COMMAND AND NO CONTROL
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – May 16, 2014

1. I believe in God. But I do not believe the same things about God that I did years ago, when I was a child preparing for my own bar mitzvah or even a newly minted rabbi filled with far more knowledge than wisdom.
2. The God I now believe in is a God constrained by limitations.
    a. I say this because I have seen too much underserved suffering in our world, let alone too much unmerited reward.
        i. I don't want to list all the bad things that have happened just recently in our world, or to people we love and care about to prove my point. It pains me just think of them and it doesn't diminish them in the least to think they are part of some divine plan.
            1. No its worse to think that God could have prevented them but didn't.
    b. The God I believe in is limited by what can be done within the laws of nature, and the laws of human moral and immoral freedom – what philosophers call free will.

c. To quote Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his transformative book When Bad Things Happen to Good People.
    i. I no longer hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters, because I realize that I gain little and I lose so much when I blame God for those things.
    ii. I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason.

3. *Ani Ma-ammim b'emunah shleyma* – I believe with perfect faith that God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws.
    a. By the same token God does not reward us with good fortune. Some are just luck, some the product of the generosity of others direct or in direct and some good luck or fortune is of our own making.
4. This is my theology – my belief system, perhaps it is similar to yours as well. But it is not the theology of this week's Torah Portion B'hukotai.

a. This week's parasha also known by its thematic name the Tokeha or rebuke clearly states in the first lines.
b. *Im b'hukotai talyechu* – if you follow my laws and faithfully observe my commandments I will grant you rain in its proper season, (btw right there observant Vancouverites could object), abundant harvests, and physical security.
c. It continues that if you don't follow in God's laws and commandments – misery and consumption will rain down from the heavens and the land will lay fallow and broken.

5. The Torah is quite clear do this and you get that
    a. As a former computer programmer we call this an IF – THEN statement it's the key to making things happen with computers and according to Maimonides it's the key to making things happen with human beings.
6. In his Guide to the Perplexed – never has a book been so aptly named. Maimonides explains that this passage in the Torah an others like it are there to motivate us not subjugate us.
    a. He explains it by way of analogy.
    b. In promising a child a toy or a sweet in order to get them to do something that is inherently good for them, read, learn, eat their vegetables we are acting in accordance with the proverb:

i. Answer the fool according to his folly.

c. We are pretty simple, us human beings with the right amount of reward or sufficient amount of fear we can be motivated to do anything.
    i. The goal of the Judaism and Torah is clearly stated:
    ii. Be like one who serves the master not on condition of reward but for the sake of heaven
        1. Do it because you want to not because you need to.
    iii. But we not always that pure in our motivations. Sometimes we need a little *shtuck* a little prodding toward the good or away from the bad.

d. That is why this is here - not because God works that way – Oh how simple it would be if God did
    i. we have plenty of evidence to the contrary

e. No the Tokecha is here to do what is in our own best interest in spite of ourselves.
    i. Is that fair, is that right?

7. We are here to live a life of meaning and contribution,
    a. for Jews it is explicit – we just read it last week, we are to be a holy people

and to repair the brokenness in the world.

b. God is constrained by limitations in making that happen – but we are not.
    i. In time our history has proven we are capable of anything – for good or for evil.
    ii. The Tokekhah is there to caution us to be careful with that power
        1. And ultimately to use it for good.