

Does God Love Old People?

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This is not a “shocking headline” or a teaser or a hypothetical question. It’s a real challenge to emunah (faith) for an elderly person who is watching his body and/or his mind deteriorate. For the caretakers as well—in particular family members, who watch the decay unfold, the slow, sad, even tragic, slide of a confident, capable individual whom they love, and from whom they drew strength and inspiration for decades—it can be bewildering: If Hashem (God) loves the

oldster, why is He doing this? Does the oldster deserve such a comedown, that s/he becomes immobile, cannot reach out and take things so (seemingly) near, that s/he cannot bathe or relieve himself without an aide?

There is added distress and anxiety for many, when the oldster's financial reserves are depleted by the need to pay for caretakers, medicines and operation or procedures. A lifetime of work "is down the drain," with all their savings going to strangers instead of to the children and grandchildren. Does God love our cherished oldster?

First, as we must often, often, remind ourselves, we cannot ever hope to intellectual or rationally understand what God does. At our best, we can only believe that all that God does (had done and will do) is good and for our benefit.

Second, to answer our question, we will extrapolate from a comment Rabbeinu (Rebbe Nachman) zal once made, regarding how Hashem views the world. Hashem views the world, Rabbeinu zal said, in a very non-human way. When we purchase a new item of clothing, we enjoy wearing it and taking care of it. But as it fades, or gets torn and ripped, we esteem it less and less (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #239). Hashem, on the other hand, does the opposite. The more His "cloak"—the world, with all it contains—gets older, the more important it becomes to Him. Why?

Rabbeinu zal explained. Initially, the world was imperfect, but slowly and steadily it began to improve. The Patriarchs and Matriarchs came. Then Moshe Rabbeinu arrived. The Rebbe said, "Tzaddikim constantly come along and repair the world more and more. The world steadily grows dearer to the Blessed One."

A human being is an *olam katan*, a miniature world. When we are born, we are imperfect. But slowly (even if not steadily) we improve. We learn *alef-bet*, begin to say Shema, make *berakhot*

(blessings), and keep Shabbat. We add a mitzvah here, a mitzvah there. The vicissitudes of life make us wiser, our *emunah* and over-all appreciation of God's ways deeper. All these improvements mean that Hashem loves us more and more as we get older. He must love old people a lot!

(So why the suffering? Why? We do not know. Since suffering of this sort, the suffering of the innocent [or to us, seem innocent] is something we cannot comprehend, this question has no answer. To a Jew who had suffered terribly for a long time, Rebbe Nachman said, "You have suffered the most severe and bitter pains all these years. But it is still better than one burn in Hell. One singe in Hell is worse than all this" (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #236). This we believe.)

In regard to the world's improvement Rabbeinu zal said (*ibid.* #239), "In the end, Mashiach will come, speedily, in our days. Then *tikkun haolam* will be complete." Amen.