Earthquakes & Peoplequakes II
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How could God allow such a thing to happen? Where was God in all the pain and suffering they had to endure? These were good people, school children, senior citizens. Aren't we taught that God looks out for the innocent and the young, cares for those who are more in need of caring? If there is a God why didn't God prevent this horrible thing from happening?

I first wrote those questions a few weeks ago afternoon, I was sitting at my desk listening to news of the massive earthquake in El Salvador, recalling that it was only a few weeks before that an equally destructive force leveled homes and lives in India. Sitting at my desk, watching how the side of a mountain had nearly erased an entire village I jotted down those questions. I wrote them because I though they would help me make sense out of the destruction and loss that had fallen upon people and communities that already had it pretty hard just surviving as it is. I thought maybe I could build those questions in a sermon.

That note sat on my desk for two weeks; I tried several times to turn it into the beginnings of a sermon. But each time I tried I was unable to do little more than raise more questions about why this happened and how I was to make sense out of it as a Jew and a human being. On Tuesday I set aside the afternoon and I was going to turn that note into my sermon for shabbat, one way or another I was going to find answers to those questions and share them with you tonight. As senseless and heinous as the event was, Judaism has been confronting acts of violence directed at its children and

institutions for centuries. Whether it is the Roman destruction of the Biblical Temple, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Holocaust or a Terrorist bombing, we have faced similar calamities many times in our history as a people and our tradition has offered countless explanations and responses. I figured if I couldn't find the words myself I would borrow and teach from those of another Rabbi, taking refuge in the wisdom and insight of our Jewish leaders.

But then the news of the earthquake in Turkey became clearer and filled the TV and radio, 10,000 people killed, thousands more injured and left homeless and hurting. I looked at my list of questions, Where was God? What was God? How could God? And it occurred to me that if I crossed out the words JCC at the top of my note and wrote the title Earthquake, the same questions cried out to be answered. The same seemingly senseless loss of life and happiness needed explanation. Again we have encountered natural destruction before, we who live in this city who bolt our bookcases to our walls, we know all to well the havoc that earthquakes, fires and floods can cause in the world. They destroy not only homes and property, but human life, as the ground shakes so does our sense of security, our trust in the orderliness of nature.

But we know how to respond to earthquakes, we understand them on a level and in a way that we don't understand the shooting of children while at day camp. We accept earthquakes as a constant possibility, if not a probability and we therefore apply our energies toward preparedness and minimization of the damage they can cause. Scientists say with regard to earthquakes that people who have prepared themselves

emotionally and materially can actually turn a 7.0 quake into a 5.0 rumbler just by being aware and prepared.

Friends, I would love to call out tonight in the midst of this congregation for an end to violence and hatred, and end to fighting and bloodshed, an end to crazies with guns and bombs and the ignorant, hate filled views of people and groups. But I can no more honestly do so than to call out for an end to earthquakes and floods, tornados and forest fires. Just think about it for a moment; really think about it, this stuff is part of our world. Racist hatred is a force in our society, an evil and violent force, and if the history of our people teaches anything, it teaches that hatred of another because they are different is as old as hate itself. We must come to terms with that. We don't deny that their are earthquakes, we ready ourselves for them, we pull together as a community to pick up the pieces when they are over and we call our leaders to task when our institutions are is unprepared to cope or respond.

We must do the same with hate crimes and violence, we cannot deny that they are endemic in our society, and we must do what we can to minimize the destruction they can cause in our world, we must be prepared for both their potential and their aftermath. We in California know that you don't build a home on a fault line, you don't burn leaves in the canyon, you don't hang a glass framed picture over your bed. Likewise, we as a nation must realize that you don't sell weapons of mass destruction in a society filled with hate, with the utmost respect for the right of free speech, you don't permit the unchecked publication and spread of hate and bigotry on the internet and talkradio. Why is their a Museum of Tolerance in this community with its programs of

dealing with one another with respect and dignity, because their is intolerance in this world and we must do our best to minimize its potential to spread and cause further destruction.

Maybe we can't stop a crazy with a gun, or an earthquake, but we don't have to be silent in the face of either. We can and must confront both to the limit of our resources and our energies.

And now I turn back to those questions on my piece of paper, where was God, why didn't God, how could God? Friends neither of these events are about God, they are about us and our ability to work together to find solutions and resolution. God created the world, with earthquake and hate, as well as rainbows, and love. God set it all in order then gave each of us a body with which to do, a mind with which to think and a soul with which to feel. Inspired by God's, informed by Torah and Judaism's view of a world without hatred, without bloodshed, where people come together to support and respond in a crisis we must use our bodies, minds and souls to find our own solutions to these problems, to build better buildings that can stand up to earthquakes, create better laws that keep the instruments of destruction out of the hands of those that seek to destroy, to make a better community, and world, one based on a mutual sense of responsibility and in-it-togetherness, so that when the tragedy comes, when the hatred boils over we come together, and not fall a part. In the words of Rabbi Hillel, "*Im ain ani mi, mi li, oo-keh-she ani l'atzmi mah ani, v'im lo achshav eimatai* / If I am not for myself who will be for me and if I am only for myself what am I and if not now when." We are partner's with God, God created the world a pretty great and

wonderful place, with beauty and with abundant resources, but it is up to us to make the world work, it is up to us to care for each other, to respect each other, and to help each other as we face life's' challenges. May this be our task and our blessing this week and every week, and may we encourage others to join in our efforts to repair our world.