

I can remember being a little boy and believing that my parents, they should rest in peace, were all-knowing and all-powerful. I believed that they would have the answer to any question I asked. I believed that there was no broken toy they could not fix, in fact that there was no problem too difficult for them to solve. I know that there was a time when Evan, Sam, and Rachel believed the same was true of Arlene and me.

The problem, of course, is that I eventually realized that it wasn't so. They did not always have an answer for every question. They could not fix every broken toy. They could not solve every problem, and when it was my turn to be a parent with Arlene, of course we had the same limitations, along with every other parent on the planet.

Happily, I learned as a little boy that despite my parents limitations, they were still worthy of love, respect, and honor. And Evan, Sam, and Rachel had to do the same thing. They had to come to grips with the reality that like everyone else, they had imperfect, limited parents who were nonetheless worthy of love, respect, and honor. After all, there is no perfect being in the universe, except God.

Certainly, that was our childhood theology. God is perfect. God has no limitations. But as we mature and see the realities of life through adult eyes, we see that if God is indeed controlling everything, it did not prevent unfair and undeserved suffering, and I am not talking about suffering we inflict on one another. The responsibility for human cruelty rest solely on human shoulders. But hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes and disease are beyond human control and cause untold amounts of horrific suffering. Human error, something that cannot be blamed on our capacity to perpetrate evil on others, is responsible for a great deal of suffering as well. So what do we do with the cognitive dissonance this causes?

I believe that many times, we realize the theology of our childhoods was not true, but instead of modifying, all too often we overreact and decide that if our

childish beliefs about God are not true, then there is no God at all. It seems far too radical to even consider the idea that God is not all-powerful and perfect.

My friends, those of you who hear me on a regular basis know that I have come to believe that although God has the power to will the universe into existence, which I absolutely believe God did, having an incomprehensible amount of power does not have to extend to an unlimited amount of power. I have shared with you my friend and colleague Rabbi Harold Kushner's formulation of three ideas:

1. God is good,
2. God is all-powerful,
3. Evil exists

and the idea that any two can be true at the same time, but only by denying the third. Evil clearly exists, so we are left with a choice between a good but not omnipotent God, or the reverse. I believe in God's goodness, not omnipotence. But omnipotence and perfection are two different things. Tonight, I deal with the idea of God being perfect.

You might be surprised to learn that neither the Torah nor the rest of the Hebrew Bible say that God is perfect. Yes, it does say God's *ways* are perfect, and the Torah says that God's ways are to do what is just and right. But what about God? Perhaps the best source of an answer to this question is God Himself.

Tomorrow, we read the Noah story, but let us take a peek back at how last week's Torah portion ended. After reading about how God saw His creation as good and ultimately as very good, this is truly heartbreaking:

*The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. The Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created — men together with beasts,*

*creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>*

My friends, there are two possible ways to understand this passage of Torah. One, God was correct to regret making humanity. It was a mistake, and if God made a mistake, then God is not perfect. The second is that God was right to create humanity, in which case regretting it is a mistake, and if God made that mistake, we are back to God not being perfect. But do you know something? To me, it does not matter if God is or is not perfect. What matters to me is that I am not, and therefore, every day of my life, I have to try to make sure that imperfect I try to walk in God’s ways, which as I said before, means doing what is just and right. That is as close to perfection as I will ever get, but if I can get that close, I’ve done what God expects of me, and of all of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6: 5-8