

Judaism Doesn't Work!
By Rabbi Michael Lotker

What? Is there a typo? Has the rabbi lost his mind? Has the rabbi lost his faith?

No, no. Relax! Take a deep breath! Everything is OK. I'm fine and my faith in God and Judaism is fine. But I do want to make an important point: Judaism doesn't work! You do!

In the deepest truest sense, I see God working through Judaism and other religions as a Teacher, an Inspirer, a Role Model, and yes, a Commander (a *Mitzaveh* who commands *mitzvot*, commandments). I don't believe that God is a miracle worker in the Abraham K'dabra sense – meaning that I don't believe that if I pray for something hard enough, in the correct Hebrew or Aramaic words, that somehow God will change nature and make my prayers come true. That's magic, not Judaism.

But I do believe that prayer works. I know that when I have prayed for strength to carry on in the face of difficult challenges, my prayers have been answered. In the most trying times of my life, I have heard the prayers of others for my well being and for the well being of those I love, and these prayers helped me considerably. I know that when I have listened to the commandments of our tradition, about giving to charity, about visiting the ill, about consoling the bereaved, about teaching and learning, about honoring others, about all these things and more, that the lives of others have improved and my own life enriched. I believe that these are the highest prayers, what Abraham Joshua Heschel called “praying with my feet.”

It is a central teaching of Judaism that creation is incomplete. God could have created the world perfect: no illness, no hunger, no poverty, no war, no crime, no earthquakes, mudslides, hurricanes, etc. If that were the case, what would our job be? We would have literally nothing of significance to do! When the Torah teaches that we are created in God's image, this doesn't mean that God has ten fingers and toes, it means that we, like God, have divine, holy, significant work in the world. God begins creation and turns over the work to God's partners – that's you and me. The instructions, the teachings, the specifics are what Torah and revelation and Judaism are all about.

There is a wonderful rabbinic teaching in which the rabbis take a close look at a verse from Isaiah in which the prophet quotes God as saying “You are my witnesses and I am Adonai.” The rabbis say that what God is really saying is that only when we are God's witnesses, when we represent God in the world, when we do God's work, is God really God. If, God forbid, we ignore God, then for all practical purposes, God might as well not exist.

So, indeed, Judaism doesn't work, you and I do. Meet me at the Temple, at services, at Torah study, at classes, at meetings, to continue this sacred work.