

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

## Chapter 9 I Am Very Angry at God!

*Dear Gil:*

*I have always had rock-solid belief the Lord will protect and defend me. When my son died at 8 years of age, I admit, I did waver a bit. But, through all that, I still trusted and believed even though I got mighty angry at G-d. I "wrestled" but good.*

*Two years ago my beloved husband, David, died after a long and painful illness. Yes, the Yahrzeit [observance of the anniversary of a death] comforts but... I miss him so terribly and I still cry for him.*

*But now, I have a new challenge. My wonderful sister is dying of cancer. She's in pain, she's so scared. I am VERY angry at G-d. VERY angry. How can I stop this anger I am feeling? My child, my husband and now my sister. The pain is incredible and I don't know how to get around it. I "talk" to G-d, I pray and I "wrestle." But, I just cannot stop the anger. Do you have some wisdom to share that might ease the anger, and truth be told, some doubt I feel creeping into my heart?*

*I have grown weary of what seem like the usual clichés and platitudes. I am sorry to take all of your time like I have. I deeply appreciate whatever you might have to offer.*

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L Shalom!

As I read your letter I thought — What's wrong with being angry? Who could blame you after the painful losses you described? I think something might be amiss if you were not angry. You might feel a little better if you gave yourself permission to be angry. I asked a friend of mine who is battling cancer about what you asked me. She told me, "Moses was sometimes angry with God. At times, I too have been angry with God... It's OK, she (God) can take it."

Moving from anger to pain, I'd like to offer you a Chassidic saying that you might find comforting: "Who ever said that one must pray

## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews

with a whole heart? Perhaps it is preferable to pray with a broken heart." (Rabbi Uri of Strelisk)

Your heart sounds understandably broken as you struggle with God. Two resources that could offer you some guidance as you struggle are Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* and the National Center for Jewish Healing at 212-399-2320. They have both provided help to countless hurting people.

Locally, I suggest you seek out a Jewish healing prayer service (or talk to a rabbi about creating one). Here is a prayer from one such service (the Center for Healing can send you others). This prayer (I am sorry, I don't know the author) touched me — perhaps you too will find it meaningful:

"Each of us enters this sanctuary with a different need. Some hearts are full of gratitude and joy: They are overflowing with the happiness of love and the joy of life; they are eager to confront the day, to make the world more fair; they are recovering from illness or have escaped misfortune. And we rejoice with them.

"Some hearts ache with sorrow: Disappointments weigh heavily upon them and they have tasted despair: families have been broken; loved ones lie on a bed of pain; death has taken those whom they cherished. May our presence and sympathy bring them comfort.

"Some hearts are embittered: They have sought answers in vain; ideals are mocked and betrayed; life has lost its meaning and value. May the knowledge that we too are searching, restore their hope and give them courage to believe that not all is emptiness.

"Some spirits hunger: They long for friendship; they crave understanding; they yearn for warmth. May we in common need and striving, gain strength from one another, as we share our joys, lighten each other's burdens and pray for the welfare of community."

A main point of this prayer and Jewish healing services is that you should not struggle alone. I do not understand God's ways or why there is so much pain in this world, but I do see that God gave us

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

others. Just as life can be so wonderful we must share it with others, life also hands us difficulties that are far too painful to endure alone. Especially at such times, we need help with our answerless questions and constructive outlets for our dark thoughts and emotions. So don't struggle alone. Share what is on your mind with family, friends, rabbis, professionals, and others.

Please continue to reach out as you have to me. Together with others, I hope you are able to find the comfort you seek and deserve. Stay in touch!

Gil

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### Email Responses to "I Am Very Angry at God!"

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**Subj:** re Angry with God  
**Date:** 2/10/ 7:04:47 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

It is my hope that you find comfort in knowing that there are others who are strangers who truly care about your anguish. I have had many personal struggles within our family, I have no answers as to why. I only know what has worked for me. Memories that are cherished of good times, humor, live for the beauty of each day and find something good in it, if only the smell of a flower, the sun casting warmth, the laugh of a loved one. For me (it may seem trite, or not enough to others) I would have rather had the pain of losing someone than to never have them in my life at all. So I rejoice in their life even though my heart aches in losing them. Enjoy each day as a gift that your sister has left. Try to read to her, make it meaningful, look at old albums and share happy childhood memories.

In Friendship and hope for you and peace in your heart.  
Name

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## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews

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**Subj:** anger and the journey  
**Date:** 2/18/ 9:34 AM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

I applaud the willingness to talk about a subject few of us will, and that is anger with G-d. In a faith which creates a foundation upon which we draw, there are times when that very same faith leaves us blank and unsure.

I myself am a survivor of cancer. Throughout my treatment, I didn't want to be angry, thinking it was wrong or demonstrated my lack of faith. Oddly enough, while the radiation treatments caused physical problems, the real threats to my survival were taking place in my heart. But I just wouldn't let myself see the pain and frustration, the anger and the fear.

I grew well and went on to pursue a graduate degree in theology in order to help answer the nagging questions. But still I ran, I hid from my own heart. I wanted to know Adonai's [God's] place for me and that I was loved, but I wouldn't allow myself to look, to seek, to cry, to feel the anger.

Now, I find myself facing a new disease. I am trying hard to maintain a positive attitude. But finally, I have had to give heed to what has been locked inside for so long. I have finally looked up and asked, even screamed, "Why me?! Am I that awful?! What have I done wrong?!"

Granted, no life-changing answer ever came, but in its place, a growing freedom to be in dialogue with the Most High. To tell G-d in my prayers just how I feel, what frightens me, what I need, and yes, to openly talk about the pain. True, this doesn't promise an answer or some magical means to take away the anger, but, what it does give birth to, is a direct honesty with the Giver of Life. It may sound strange, but G-d can take it, so, give it back, in large portions!

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

We've been given music to celebrate, laughter to feel the dance of the earth, and in part, voices to pause, reflect, and yes, share our emotions from joy to anger with the One who has given us this life. As long as there is air in our lungs, and a thought rolling over in our minds, we owe it to those we love, ourselves, and to the Eternal, to take an honest role in our feelings, up to, and including all that angers. May the journey offer you peace!!

Name

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**Subj:** Re: Don't blame God... He is your only hope  
**Date:** 2/18/ 12:00 AM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

It is not fair, in my view, to state that God preserves anyone's life over other's because He might deem them "worth" it. God does not choose who lives and who dies based on merit. How else would you explain the deaths of millions of innocent Jews during the holocaust or any other wars?

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**Subj:** Re: Poor Woman  
**Date:** 2/17/ 8:44:17 PM CDT  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Dear Gil:

I suppose it is natural for that poor woman to be angry at God for the misfortunes that befell her family, but the anger is misplaced. God does not "take" people or make them suffer. While I have no answers for the woman in the article, I can only offer the example of my wife.

In 1956, my wife and her family lost their home and everything they owned when the Russians invaded Hungary. One of her

## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews

brothers and one of her sisters were seized and never heard from again. In 1958, four of her relatives died attempting to flee their homeland. In 1962 my wife's first husband died tragically of cancer. In 1966 her Father died. In 1968 her mother died. In 1969 her sister died in a tragic car crash. My wife has lived constantly with the death of those closest to her. She does not blame God nor is she angry. She accepts that which she cannot change and does not blame God or anyone else for her situation. The one exception is that she is fiercely anti-communist, and who could blame her? (I think her admiration of me is enhanced by the fact that I bombed North Korea during the war.) Far from being angry, my wife acknowledges that God (the God of Abraham) sent me to her to be her husband and raise her children as my own. It is the wrong question to ask "What is the meaning of life?" God commands us to ask "What meaning will I create for MY life?"

My heart goes out to the woman who has lost so much, but perhaps by only looking at the negative she is failing to see the whole picture. My words may not bring her any comfort or solace, no words can, I think. We cannot choose the situations that confront us in our lives, but we can choose our attitudes towards those situations. In any case, my sincerest condolences, sympathies, and prayers go out to her.

Name

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**Subj:** Re: I am very angry with G-D

**Date:** 2/18/ 2:15 PM CST

**From:**

**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Dear Gil,

Since I believe nothing happens by chance, I had just finished reading a commentary on the Parasha [weekly Torah portion] of the week when I turned on my PC and read the email from the woman who said she is very angry with G-D.

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

I liked what you wrote and just wanted to add something I read in the commentary, "The Chofetz Chayim [a famous sage] teaches that G-d does not make impossible demands upon us. Every person is obligated to do only that which he or she can. As King Solomon said in Mishlei [Proverbs] 9:10, "All that you find within your ability to do, act upon it..." which is to say, only that which is within your ability. We must do only that which has been placed upon us."

I don't know if she will gain any comfort at all, but I believe it confirms what you said about her right to be angry.

Thank you,

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**Subj:** Re: I am very Angry!  
**Date:** 2/25/ 8:24 AM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

I am able to identify with the writer's losses and feelings. My mother (who lived with us) died five years ago and my husband's third yartzheit [anniversary of death] is today. My sister and her husband have each had serious illnesses — hospitalization & surgery — this winter. I have returned to attending synagogue services and functions on a regular basis and have found it helpful for me.

I keep Kushner's book at my bedside and have sent it to many friends in their time of need. I also have found great help from the meditation tapes (also at my bedside) and books of Dr. Bernie Siegel. She might want to share Dr. Bernie's books with her sister. His original work was with cancer patients, but he has since broadened his scope.

I have found great help in a local support group for grief and loss. The writer might want to check with local hospices and synagogues for such groups. They might not, in the case of hospice, be solely Jewish groups, but they will certainly at some point touch on G-d and her feelings of anger.

## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews

As you mentioned, anger is a normal part of grieving. Questioning is a part of life — of growing and learning and finding peace if not total understanding. And it all takes time.

May we all find that peace of spirit as we travel this journey called life.

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**Subj:** Angry at G-d  
**Date:** 2/27/:19 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

First, I want to say that my heart goes out to this woman for the pain and suffering she has to endure. Secondly, it would be helpful if I and anyone else who so wishes would pray for her sister. Perhaps you could print her name so “mishuberras” [prayers for healing] could be said. Then, I want to say that I speak from several positions — I am a human being, a psychologist and a speaker — who speaks on self esteem.

Your anger is real and genuine and it needs to be expressed and recognized. The recommendation to be involved in community is a very good one — for it is only with others that our feelings can be acknowledged, accepted, and then, hopefully, the harmful ones, released.

Why is anger harmful? Because it doesn't hurt in any way, or actually affect in any way, the being against whom it is being directed. It does, however, very much hurt the one who is harboring it.

However, when I can step back for a moment and ask myself “would I rather that the entire possibility of the situation never have happened?” I usually answer “no.” In other words, if asked, would you rather have not had a son at all, or, if possible, to be grateful for what I'm sure were a wonderful and gratifying 8 years with this precious gift that had to be taken away?, what would you say? It is so hard when we are focusing on the loss to

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

try to remember the joy we felt by the “having” but that is what keeps me going.

There is no reason that we can understand why one person’s life seems so overwrought with tragedy while other seem to get away “scott free.”

I hope that one day, you will be able to see beauty and hope in life again, that the pain will be diminished and you will be able to remember and appreciate that the precious gifts that were taken away were yours to enjoy for whatever time you had them. In the meantime, recognize that you have every reason and right to be damned angry and resentful, that your sister is fortunate to have someone around now who can love, care, and support her during her illness and remember that there are many people who are caring for you and with you right now and who will pray for both your sister’s recovery and your strength to care for her and to go on.

I do, yet, believe in Hashem [God, literally meaning The Name] and I pray to Him to be with you during this time and forever.

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**Subj:** Re: Angry at G-d  
**Date:** 2/28/ 6:42 AM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

There actually is a reason that some suffer tragedy and others seem not to and that is that events in the universe occur entirely at random. The universe is therefore indifferent to good or evil. This is difficult to accept but is probably healthier than hating God.

Name

“We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty humans and then blames them for his own mistakes.” Gene Roddenberry

**Sex, God, Christmas & Jews**

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**Subj:** (no subject)  
**Date:** 2/10/ 8:52:53 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Coming home from work tonight, I was praying for some sign that God could hear me, The prayer that you quoted from the Jewish Healing Service made me feel not so alone and I thank you for it. I can certainly empathize with the woman that wrote to you. My heart and prayers go out to her.

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**Subj:** anger at God  
**Date:** 2/10/ 10:47:38 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Paraphrasing Tolstoy — all happiness is the same, but everybody's pain is unique to them.

I have found that at least for me, time does not ease the pain, it merely makes it less debilitating. The God that I believe in is in the fact that I do wake up and continue living each day despite, during, and maybe because of tragedy. Judaism has always been quite clear that the grief must be experienced, especially in cases where grief is presumed appropriate. Part of grief is anger. Anger at the world for turning when yours has stopped, anger at the sun for shining, and anger at God for "letting" these things happen.

Until the pain is livable, words remain just words. Background and meaningless, except for the meaning our fevered senses attach to the bits and pieces that reconnect us to the world, our souls and God.

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**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

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**Subj:** In Response to why does G-d hate me  
**Date:** 2/13/ 11:56:19 AM CDT  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

This woman is doubting G-d's existence or G-d's will because she doesn't trust that Hashem really does know what's best, or that Hashem really does love her. Me, I choose to assume I don't have the whole picture. Yes, she is in pain. And sometimes life is pain. Sometimes choosing to trust G-d is hard. But for me, I cannot afford the arrogance of doubting that my life is according to G-d's will, or that Hashem does know what's best, however hard it may be in the middle.

It is arrogance to doubt G-d? Why do we comfort people when they decide they know better than G-d that something is bad or not right? Why do we not tell them that whatever G-d gives us to deal with, G-d also gives us the strength to deal with (and yes, not alone). It's not that I don't sympathize with the pain, but I think we are asking and answering the wrong questions. Not 'why is G-d doing this?', but 'what is G-d giving me to help me get through this?' and 'what can I learn from this that will bring me closer to Hashem?'

When asked why did so and so die? my only answer is the complementary question why did I live? And when both questions are asked together the only possible answer is that we can't know G-d's will, except, sometimes, in hindsight.

L'Shalom  
Name

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## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews

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**Subj:** Angry at Gd  
**Date:** 2/10/ 7:53:22 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Gil

I was deeply moved by the sorrow and despair of Ms. "L." I, too had very painful days that stretched into years. I lost just about everything. In the midst of my despair, I almost lost my faith. Ms. "L" must feel very lonely and singled out by life. Pain has the ability to make you feel isolated regardless of how many people are around you. Indeed, pain teaches you that there is an existential aloneness that you cannot escape. Nobody, no matter how close they are to you, can possibly unburden the intensity of the pain. But faith can help us see strength and love within ourselves.

Judaism teaches us about the glorious gifts that we are given by God. We are given the ability to make choices, to love, to hope, to dream, and to endure. Judaism also teaches us about life's constant transformation. Our essence, I believe, transforms itself into life-giving energy when our physical being dies. Like other forms of energy, it never gets destroyed. Life's transformation is what we must look for when our hearts ache intensely. Ms. "L" will not be able to touch or see the physical beings of those she loves who have died. But they are part of the universe now, a part of life that she can see and touch. Wherever there is a manifestation of life, there is a manifestation of God... and that's where our loved ones go. She has been given the gift of choice. God is waiting for her to decide which way to go. God provides strength as we walk.

Name

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**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

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**Subj:** To the Lady in Pain from Loss of her family members  
**Date:** 2/10/ 11:37:51 PM CST  
**From:**  
**To:** GilMann@aol.com

Hi, Gil

I feel so much for this lady. My foster mother is not Jewish, but she has a prayer group and she teaches prayer to several groups in her retirement complex. I will ask that they pray for this lady.

Now, I think she needs to contact a grief support group for herself. There is also a cancer support group for women. I will try to find out the exact name of it.

I have been watching Oprah Winfrey's show. Today she had Gary Zukav on again. He is not pushing a religion nor does he pretend to be a psychologist, but he has some very helpful ideas in his book called "The Seat of the Soul." This lady needs, REALLY NEEDS, to take some quiet time for herself. I agree that it is not wrong to be angry with G-d; however, as Gary says, we are put here for a reason, and our life's work is to heal the problems we were born with. "When you are in the throes of your agony, that is your holy place," and the starting place of your healing. I agree that the healing group is also a good place for her to go, or to start one, if there is none in her town. Maybe it is her life's work to do, that to provide a quiet, loving, healing place for others and in so doing find peace and healing for herself. He says, "You cannot have control over what happens to you. You can control only how you respond to it and use what you learn from it."

Name

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## Sex, God, Christmas & Jews



### Concluding Thoughts to Copy, Cut, Paste, and Save

As I reviewed this section and gave thought to a conclusion, I was most conscious of the original writer's comment that she had "grown weary of what seem like the usual clichés and platitudes."

Out of desperation and awkwardness, these are the kinds of words that seem to stumble from our mouths when we communicate with a person enduring pain or grief. I have heard horror stories of "words of comfort" that have been offered with the intention of helping, that, in reality, were insensitive and instead compounded the person's suffering. This is why Judaism teaches that upon visiting the house of a mourner, we should say very little. Rather, we should show our support by our presence, giving mourners the option to speak if they wish. Listening can be the most compassionate thing to offer at such times.

One could say that some of the comments from the emails in this chapter would be unhelpful. Still, I include them because there is another Jewish lesson in all the emails in this chapter. Judaism places a huge emphasis on the importance of community. At no time is community more important than during crisis and loss. I was personally moved by the cyber-community that responded to this woman's plight.

I forwarded many emails to her. Not long after, she wrote back to me. Here is an excerpt of what she wrote:

"I have been feeling pretty good lately. My attitude has improved greatly and my friends comment on it frequently... I appreciate your forwarding on the responses to my original letter to you. I never expected such a range and depth of reactions. Most enlightening."

A friend of mine who was the rabbi of a huge congregation once told me that working with so many families over the years taught him that anyone who lives long enough will experience some tragedy in their life. When life slams us to the pavement, we are left dazed, wounded, and groping for answers. Why must we endure

**Spirituality:** I Am Very Angry at God!

such pain? What role does God play? Where is God at these times? As I said earlier, I do not pretend to know. But I do know, confirmed by the emails I have received, like those in this chapter, that we need each other and that we have a tremendous capacity to heal and to help through our acts of kindness. Could this be God? Are these kinds acts part of the Divine spark in each of us?

Whether or not this idea is consistent with your image of God, perhaps the most important lesson that can be drawn from this chapter is that even a small act of kindness can go a long way—like sending a compassionate email to a stranger in pain.

