Where Is God in the Tsunami Tragedy?

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Several weeks ago the world was shocked by the magnitude of the Tsunami crisis. A 9.0 magnitude earthquake erupted off the coast of Indonesia. This eruption propelled deadly waves into 9 countries stretching from Thailand to Somalia, killing more than 160,000 people and devastating countless coastal communities. Five million people were made homeless. 23 million have been in need of food. Tens of thousands are at risk for contracting cholera, malaria and typhoid. Thousands of other folks may die.

People are asking - Where is God?

In his well-known *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner offers some guidance. Rabbi Kushner places this discussion in the context of God’s creation of the world. He points out that Creation meant putting Primal Chaos into Order. The heavens and the earth were put into their distinctive places. So, too, were the Seas separated from the Dry Land. Land and sea animals were placed in their appropriate setting, and so forth. Yet a considerable amount of Residual Chaos remained in the form of diseases, earthquakes, tornadoes, etc.

As a remedy for continuing the Divine Ordering Process, G-d’s last act was to bring a Partner into the world, e.g. human beings. Humanity is made in "the image of God." Certainly this similarity to the Almighty is not in physical terms. Instead, we are similar in our capacity to tame and cure illnesses, and to confront and deal with natural disasters. Subsequently, medically we have conquered tuberculosis and other dreaded diseases, but there is much more progress needed (cancer, AIDS, heart ailments..) In terms of atmospheric eruptions such as the Tsunami, we have made (albeit inadequate) strides in early warning systems. So, at such times as the Tsunami crisis, where is God? God is in the Divine capacity for "Ordering Residual Chaos," thereby inspiring human advances in healing and early warning technologies.

As noted by Harold Kushner, when humanity fails to tame a deadly manifestation of Residual Chaos as occurred in Southeast Asia, metaphorically *God is in tears*. Why? Because God’s Partner (humanity) has failed in our sacred responsibility.

But God does not only cry. God also calls out to the Divine Spark within us, to our conscience, and to our souls. God inspires men and women and children to engage in acts of Hesed, of loving kindness. Inspired by God, we are mandated to donate funds and provide materials (medicine, food, clothing) to assist the afflicted. We are commanded to join in offering support to the bereaved. We are sanctioned to send necessities to those in need in any part of world, irrespective of global politics, of tensions among religious groups, or of any other secondary consideration.

In Rabbi Kushner’s words, "God inspires people to help other people who have been hurt by life, and by helping them, they protect them from the danger of feeling alone, abandoned or judged." I urge all the members of our CAI family to rise to meet this tragic moment by donating generously to the Tsunami
relief efforts by sponsored by our MetroWest United Jewish Communities, or Hadassah or Bnai Brith, or Israel’s Magen David Adom. In that fashion, we will become God’s "arms and feet" in bringing a measure of healing to the brokenness in our troubled world.