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When bad things happen to good people

In his book "When bad things happen to good people", Rabbi Harold Kushner attempts to answer the age old question, "why did God let something so terrible happen to me?" Now I don't know a lot about Judaism, or I didn't before I read this book, but quite honestly I was surprised by his answer to this question. Kushner rejects all the typical explanations of misfortune. He rejects the notion that bad things happen because of God's will or that suffering is a test. He discards the theories that align bad events with punishment from God. He doesn't even believe that the events in our lives all have to do with God's grand plan of unknown purpose. Frankly, this surprises me coming from a man of God. A man of God who has devoted his life to God doesn't even believe that this God that he worships is in control of the universe. Maybe this all sounds strange to me because I am a Christian and have always been taught that God has a plan and that when something bad happens it is part of that plan, the plan to shape our lives into what they are supposed to be.

As I have grown older and been exposed to different religious groups and spiritual people, my own thoughts on religion and God have evolved and evolved again, but throughout that time I have still remained a bit fatalistic. Sometimes when something isn't going quite the way I had planned it to, I hear myself saying phrases like "whatever is meant to be will happen" or "it is in God's hands now". These phrases have been engrained in me from childhood and they are a source of comfort, but they may also be a source of defeat. They may signal my loss of control in my life; that I have given up

trying to make things better. I also find myself using the phrases that Kushner rejects when something bad happens in my life, but I do not use these phrases to defend God's actions or to blame God for doing this to me. It is simply my way of understanding the world and deriving comfort out of the stability of God in my life.

So Kushner rejects all the typical explanations of tragedy, what then is his reasoning behind why bad things happen to good people? Kushner states "being human leaves us free to hurt each other, and God can't stop us without taking away the freedom that makes us human." He believes that we are free to make choices instead of running on instinct. Kushner believes that fate sends us problems and God gives us the strength to cope with these problems. My question is then who controls fate? Is it just this random force in the universe without a creator or controller? This I cannot believe because to me believing in God means believing that He created everything in this universe and therefore if He created a force called fate, kismet then He controls that force. But Kushner doesn't hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters because he can "worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason."

Since Rabbi Kushner is the only source of my information on Judaism at this time, I find myself wondering if these beliefs are universal to the Jewish faith or if Kushner has created his own new beliefs. I wonder if I am getting insights into a religion while reading this book or insights into one man's thoughts. Whatever the case may be, this book has caused a strong reaction in me and maybe it is a defense mechanism that has appeared because my beliefs are being openly challenged, questioned, and rejected in

this book, but I have the strong opinion that Rabbi Kushner is not correct in his theories of the randomness of pain and suffering, the inability of prayer to heal people and souls. I just cannot accept these views as truth.

I do believe that God gives us all strength to face challenges, to become stronger in the face of adversity, but I also believe that he sends us these challenges and tragedies to make us stronger. It seems like circular logic, like the chicken and the egg if you will, but no one said religious beliefs needed to be based on logical explanations and with that I think Kushner would agree.

I think this book made me really stop and think about why I believe what I do and the truth is I just believe it-blind faith. The 18 years of Sunday school classes probably helped a little too. This book also made me realize that we all take the things that we were taught about religion and God and form them into our own personal beliefs, which fit our own needs and our world. I think after experiencing the tragedy of losing his son, Kushner realized that he could no longer believe everything that he had grown up believing about God and in order to still believe in a God he had to alter his beliefs about God. Though most of us probably do not realize it, I think we all come to cross roads in our lives where we have to alter our beliefs in something so that we can keep on believing. It has happen to me a number of times when I have realized that something I was taught in Sunday school seems so unfair and outrageous and I have to work through that and find my own truths.

Though I do not believe in Kushner's ideas about why bad things happen to good people, I think we are more alike than different. I think we both believe deeply in God and would never give up that belief. We both believe that God is good, but unlike

Kushner I also believe God has ultimate control of the universe and the bad things that happen as well as the good.

In the end, Kushner states that “why did this happen to me?” is the wrong questions and instead we should ask, “What am I going to do with the life I have now?” Though we do not share the same philosophy about why bad things happen, I think that Kushner has the right idea here and that is always to look forward to what could be instead of looking back at what might have been or what you did to cause a tragedy. I think it is only natural to have feelings of guilt, anger, and resentment when things go wrong in our lives, but the point is to get beyond that and live the life you have been given to the fullest. This doesn’t mean that we should mourn for loss and tragedy, but use the strength that God gave us to move forward, not by forgetting the past, but by remembering it, learning from it, and growing stronger because of it.