



# Ask The Rabbi...



February 5, 1994 Issue #9

This edition contains:

1. G-d and earthquakes.

Rattled in LA writes:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*We went to our Synagogue on Friday night, to give thanks following the LA earthquake. The Rabbi spoke about how it is difficult to believe that a decent, good, all-caring, and all-powerful G-d would cause an earthquake.*

*Is this true? Doesn't G-d control natural phenomena such as earthquakes?*

Dear Rattled,

First, I would like you to know that we here in Israel were shocked and stunned by the earthquake and the tragedies that have unfolded because of it. We are following the coverage of the event with both interest and compassion. We share in your grief and by no means do we intend to preach to you from this column. But as Jews, we look for meaning in everything that happens in our lives, and it is in that light that I would like to suggest the following.

The Mishna in Tractate Brachot says that when one sees an earthquake one should make the blessing "Blessed be He whose strength and power fill the world." This clearly expresses the belief that G-d controls earthquakes, and causes them so that we can experience His might and power. Why do some need to experience it now and why do some have to experience it more than others? I do not think that anyone can know for sure why other people experience earthquakes. But we can try to find meaning and purpose for ourselves as individuals.

The Talmud in the beginning of Tractate Brachot says that if someone is suffering they should review their actions. There must be some way that this suffering can give meaning to a piece of my being that needed to be nurtured. The Mishna in Brachot also mentions that if someone suffers a personal loss they should say: "Blessed be He, the true Judge."

There is a wonderful Chassidic story about Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchov. He once had it announced that after the Mincha service on Shabbat he would be lecturing on the subject of "What I, Levi Yitzchok would do if I were G-d." There was much excitement about the topic, and the synagogue was filled to overflowing when the time for the discourse arrived. R. Levi Yitzchok dramatically made his way to the lectern, and in an emotional voice said: "If I, Levi Yitzchok were G-d, I would...do...exactly what G-d does. The problem is that I am not G-d, am not all-seeing and all-knowing, and that's why I don't

understand so much of what He is doing." Essentially, that is what we mean when we make the blessing "Blessed be He, the true Judge."

As Jews we are ever hopeful that every dramatic event will bring us closer to a time when G-d's presence is openly revealed. [The following is not an argument for why the earthquake happened; it is intended as a ray of hope on a dark and tragic landscape]. The Israeli city of Tzfat has suffered several devastating earthquakes. After one of them in the year 1839, the Chassidic Rabbi, Rebbe Avraham Dov of Avritch, said the following: "This catastrophe is a sign of the redemption. The Talmud in Sanhedrin alludes to the time when the Mashiach will redeem us. He will come when 'This gate shall collapse, be rebuilt, collapse, be rebuilt again and again, until there will not be enough time to rebuild it before the Mashiach comes.' The word gate in Hebrew is *\_sha'ar\_*. These same three (Hebrew) letters when reshuffled, spell the word *\_ra'ash\_* (meaning earthquake)...May this be the last 'collapsing of the gate' mentioned in the Talmud, and may we soon see the final redemption in our time - Amen."

Ditto!

Sources:

- Mishna, Tractate Brachot, page 54a
- Talmud, Tractate Brachot, page 5b
- Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, page 98a
- Safed the Mystical City, by Dovid Rossoff, pages 163-164

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