

A baby born with a defective heart undergoes surgeries, facing lifelong physical and cognitive challenges. An active mentor is debilitated by a stroke. A mother's genetic disease affects her and her children. These events and others like them occur all too frequently, highlighting the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people. Is God omnipotent, benevolent, or distant? Rabbi Kushner's perspective in "When Bad Things Happen To Good People" suggests that pain and tragedy are inherent in our world, not caused by God. Deuteronomy's teachings on rewards and punishments pose a challenge, as this theology claims that obedience brings blessings and disobedience leads to suffering. Yet, many Jews, including myself, struggle with this belief.

"If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Eternal your God and serving [God] with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—I also will provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow down to them. For the Eternal's anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Eternal is assigning to you." (Deuteronomy 11:13-17)

These words are familiar to anyone who has used a traditional or Conservative prayer book, it is the second paragraph of the Shema. It does not appear in our prayer books. We Reform Jews have trouble praying what we do not believe. And our experience tells us not to believe in this theology.

Throughout the Talmud and many other commentators, our Rabbis considered the concept of *olam haba*, a "world to come," which was to provide solace, offering delayed justice for suffering. Living in "*olam hazeh*," "this world," requires us to make the best of circumstances. Coping with loss, as Rabbi Kushner suggests, involves seeking help from a God who shares our outrage.

During tough times in the present world, turning towards, not away from, God might yield comfort and healing, a reward we all deserve.