in the name of God that no-one should ever again say, "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Ezekiel 18:1-20).

The first suggestion, then, is untenable; and the rabbis propose a second: The righteous man who suffers is not a completely guiltless person. This takes us into another major theme: the afterlife. The righteous are allowed to suffer in this world so that their few sins may be atoned for before the world to come, where they will enjoy undisturbed happiness. The wicked are made to prosper for the reverse reason: to give them the little reward they deserve for their few good deeds now, whilst in the world to come they will endure unmitigated pain. This view

is perhaps the most widely expressed in Judaism, but we must admit that it has paradoxical consequences.

Not only does it suggest that "There is no reward for the commandments in this world", but it even leads to the idea that this world is the very mirror image of the next: that in this life the good are only punished and the bad only rewarded. The sages were prepared to spell this out in the most striking terms: "He whose good deeds outnumber his iniquities is punished and is as though he had burnt the whole Torah to the last letter. He whose iniquities outnumber his good deeds is rewarded and is as though he had fulfilled the Torah to the last letter." (Kiddushin 39b). When we encounter this passage we may well feel that we have to reread it several times to be sure we have understood it. But this is how the world must have looked like at times, when the sages were being burned by the Romans for their very saintliness. Inevitably justice was to be found in the next world, not in this. When the son of R. Joshua ben Levi fell dangerously ill, he was given — records the Talmud — a glimpse of the world to come. His father asked him what he had seen. 'I saw a topsy-turvy world. The high were low and the low were high.' 'My son,' he replied, 'you saw a clear world.' (Pesahim 50a). In fact the vision is an ancient one, and can be traced back to the prayer of Hannah (I Samuel 2:1-10) and before. It was given its most systematic expression by Saadia Gaon.

What this and the previous suggestion have in common is that they see the problem of evil as essentially one of *perspective*. As we saw in the case of Abraham, what we need is more information. If we could only see a person's life in the context, say, of the actions of his parents, or in the full perspective of his life in the next world, we would instantly see the justice of what befalls him. Our bewilderment is the product of short-sightedness, We see only part of the picture, and take it for the whole.

In a much more modest way, this is what lies behind R. Akiva's advice that "A man should always accustom himself to say: Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good." (Berachot 60b). If we would have the faith and patience to wait, we would see that in the long run a seeming tragedy may often have good and unexpected consequences. Again, the problem is perspective.

The third view, propounded by R. Meir, is the most radical. There is no answer to why the righteous suffer; none at least that is accessible to us. This, for him, is the meaning of God's words to Moses: "I will have mercy to whom I choose and show kindness to whom I choose." (Shemot 33:19). This is not to suggest that God is not just, but simply that from our finite vantage-point we can never aspire to an understanding of His purposes. Maimonides was later to suggest that this is the lesson of the book of Job, to point out "the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence and rule to be similar to ours." (Guide, III, 23).

What remains, on this view, is simply *tzidduk ha-din*, acceptance of the justice of the unfathomable: "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He." (Devarim 32:4).

MAIMONIDES ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

A quite different view was taken by Maimonides, though his treatment of the problem in the Guide for the Perplexed is so long, complex and subtle that we can only present a fragment of it. It is far from all he has to say.

At one point in the argument he steps back from the issues of Providence and justice, and in effect asks us to consider the problem in terms of the human condition (Guide, III, 10-12). Our sense of indignation in the presence of pain is often the product of one or other of three fallacies: we judge the universe from our subjective standpoint as if the world had been made for us; we ask for the logically impossible — to have bodies and yet never to suffer; and we blame God for what is, in fact, the fault of man.

Firstly we often complain that we do not have what we desire, yet our desire is not the measure of all things, and may in fact be quite unwarranted. Secondly, we may protest at our ill-health, forgetting that it was our own self-indulgence and neglect which made us prone to illness. Thirdly, in our short-sightedness we harm one another, failing to see that by so doing we weaken the structure of society, which will in due course be to our cost.

Human suffering has three kinds of cause. The first derives from the fact that man has a body. Everything physical is subject to change and decay, and hence to illness and death. This is a necessary property of matter, and to ask that it be otherwise is to ask God to do the logically impossible. The second is the evil people cause to one another, and the third and most common is the evil we do ourselves — wanting the wrong things, living an unhealthy life, and devoting our energies to the pursuit of superfluous wealth. The first kind of suffering is inevitable; the second and third are not the fault of God. Maimonides caustically remarks that so perverse is our tendency to shift the blame onto God,

that some complaints can be translated as irritation that "nature does not help every vicious man to achieve the satisfaction of his vice so that his corrupt soul should reach the aim of his desires, though they. . . are really without limit."

God gives us two things: existence and freedom. Although existence brings suffering, it is not itself an evil; rather, it is the precondition of anything, good or bad. All existence as such is good. Infinitely the worst evil is not to exist. Thus God's gift is good. But He also gives us freedom, from which all human evil stems. True He might have made us with the capacity of only doing good. But then the whole religious enterprise would have been voided. God chose to give man the freedom to do good; and this logically entailed the possibility of his choosing evil. Freedom, like existence, is good in itself. Its misuse is what is bad. But once having given it, God never takes it back; and this must mean that He does not intervene to prevent the wicked doing what they plan. (Guide, III, 32).

Thus for Maimonides it is not necessary to aspire to a Divine perspective to unravel the problem of evil. It is enough that we should be honest about ourselves.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

Yet despite all the weighty literature attempting to solve the problem, there remains a halachic insistence on *not* solving it. For there is a difference between reflection and action, between *explaining* suffering and *reducing* it.

There is a danger, of which Judaism is acutely conscious, that if we succeed in finding justice in pain, we thereby render it acceptable, or even precious. There is a penetrating example of how the Talmud fights against such thinking, in a long passage outlining the concept of 'sufferings of love' — the privations to which God subjects the righteous not because they have sinned, but in order to increase their reward in the world to come (Berachot 5a; Rashi ad loc). The natural consequence of such a view is to rejoice in affliction; and this indeed is a pious response. Yet the passage concludes with several stories of which this is an example: "R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Johanan went to visit him. He asked: Are your sufferings precious? R. Hiyya replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him; Give me your hand. He took his hand and healed him." (ibid. 5).

What can be cured is not precious: this is the necessary corollary to any explanation of suffering. We pronounce the *tzidduk ha-din* declaring God's justice, only over loss that is irreparable. Despite the fact that we should always say över evil, "This, too, is for good", *we may not make the same blessing over evil as over good.* Even if we can foresee that what is bad now will definitely turn out for the best, we must still pronounce it evil (Orach Hayyim 222:1-4). By coining as the blessing over evil the sentence, "Blessed are You. . . the true Judge", the rabbis legislated that we live with the paradox: it is just; but it is bad. In this way they preserved the most difficult of all distinctions: to explain evil without denying that it *is* evil.

The halachic response to evil is of two kinds. The first is to take it as a prompting to be better. We noted above the rabbinic rule that "If a man sees sufferings come upon him, let him examine his conduct". And as for the individual, so for society. The law of public fasts, for past or imminent tragedies, is intended to turn calamity into a call for spiritual rededication (Maimonides, Hilchot Ta'aniyot 1:1-3; Guide, III,36). This, as it were, is the attempt to *redeem* evil by turning it into an impetus for good.

The second, straightforwardly, is to *eliminate* it as far as is in our power. Thus while someone who is ill may see his condition as a punishment, he may not refuse to seek medical help (see Azulay, *Birchei Yosef,* Yore De'ah 336:2). Nor may we accept poverty on the grounds that it creates the opportunity for others to perform charity, as some Christian writers have suggested. In Jewish law the highest charity is to make someone independent of charity (Yoreh De'ah 249:6).

The halachah takes evil as a *challenge,* not as an immutable condition of life. The evil in our own natures is there to be overcome by strength of will. The evil in others is to be confronted by honest rebuke, by education and persuasion. The evils involved in our having a body — pain, hunger, poverty, disease — call forth our deepest reserves of creativity in the constructive development of medicine and technology. The fight against evil in all its forms is one of the motifs of the halachah. It is an essential Jewish vocation, a task through which we grow into full partnership with God in the work of creation.

This, ultimately, seems to be the meaning of the Midrash quoted at the beginning. Abraham sees the world as a palace on fire. God tells him that He is the owner of the palace. How does this answer Abraham's question? Does it not make it all the more insoluble?

It does — if it was intended as an answer. But it was not. It was intended as a command. An invitation by God to man: not to contemplate the fire but to help to put it out.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The subject is so vast that almost everything in Judaism touches on it. Certainly it dominates most of the prophetic books, but the book of Job, in particular, is required reading. Many of the Psalms are written from within the heart of the experience of moral pain: see, Psalms 5,6,10,13, 22,30,31,35,38,39,42,44,55,56,59,69,74,77, as examples.

The rabbinic literature is rich and various. As usual, Urbach, *The Sages*, Magnes Press (pp.420-523), provides the best analysis. If this is hard going, see A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* pp.110-120.

Of the medieval philosophers, Saadia gives a comprehensive account of how one might solve the problem in terms of the after-life: *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* trans. Rosenblatt, Yale, Book V, pp.205-234. The analysis in Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed,* extends from chapters 8 to 24 of Book III.

For an example, in the twentieth century, of a life devoted to confronting and alleviating suffering, you should read the moving story of the life of R. Aryeh Levin, *A Tzaddik in our time,* by Simcha Raz, Feldheim.

GLOSSARY

ARAMA, ISAAC — Spanish rabbi and philosopher, 15th century C.E. His famous commentary to the Bible is entitled 'Akedat Yitzchak'.
BET DIN — Jewish court of law.
DERECH ERETZ — Literally, 'the way of the land'. Used figuratively to mean, variously, polite behaviour, a worldly occupation, involvement in matters of secular concern.
EMUNOT VE-DEOT — '(The book of) Beliefs and Opinions', Saadia Gaon's philosophical treatise, completed in 933 C.E.
GALUT — Exile; the condition of Jews outside Israel.
GAN EDEN — Literally, 'the Garden of Eden'. Used figuratively to signify the resting-place of the soul after death.
GEHINNOM — 'The Valley of Hinnom', a valley south of Jerusalem. Used figuratively as a name for the place where the wicked are punished after death.
HALACHAH — A term signifying either a particular Jewish law, or Jewish law in general.
HASSID — 'Pious man'. Often used specifically to refer to an adherent of the popular mystical movement in Judaism initiated in the 18th century C.E. by the Baal Shem Tov.
JUDAH HALEVI — Poet and philosopher, born c.1075; d.1141 C.E.
KUZARI — Title of Judah HaLevi's great philosophical dialogue, in which he sets out, in the form of an imagined conversation between a rabbi and the king of the Khazars, his view of the uniqueness of Jewish spirituality.
MAGGID MISHNE — Commentary to Maimonides' Mishne Torah, by R. Vidal of Tolosa, 14th century C.E.
MAIMONIDES — R. Moses ben Maimon (RaMBaM), 1135-1204 C.E., outstanding rabbi, philosopher and codifier of Jewish law.
MEKHILTA — Collection of teachings from the Mishnaic period arranged as a commentary to the book of Shemot. There are two such collections, the MEKILTA DE-RABBI ISHMAEL and the MEKILTA DE-RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI.
MIDRASH — A generic name for rabbinic Biblical interpretation.
MIDRASH RABBAH — Whenever there is a reference in the text to a book of the Bible, followed by the word RABBAH (e.g. SHEMOT RABBAH), the work referred to is a volume in the collection known as the MIDRASH RABBAH; a series of midrashim to the Five Books of Moses, and the five Megillot
MISHNE TORAH — Literally, 'repetition of the Torah', and used to refer either to the book of Devarim, or to the law code of Moses Maimonides (Rambam). Whenever there is a quotation from Maimonides, whose source is indicated as 'Hilchot. . .', the reference is to one of the books of his Mishne Torah.
NACHMANIDES — R. Moses ben Nachman (RaMBaN), 1194-1270 C.E. Spanish rabbi, philosopher, and mystic. Author of a famous commentary to the Torah.
ORACH CHAYYIM — Section of the Shulchan Aruch dealing with the laws of prayer, Shabbat and the festivals. Literally, 'The Way of Life'.
RASHBAM — Acronym of R. Samuel b.Meir, c.1080-1158 C.E. French rabbi and author of a commentary to the Torah. A grandson of Rashi.
RASHI — Acronym of R. Shlomo b.Yitzchak, 1040-1105 C.E. French rabbi, author of the most famous of all commentaries to the Torah, and of the indispensible systematic commentary to the Talmud.
REBBE — Teacher; often used specifically of Hassidic leader.
SAADIA GAON — Outstanding rabbi and leader of Babylonian Jewry, 882-942 C.E. A pioneer in many fields of study, including grammar, Biblical translation and commentary, halachic codification, and Jewish philosophy.
SHECHINAH — The Divine Presence, a term usually employed to indicate the aspect of the Divine which is indwelling, rather than transcendent.
SHEMONEH PERAKIM — 'The Eight Chapters': title of the introductory treatise to Maimonides' commentary on the Ethics of the Fathers.
SHULCHAN ARUCH — 'Prepared Table'; name of Joseph Karo's law code, first published in 1564-5 C.E.
SIFRA — Halachic midrash, of the Mishnaic period, to the book of Vayikra.
SIFRE — Halachic midrash, of the Mishnaic period, to the books of Bamidbar and Devarim.
TALMUD — 'Study' or 'Learning': the name given to the composite work of the Mishna (compiled by R. Judah HaNasi, early 3rd century C.E.) and the exposition and elaboration of it, the Gemarra. There are two such works, the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli), and the Jerusalem Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi).
TUR — Full title — Arba-ah Turim, 'Four Rows': the name of the halachic compendium written by R. Jacob ben Asher, c.1270-1340 C.E.
TZIDDUK HA-DIN — Vindication or acceptance of the Divine judgement. In a more specific sense, the name of the prayer said at a funeral (S.P.B. 424-5).
YALKUT SHIMONI — Anthology of midrashim, usually attributed to 13th century C.E.
ZOHAR — 'Splendour': major work of Jewish mysticism, mainly arranged as a commentary to the Torah.