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Faith & Doubt

“In Judaism, faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be. Faith lies not in the answer but the question – and the greater the human being, the more intense the question.”

To Heal a Fractured World, p.27 (Rabbi Sacks)

“To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a compelling testimony to the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to go further, higher, deeper. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith – that history is not random, that the universe is not impervious to our understanding, that what happens to us is not blind chance. We ask, not because we doubt, but because we believe.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Haggadah, p.106

What is the relationship between faith and questions?

“Outline of the Book of Habakkuk – The Mission

Chapter 1 contains an outline of Habakkuk’s central problem of theodicy, questioning how God can allow evil to prevail in this world... the prophet takes issue with how God could allow evil in the form of the Chaldeans, or neo-Babylonians, to triumph without end. This chapter is a description of faith in a state of conflict. Chapter 2 contains God’s response to that problem and Chapter 3 is a prayer/psalm composed by Habakkuk. It is this last chapter that we read as the *haftarah* on the second day of Shavuot. The final message of Habakkuk is that we must allow God to be God, and allow Him to do things His way and in His own good time. Our job is to trust Him and to live by faith! Chapter 3, then, is about faith triumphant.”

Shavuot To-Go, 5771, Shuli Taubes

What appears to be the general answer to questions of doubt?

What is unique about this Haftarah selection – when is it read and by whom?

“The prophecy of Habakkuk is the ultimate debate between God and Israel. Habakkuk represents the People of Israel in this debate and voices clearly, even aggressively, the anguished complaints of Israel regarding its treatment throughout history. The nation clearly feels that it has been wronged by God and by the fate assigned to it. It storms against the injustices perpetrated by the nations of the world and demands to know how God allowed these things to happen. The opening chapter of the book of Habakkuk contains some of the strongest language and vehement accusations against the judgments of Heaven found anywhere in the Bible or rabbinic literature...

For Jews, this debate is not a voluntary one. It is a central condition of the covenant of Sinai. It is no wonder that the prophets of Trei Asar formulate their prophecies in the format of debate, questions, and discussion, for this is the only way we can truly communicate with God and with our inner souls and eternity.”

Who Knows Twelve? P. 4,6 (Rabbi Berel Wein)

Why is questioning so integral to our covenantal relationship with Hashem? Does that strengthen or weaken our relationship?

“I humbly submit that Habakkuk is one of the most important books of the entire Bible. It reflects the angst of our souls forced to live in a mendacious and cruel world... in chapter 1 of Habakkuk, the prophet demands action of God – or at least an explanation of His inaction in the face of evil and injustice perpetrated against the Jewish people... In chapter 2, the Lord reminds the prophet in a fatherly and gentle fashion that no human mind can comprehend the system of God’s wise pattern of judgments nor pinpoint divine vengeance. The Lord reminds the prophet of the complexities of the universe and of nature, and of the unfathomable wonders of creation itself. Therefore, human beings are required to have patience, fortitude, and above all else, faith that God is just, that all human and national behavior is subject to Heavenly analysis, and that God’s system of reward and punishment is effective and everlasting...

God's judgments are inscrutable to us mortals. We have no truly satisfactory answer as to why apparently bad things happen to apparently good people. We are perplexed beyond words as to why our exile was of such length and bitterness. Even today, we are hard-pressed to understand the malignancy of anti-Semitism that eats away at the veneer of the civilized world."

Who Knows Twelve? P. 96-97, 104 (Rabbi Berel Wein)

"אפשר למצוא סמיכות אחרת בין ההפטרה הלקוחה מספר חבקוק ובין מעמד הר סיני. מורי ורבי הרב י. קרליבך הי"ד פירסם בשנת 1933 כאשר החל היטלר ימ'ש לפרוש את שלטונו המקולל, מאמר בשבועון החרדים בשם: "תורתנו וגורלינו" וזו תמצית הדברים: במעמד הר סיני נקראינו אנחנו להיות בכל הדורות נושאי ההתגלות ומגשימיה. לעומת יעוד נעלה זה רואה הנביא חבקוק בספרו את הצפוי לעם זה על ידי בבל, אחד מרשעי הגויים, ודווקא ביום הזכרון למעמד הר סיני יש טעם ומקום להזכיר את רוע גזר דינו, את סבלנו, ובמיוחד מתאימים ליום נורא כזה דברי התפילה-התחינה הלוחטים והתובעים: "פעלך בקרב שנים תודיע, ברגז רחם תזכור".

חזון המקרא, 315, הרב יששכר יעקבסון

How do Rabbis Wein and Yaakovson, both witnesses to the first half of the 20th century view the answer to questions of faith and doubt?

"What makes the book of Job unique is that... it asks us to imagine history and humanity from the vantage point of God. Is there even one person on earth who justifies God's hopes when he created man? The question posed by the Accuser to God is: Is there a single individual capable of loving you unconditionally? Of trusting you even though you seemed to have betrayed that trust? Of believing in justice despite the fact that he knows he has suffered injustice?... Job justifies God's faith in man. Despite the fact that he knows his suffering is unjust, he does not cease to talk to God, to argue, pray, challenge, debate, question and fight against wrong even to the very gates of heaven itself. He is capable of the sustained cognitive dissonance that lives at the very nerve centre of Jewish consciousness. God exists *and* evil exists (at least from the perspective of humankind.) Job's comforters want him to deny evil. His wife wants him to deny God. He refuses both, because either would let him live at peace. But a world that contains evil is not one in which God wants us to live in peace...

Faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty. It does not mean having the answers, it means having the courage to ask the questions and not let go of God, as he does not let go of us. It means realizing that God creates divine justice but only we, acting in accord with his word, can create human justice – and our very existence means that this is what God wants us to do. For one who sets a hard challenge does not do so to punish, but because he believes in the one to whom he sets the challenge. At the heart of His call to responsibility – and *this* is the meaning of Job – is God’s unshakable faith in humankind.”

To Heal a Fractured World, p.197-199 (Rabbi Sacks)

“God does not want us to understand why bad things happen to good people. Because if we ever understood, we would be forced to accept that bad things happen to good people, and God does not want us to accept those bad things. He wants us not to understand so that we will fight against the bad and the injustices of this world. And that is why there is no answer to that question, because God has arranged that we shall never have an answer to it.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrW1znjmPFE> (Rabbi Sacks)

How does Rabbi Sacks’ go one step further (than Rabbis Wein and Yaakovson) in explaining our doubts and questions of faith?

Should that change our role in life and our relationship with the Creator and His creations?
