

Can You Argue With God?

When Abraham learns that Sodom is going to be destroyed he pleads with God. He says "Will the Judge of the Universe not be just?" And of course God replies that if there are any good men there He will not destroy the cities of the valley.

It is incredibly difficult to understand this exchange. God is not a human being. He does not conform to the normal rules of the material world because God is not matter. If we human beings, with all our limitations, could understand how God 'works,' that would mean that God Himself would be limited by the extent of our human understanding. How God functions, decides, intervenes, judges, is simply beyond us. We do not understand why it took four hundred years of suffering before the Israelites were taken out of Egypt. Couldn't God have done it right away? Or why did we suffer for thousands of years of oppression before God decided it was time to get our land back? Or why did a million innocent Jewish children die in at the hands of Nazis and their supporters?

Since everything in the Torah is intended to help us live the correct and good life, how can we make sense of this exchange? We have a principle in the Torah that we should imitate God. This means we should live lives according to Divine values of Torah. What the Torah is saying by this narrative is that there are values for humans that we need to and can abide by. One of them is to judge people according to their actions, not to make assumptions that anyone is automatically good or bad. And we should not punish innocent people. This is a Godly principle. We cannot think of God as a human being and so we cannot complain if God Himself does not seem to conform to Human ideas of what is right because He has a totally different perspective and nature. But what the Torah does is to tell us how we should behave if we want to get as close to God as possible.

Abraham understood this when he agreed to sacrifice his son. It did not make sense to him. He knew he could not understand the Nature of God completely but he also knew that it was God's role to teach mankind how far to go and where. Even so one is bound to ask why he did not argue when told to sacrifice his son? Did he feel he could only appeal on behalf of others? Or by this time, many years later, he has learnt to trust God and realize that life and God often test one in ways one cannot fathom.