



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

EMOR

When God Gets It Right

The laws of the festivals form part of this week's sidra, including the law of Sukkot.

The building of the sukka is given a historical explanation: "So that your generations may know that I made the Children of Israel dwell in booths (sukkot) when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43).

As God's providence preserved our ancestors in their flimsy dwellings in the wilderness, so does His protection enable us to survive the fragility of life in every generation.

There is an interesting question. Why do we blame God when things go wrong but fail to thank Him when things go well?

Human beings have always known the problem of evil, which asks how a good God can allow pain and suffering.

It is an especially pertinent question in the post-Holocaust era. Some have given up on God because they accuse Him of letting them down. Some,

without realising there is a precedent in the Book of Iyov, speak of putting God on trial for what He did or failed to do.

But if there is a problem of evil, there is also a problem of good. If there is undeserved suffering and we accuse God over it, there is also undeserved goodness.

How can we take our blessings for granted and fail to admit that there are times when God gets it right?

If we are disturbed that there was so much pain, suffering and martyrdom, should we not equally rejoice over the fact that the Jewish people, however attenuated, has come through, that Israel, however grievously assailed, has survived, and that Judaism, however misunderstood and maligned, has continued to flourish?

Making a Simcha of Sorrow

The sidra begins on a sombre note with instructions to the kohanim as to how to act in time of sorrow.

Such things were always subjects of great concern to Judaism. Its pattern of mourning procedures is carefully worked out and psychologically wise.

What a pity it is that not everybody follows it to the full and allows it to lead us through the intense grief and back into life.

For example, saying you will not CUT K'RI'A denies you an important way of coming out with the grief.

Cutting the shiva short and keeping only one day denies you the solace of relatives and friends helping you to get through the first week.

Getting others to say Kaddish because you cannot pronounce the words denies you the privilege of personally saying what needs to be said.

Being too busy to say Kaddish for 11 months denies you the comfort of remembering your loved one in the context of the congregation; the small group of daily stalwarts really gives immense spiritual strength.

Beside these things there is the tendency to make a funeral or a shiva visit into a social occasion. Of course talking relieves the tension, but it should be restrained and dignified.

How can it be appropriate for a visit of condolence to be marked by joking and gossip, together with refreshments that make you think you have come, l'havdil, to a simcha?

A little common sense and you know you have done the right thing. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH