

# Why The Righteous Suffer

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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In Genesis 47:9, Jacob recounts before Pharaoh that, *"The days of the years of my life have been few and miserable."* After all the miracles, promises and wonders that Jacob had experienced over his many years, he still describes the years of his life as being "ra'im," translated here as "miserable," but actually meaning "bad." Of all the Patriarchs Jacob indeed had a very difficult life. Nevertheless, G-d was with Jacob through everything. Although G-d did not protect Jacob from bad things happening to him, nevertheless God was with him and blessed him.

יוצר אור ובורא חושך  
עשה שלום ובורא רע  
אני ה' עשה כל אלה

We can recount the hard times that Jacob had at home with his brother Esau, how he had to deal with a deceptive father-in-law (Laban) who was a master of black magic and who used all his wives to trick Jacob into virtual servitude. We see the troubles Jacob had with the jealousy between his wives, the rape of his daughter Dinah, the death in childbirth of Rachel, his favorite wife, the strife between his sons, the apparent death of his most beloved son Joseph and who knows whatever other troubles he faced over his many long years.

G-d did not spare Jacob from any of these things. In spite of the Divine Promises made to Jacob on a number of occasions, Jacob still suffered from circumstances that many would attribute to the absence of the presence of G-d in his life. In this respect Jacob is very much like Job, who suffered immense losses for no apparent reason. While Job's companions seek to blame him for some secret blemish, Job insists upon his innocence. It is not until the end of the Book of Job that G-d reveals Himself, vindicates Job and condemns Job's friends for falsely accusing him of wrongdoing. Job suffered silently, and apparently so too did Jacob.

Bad things do happen to good people, this is the simple truth of the reality of life. The Bible portrays Jacob as the zenith of the Patriarchs and, like Abraham, as G-d's beloved. Still, like Abraham, Jacob suffers through his lifetime from one struggle to the next. Yet, through all the hard times, G-d is there. G-d is there, yes, but G-d is not making things any easier for Jacob.

Jacob had worked for Laban for close to 20 years. Laban had cheated and tricked Jacob at every turn. Like a good man, Jacob took it in stride. But Laban was not destined to win in the end. G-d was with Jacob and endowed him with secret knowledge of the underlying ways how G-d operates His universe and uses the powers of what we know as good and evil. Knowledge of this came to Jacob in a dream as it is written, *"I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the he goats that mounted the animals were ringed, speckled, and striped. And an angel of G-d said to me in a dream, 'Jacob!' And I said, Here I am. And he said, 'Now lift your eyes and see [that] all the he*

goats mounting the animals are ringed, speckled, and striped, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.” (Gen. 31:10-12).

Isaiah (55:8-9) says, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” says the L-rd. As the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts [higher] than your thoughts.*” G-d blessed Jacob with profound spiritual insights into the Divine secrets as to why the world operates the way that it does. Humanity in general cannot understand the Ways of G-d. Yet, Jacob was granted a glimpse of insight into the higher ways through which G-d operates his World.

This secret sacred knowledge enables its possessor to understand how G-d is the Author and Creator of both good and evil, as it is written, *“Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates evil; I am the L-rd, Who makes all these”* (Isaiah 45:7). G-d uses both good and evil for His own spiritual purposes to accomplish the great and sublime tasks clearly perceived in spiritual wisdom. But this spiritual wisdom is almost unfathomable to mere mortal men like ourselves. We cannot possibly understand how and why G-d allows bad things to happen to good people. And yet, G-d allows such evil to exist.

Does one stop to ask the obvious question regarding Jacob's dream about the goats? What is the relationship between the ringed, speckled and striped goats and seeing all that Laban has done to Jacob? How does this dream reveal to us the secrets of Heaven? In order to understand this, we must delve into some of the deepest metaphors in Kabbalistic terminologies and symbolism. The dream reference to the “ringed,” “speckled,” and “striped” is considered not to be about physical flesh and blood goats, but rather a revelation of the order of spiritual evolution from the moment of creation until present times. Unless one can understand how and why G-d created evil, one can never understand why G-d allows it to exist in His universe.

The three metaphors of the “ringed,” “speckled,” and “striped” are said to represent three epochs of time, space and revelation through which the Divine Will becomes manifest. In the language of Torah mysticism, the Kabbalah, the three are known as Olamot (worlds), these being the worlds of the Akudim (ringed), Nekudim (speckled) and Berudim (striped). These three worlds are domains above time and space through which the order of spiritual evolution advanced.

In the beginning G-d created the universe, but as Genesis clearly states, the universe did not come into being as is, but rather developed in stages, referred to as the “days of creation.” Prior to the creation of the Heaven and Earth it is revealed that G-d Himself first created the spiritual domains and established their order and parameters. In these spiritual domains G-d created evil. Nowhere is the creation of evil mentioned in the Genesis story, nevertheless, by the time Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, we see evil there right beside them in the personage of the serpent. Although the timing of evil's creation is not mentioned, it obviously had to exist prior to this time in order for it to be there. Isaiah 45:7 reveals that G-d created evil, but does not reveal when this was done. Such a revelation has to be received prophetically, as did Jacob in his dream.

These primordial spiritual worlds of the Akudim, Nekudim and Berudim are the domains from which come forth the existence of what we know in our world as good and evil. The startling revelation revealed to Jacob and to later prophets and mystics is that G-d created evil prior to the creation of good. Essentially G-d intentionally created an imperfect world and then created humanity to act as the Divine agent to bring about the necessary corrections and perfection. This is what was shown to Jacob in his dream, symbolized by the ringed, speckled, and striped animals.

G-d designed our world to require a human being, symbolized by Jacob who is representing Adam, to bring about order to chaos. Jacob is granted Divine insight into how to bring about such order. The remainder of Genesis 31 explains the actions Jacob took based upon his dream that enabled him to thwart the evil plans of his father-in-law Laban who was seeking to dominate and control him. Jacob, endowed by Heaven with Divine wisdom used that ability to influence and direct physical events here on Earth. Jacob thus defeated Laban's evil plans to financially enslave him and instead became very wealthy.

Needless to say after this spiritual victory that manifested in financial prosperity for Jacob, he was instructed by Heaven that now was the time to take advantage of the opportunity and to leave Laban's domain and to return home. Knowing well Laban's arcane powers, Jacob uses his spiritually acquired wisdom to recognize the proper course of action and chose to leave clandestinely without a proper good-bye. Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife also must have been spiritually well-endowed. She foresaw that her father Laban could use his arcane spiritual powers to somehow thwart Jacob and the family. Therefore, she stole her father's idols rendering them unusable. This, more than Jacob's departure, infuriated Laban.

Nevertheless, the Biblical account relates that Jacob and family got away safely, but only to shortly face other perils, the first of which was the death of his beloved Rachel. For although she stole her father's idols, their powers were not to be denied. Their evil reached out and struck her at her most vulnerable moment, when giving birth to Benjamin. Although the idols did not directly kill Rachel, nevertheless, their powers contributed to her weakness that led to her death.

And G-d allowed all this to transpire. G-d alone is the author of life and death. He did not have to require Rachel's soul at that moment. But, He did! It was the Divine edict. Nothing Jacob could have done or prayed would have changed that. G-d and G-d alone ordained Rachel's death. Jacob did not complain, but instead mourned deeply. Knowing the wisdom of G-d, Jacob could see the wisdom in Rachel's passage at that moment and in that place. Regardless of his personal feelings about the matter, there was a greater issue at hand. To this day, Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem is a place of pilgrimage for righteous Jews who go there to mourn and pray to G-d for His mercy in whatever matters that are of trouble.

Evil does not exist to conquer man, but to strengthen him and bring him closer to G-d. As it is said in the sport of weightlifting "no pain, no gain." When muscles hurt because of heavy weightlifting, it is not because the muscles are evil or inflicting punishment upon us. It is silly and foolish to symbolize physical pain in this matter. Medical science recognizes that the pain in the muscles caused by heavy weightlifting is actually a sign that the muscles will strengthen and grow, thus the relationship between pain and gain.

As it is within the realm of sport, so too is it in the realm of spirit. G-d has ordained from the beginning that when humanity suffers, it is the suffering that makes one strong. Jacob certainly suffered more than his share and in doing so, Jacob was transformed into Israel, the prince, the man who can contend with angels themselves and be victorious. Who else amongst men can make such a bold claim? But as the later story of Jacob's struggle with the angel proves, such a contest can be won.

Indeed, the one who can contest with angels and win merits the title of being called Israel, a fighter and a prince. Only such a one can contend with angels and challenge the Divine decree recorded in Daniel 4:14 that the angels make decrees that all men are subject to. One who can obtain the level of being Israel can even override an angel. Such an accomplishment does not

come about easily, but as with Jacob, with struggle and suffering. This profound truth explains why the righteous suffer and what in fact makes them righteous in the first place.

The prophets of old and the Torah mystics who follow in their footsteps have long sought to contemplate the primordial worlds of the Akudim, Nekudim and Berudim. They gaze upon them with inner contemplation to receive (kabel) insight into their nature and by thus gain revelations into the true spiritual causes of the workings of our world. These self-sacrificing souls who gain such insights do so at tremendous cost. For by gaining a glimpse into G-d's wisdom and ways, they realize that they themselves must become the conduits for the shining of G-d's light. As such they must become spiritual Israel. And as seen in prophetic vision centuries after Jacob by his descendant Isaiah, Israel becomes G-d's suffering servant, through whose suffering, light is brought to the world bringing along with it enlightenment and eventually redemption.

This is the secret of rectification (tikkun) and the integration and realignment of the primordial worlds. Good and evil are both creations of the L-rd. Evil serves His Divine purpose. We human beings are commanded not to embrace evil for such an embrace harms us and our world. Evil is to be resisted and recognized, like muscle pain in exercise, as a good sign that we are doing the right thing. We do not embrace pain and seek to enjoy it, rather we fight our way through it until it no longer bothers us. Evil is the same way. The righteous face it, confront it and suffer to overcome it. In their suffering comes their strength.

One who has never suffered cannot know strength. One who is not strong can never contend with and certainly not defeat an angel. In order to rise to the level of becoming Israel, one must apply the bodybuilding motto to spiritual growth, "no pain, no gain."

One who embraces G-d's Will surrenders to the Holy Hand and embraces whatever It provides, be it for good or evil. For the righteous know full well that no matter what, G-d's Will is ultimately for the good and that, in the end, all the pain will indeed bring great gain.

So, Jacob's life was "ra" (bad) this is what he told Pharaoh. He did not lie or exaggerate. Yet, Jacob was not bitter or angry. Like Job he never blamed G-d or complained against Him. Jacob saw the "big picture" of the Akudim, Nekudim and Berudim. He understood their way, so too do all who come after him called by the name Israel.

One who is called Israel understands how sometimes the Divine Purpose works in one's personal favor and how sometimes the Divine Purpose work against one's personal interests. Yet, those called Israel always respond, "not my will, but Thy Will be done!" In this way, whatever happens, those who are G-d's Israel recognize and know that no matter what happens, "this too is for good." For ultimately G-d is working to fulfill the Divine Purpose. And ***to serve this purpose, to shine G-d's light and to assist in fulfilling the Divine Purpose is what being righteous is all about.***