

Why Me?

By Rabbi Michael Lotker

In a way, the question “Why me?” began a process that would eventually lead to my taking Judaism more seriously, entering Rabbinical School and becoming your rabbi. I asked it, of course, in connection with my wife’s horrible illness, Huntington’s Disease. Why her? Why Carol? A beautiful young woman, a mother of three wonderful children, someone who only wanted to help and not hurt. Why us? How could a loving, caring God inflict the consequences of this genetic ailment on our family? And why me? How could God do this to me? Why would God do this to me? How can I believe in a God who would do this to me?

Sound familiar? I have heard many of you ask the same question under painfully similar circumstances. Oh the disease or the tragedy might be different but the question is the same. It’s a question that I have pondered long and hard. I sometimes think I’ve read everything written on the subject. I’ve discussed this question with rabbis, theologians and others. And I do have something to say about it.

First, I think that, in most cases, it’s the wrong question. It’s the wrong question because asking it presumes that there is a good answer. I don’t believe that there is an answer in the sense that God had a reason to send the disease, evil or tragedy into your life or into mine. As I tried to say at Carol’s funeral and memorial service, I don’t see the hand of God in Carol’s illness. I see the hand of God in all of those who loved her and surrounded her. I see the hand of God in scientists and researchers who work tirelessly toward a cure for Huntington’s Disease and in those who support their work. I see the hand of God in the doctors, nurses, caregivers and even the orderlies at Carol’s nursing home who so lovingly cared for this very young woman in their midst. I see that hand of God in the love of and strength of our family who stood by Carol during these trying years. And I see the hand of God in you, my community who supported me as I struggled to maintain my sanity while caring for Carol and our children.

For me, the question that I found helpful in my struggles was not “Why me?” but “What do I do now?” What could I do to remain strong and sane during what I knew was to be more than a decade of social, familial, and financial stress? For me, the answer was in being of service to God and others. To use what I learned to help others bear up under the strains of their own burdens – and everyone, everyone, has such burdens. For me, the answer was to become a rabbi, your rabbi.

But I want to leave you with one other thought about the question, “Why me?” If you are going to ask this question of God (and almost all of us will) while struggling with the tragedies of life, fairness demands that you ask this question about the blessings in your life as well. Why me? What did I do to be born into a world of such blessings? How is it that I live in a nation and community where I am showered with the best of food, healthcare, education, information, communication, opportunities for travel, enrichment and more? How many others throughout history and throughout the world today have had even a tiny fractions of the wonderful things that I so often take for granted?

Why me? Why us? Indeed!