

ורוב מה שהביאם אל הענין ההוא תחילה - הוא מה שיראה בתחילת המחשבה מהעדר סידור עניני בני אדם והיות קצת החסידים בחיים רעים מכאיבים וקצת האנשים הרעים בחיים טובים וערבים. והביאם זה לעשות החלוקה אשר תשמע עתה והוא - שהם אמרו לא ימלט הענין מאחד משני חלקים אם שיהיה האלוה בלתי יודע דבר מאלה הענינים האישיים ובלתי משיג אותם או יהיה משיג אותם ויודעם - וזאת חלוקה הכרחית; ואחר כך אמרו ואם כן הוא שישגם וידעם לא ימלט הענין מאחד משלשה חלקים אם שיסדרם וינהיגם סידור טוב ושלם ותמים או יהיה מנוצח ולואה לסדרם אין יכולת לו עליהם או ידע ויוכל להנהיג הסדר וההנהגה הטובה אלא שהוא יעזבם ויטשם על צד היותר נבזים ושפלים ופחותים בעיניו או על צד הקנאה - כמו שנמצא איש מבני אדם יכול לחון טוב לאיש אחר והוא יודע צורך האיש ההוא להשיג אל טובו אלא שהוא לרוע טבעיו ורשעו וקנאתו יקנא בו על זה ולא יחנהו הטוב ההוא. וזאת חלוקה הכרחית אמיתית גם כן רצוני לומר שכל יודע בענין אחד לא ימלט מהיותו משגיח להנהיג מה שידענו או יעזבהו - כמו שיעזוב האדם וישכח בביתו הנהגת החתולים על דרך משל או מה שהוא יותר פחות מהם; ואשר יש לו השגחה בענין פעמים ינוצח וילאה להנהיגו ואף על פי שהוא רוצה להנהיג. וכאשר חילקו החלוקה הזאת פסקו וגזרו גזרה ואמרו ששני חלקים מאלה השלושה חלקים המחויבים לכל מי שידע נמנעים בחק האלוה ית' והם שלא יוכל או יוכל ולא ישגיח - מפני ששניהם מדות רעות או לאות - וחלילה לאלוה משניהם! אם כן לא נשאר מן החלוקה כולה אלא שלא ידע דבר מאלה הענינים כלל או ידעם ויסדרם הסידור הטוב; ואנחנו נמצאם בלתי מסודרים ולא מחויבים להקש ולא נמשכים כפי מה שצריך; אם כן בזה ראייה על היותו בלתי יודע אותם משום צד ולא לשום סיבה

Secular Philosophers: Some pious men live a miserable and painful life, whilst some wicked people enjoy a happy and pleasant life. Based on this, only one of two things is possible, either God is ignorant of the individual or particular things on earth, and does not perceive them, or He perceives and knows them. If He perceives and knows all individual things, one of the following three cases must take place: (1) God arranges and manages human affairs perfectly (2) He is not powerful enough to manage human affairs; (3) He sees everything yet he abandons them. One who has a knowledge of a certain thing either (1) takes care of it (2) neglects it, or (3) tries their best to take care of it but doesn't have sufficient power and strength although they have the will to do so.

The philosophers decided that of the three cases possible, two are inadmissible in reference to God (want of power, or absence of will) because they imply either evil disposition or weakness, neither of which can by any means be attributed to Him. There remains only the alternative that God is altogether ignorant of human affairs, or that He knows them and manages them well. Since we, however, notice that events do not follow a certain order, that they cannot be determined by analogy, and are not in accordance with what is wanted, we conclude that God has no knowledge of them in any way or for any reason. This is the argument which led the philosophers to speak such blasphemous words.

# A discussion on **The Problem of Evil** based on **Guide for the Perplexed (Rambam) 3:16**

## Some Interactive Resources:

**Youtube:** The Problem of Evil – Crash Course Philosophy #13

-Does the existence of natural evil undermine the existence of an all good God? What is the purpose of natural evil?

-Is the harshness of life wholly necessary? Would a smaller amount of suffering not be enough for the “soul-making” process? Surely an all good God would want to minimise our suffering.

**Youtube:** Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on God and evil

-Why are natural disasters necessary in a world created by a perfect God?

-Could the existence of evil force us to do Tikkun Olam? If so does evil in fact become a force for good?

## Textual questions

- Do you agree that if God is unlimited and cares about his creations, he would intervene to stop evil from happening in the world?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- Could evil ever be a force for good in the world?
- From the text, do you think the Rambam considers himself a philosopher?

## General questions

- Is Albert Einstein’s interpretation of evil in line with Jewish ideas? Can there ever be an absence of Godliness in the world?
- Does John Hick’s idea of the world being a place of “soul-making” necessitate evil?
- If there was no such thing as evil, would we be able to tell what is good, or would we be living in a state of numbness?

## Personal questions

- Do you believe evil can coexist with God being both loving and powerful?
- Do you think free will could exist if there was no Yetzer Hara or desire to do evil in the world?
- Do you believe God can be both a God of mercy and justice? Are good and evil subjective? If so, how can we as humans be in a position to judge what is good or bad?

## A Related Story – Bari Weiss

Job is a wealthy man living in a land called Uz with his large family and extensive flocks. He is “blameless” and “upright,” always careful to avoid doing evil (1:1). One day, Satan appears before God in heaven. God boasts to Satan about Job’s goodness, but Satan argues that Job is only good because God has blessed him abundantly. Satan challenges God that, if given permission to punish the man, Job will turn and curse God. God allows Satan to torment Job to test this bold claim, but he forbids Satan to take Job’s life in the process.

In the course of one day, Job receives four messages, each bearing separate news that his livestock, servants, and ten children have all died due to marauding invaders or natural catastrophes. Job tears his clothes and shaves his head in mourning, but he still blesses God in his prayers. Job is afflicted with horrible skin sores, and his wife encourages him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refuses, struggling to accept his circumstances.

Job ponders man’s relationship to God; He wonders why God judges people by their actions if God can just as easily alter or forgive their behaviour. It is also unclear to Job how a human can appease or court God’s justice. God is unseen, and his ways are inscrutable and beyond human understanding. Moreover, humans cannot possibly persuade God with their words. God cannot be deceived, and Job admits that he does not even understand himself well enough to effectively plead his case to God.

Job sustains his confidence and believes that there is a “witness” or a “Redeemer” in heaven who will vouch for his innocence. He feels that wisdom is hidden from human minds, but he resolves to persist in pursuing wisdom by fearing God and avoiding evil.

## Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Pirkei Avot 4:15:

רַבִּי יַנַּי אָמַר, אֵין בְּיָדֵינוּ לֹא מַשְׁלֹת הַרְשָׁעִים וְאֵף לֹא מִיִּסוּרֵי הַצְּדִיקִים:

Rabbi Yannai would say: We have no comprehension of the tranquility of the wicked, nor of the suffering of the righteous.

Epicurus:

“Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”

Albert Einstein:

“God did not create evil. Just as dark is the absence of light, evil is the absence of God”

John Hick:

“Some say the world is a vale of tears, I say it is a place of soul-making”