



How Can Jews Believe in God Right Now?

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After two-plus years of agony and hardship, what can Judaism teach about the role of faith and the presence of God in times of suffering? In this episode of TEXTing IRL, **Elana Stein Hain** and **Dani Segal** of Mabua: Israeli Beit Midrash mine the lessons of *Parashat Vayeshev* and Joseph's descent to Egypt. Drawing on rabbinic interpretations, modern experiences, and stories of soldiers and hostages, they explore how faith can operate as moral clarity and personal motivation during the long and often painful arc of Jewish history.

*This source sheet is part of the **December 8, 2025** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life**. Host **Elana Stein Hain** sits down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields to explore how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with and act with integrity in the face of the big dilemmas of our time.*

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A widely well-regarded thinker and teacher, Elana is passionate about bringing rabbinic thought into conversation with contemporary life. To this end, she hosts [TEXTing IRL](#), a bi-weekly podcast that considers issues relevant to Jewish life through the lens of classical and modern Torah texts; she also teaches [Talmud from the Balcony](#), an occasional learning seminar exposing the big ideas, questions, and issues motivating rabbinic discussions. Elana is the author of [Circumventing the Law: Rabbinic Perspectives on Legal Loopholes and Integrity](#) (Penn Press, 2024) which uses loopholes as a lens for understanding rabbinic views on law and ethics.

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1. Bereshit (Genesis) 39:9

אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא־חָשַׁף מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָּה כִּי אִם־אוֹתָךְ בְּאִשְׁרֵךְ אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים:

"He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin against God?"

2. Or HaChayyim, commentary to Bereshit 39:9

וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה וְגו'. פֶּרוּשׁ, כִּי בָּזָה אֲנִי מִפְּסִיד כָּל הַטּוֹב הַמּוֹשָׁג אֶצְלִי. וְעוֹד אֲנִי מַחֲסִיר עֲצָמִי מִמְּקוֹר הַנִּשְׁמוֹת, כִּי דָּבָר זֶה הוּא אֲסוּר גַּם לְבְנֵי נֹחַ, וְהוּא אָמַר "וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים".

"How then could I do this most wicked thing . . .?" By doing so I would lose everything I have achieved. Furthermore, I would be alienating myself from the Source of All Souls, seeing that adultery is forbidden to Gentiles as well as to Jews. This is what Joseph meant when he said, "I would sin against God."

3. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 39

. . . וְכִשְׁבַּקֵּשׁ לְהִרְגִיל עֲבֵרָה רָאָה דִּיּוֹקְנוֹ שֶׁל אָבִיו וְחִזַּר לְאַחֲרָיו וְכָבַשׁ אֶת יִצְרוֹ.

. . . and when he wished to accustom himself to sin, he saw the image of his father, and repented concerning it.

4. Bereshit (Genesis) 40:8

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְנוּ וּפְתָר אֵין אֹתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹהִים פְּתָרָנִים סִפְרוּנָא לִי:

And they said to him, "We had a dream, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dream]."

5. Seforno, commentary to Bereshit 40:8

הֲלֹא לֵאלֹהִים פְּתָרָנִים. הִנֵּה חֲכָמַת הַפְּתָרוֹן הִיא בְּאֶדָם מֵצֵד מָה שֶׁהוּא בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים וְלָזֶה יִתְכּוֹן שְׁתֵּהי' גַּם בִּי אִף עַל פִּי שְׁאֲנִי עֹתָה עֹבֵד וּבְבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹּא צִדְקָתָם בְּמָה שֶׁאִמְרָתָם "וּפְתָר אֵין אֹתוֹ":

Surely God can interpret! The wisdom to interpret a dream is something divinely inspired, seeing that humanity has been created in God's image. It is therefore possible that even I may have been endowed with such wisdom, even though I am a lowly servant and on top of my misfortune, I am in jail. It may therefore be possible that you erred when you said that there is no one who can interpret your dreams.

6. Amir Gilboa, "Gedolim Ma'asei Elohai" (Great are the Deeds of My God)

Translated by Levi Morrow

גְּדוֹלִים מַעֲשֵׂי אֱלֹהֵי. הוּא בָּא עִמִּי
בְּכָל הַמּוֹרָאוֹת וּבְכָל תְּאֵי הַבֶּכִי.
רוֹאֶה עִמִּי בַּתּוֹגוֹת וּבּוֹטֵחַ בְּשִׂמְחָתִי
יוֹם אֶחָד כִּי תִבּוֹא לְהִיּוֹת קִיּוֹמָת
אֶל תָּמִיד. גְּדוֹלִים מַעֲשֵׂי אֱלֹהֵי
לְמֶן יוֹם בּוֹ הַכֶּרְתִּיהוּ. אוֹדֶךָ, אֱלֹהֵי,
הִנֵּה בָּאָה שִׂמְחָתִי. הִנֵּה בָּאָה וַיּוֹרְדָה עָלַי

Great are the deeds of my God. God comes with me
In all the terrifying sights and all the crying corners.
God sees me in the sadnesses and trusts in my happiness
One day, which will come to exist
Forever. Great are the deeds of my God,
From the day on which I knew God. I give thanks to you, my God,
Behold my happiness comes. Behold it comes and descends upon me.

7. Zvi Kolitz, *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, 1999

I believe in the God of Israel, even when He has done everything to make me cease to believe in Him. I believe in His laws even when I cannot justify His deeds. My relationship to Him is no longer that of a servant to his master, but of a student to his rabbi. I bow my head before His greatness, but I will not kiss the rod with which He chastises me. I love Him. But I love His Torah more. Even if I were disappointed in Him, I would still cherish His Torah. God commands religion, but His Torah commands a way of life—and the more we die for the way of life, the more immortal it is! (pp. 17-18)

I am saying all this to You in plain words because I believe in You, because I believe in You more than ever before, because I know now that You are my God. For You are not, You cannot be the God of those whose deeds are the most horrific proof of their militant godlessness.

For if You are not my God—whose God are You? The God of the murderers?

If those who hate me, who murder me, are so dark, so evil, who, then, am I if not one who embodies some spark of Your light and Your goodness? (p. 20)

My rabbi used to tell me, again and again, the story of a Jew who escaped the Spanish Inquisition with his wife and child and made his way in a small boat across the stormy sea to a stony island. A flash of lightning exploded and killed his wife. A whirlwind arose and hurled his child into the sea. Alone, wretched, discarded like a stone, naked and barefoot, lashed by the storm, terrified by thunder and lightning, his hair disheveled and his hands raised to God, the Jew made his way up onto the rocky desert island and turned thus to God:

“God of Israel,” he said, “I have fled to this place so that I may serve You in peace, to follow your commandments and glorify Your name. You, however, are doing everything to make me cease believing in You. But if You think that You will succeed with these trials in deflecting me from the true path, then I cry to You, my God and the God of my parents, that none of it will help You. You may insult me, You may chastise me, You may take from me the dearest and the best that I have in the world, You may torture me to death—I will always believe in You. I will love You always and forever—even despite You.”

Here, then, are my last words to You, my angry God: None of this will avail You in the least! You have done everything to make me lose my faith in You, to make me cease to believe in You. But I die exactly as I have lived, an unshakeable believer in You.

Praised be forever the God of the dead, the God of vengeance, of truth and judgment, who will soon unveil His face to the world again and shake its foundations with His almighty voice.

“*Sh’ma Yisroel!* Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my soul.” (p. 24)

8. Bereshit (Genesis) 50:20

וַאֲתָם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבָה לְטוֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֶׂה כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַחֲלִית עַם־רַב:

Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.

9. Seforno, commentary to Bereshit 50:20

אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבָה לְטוֹבָה. הַמְצִיא בָכֶם זֹאת הַשְׁגָּגָה לְתַכְלִית טוֹב:

God helped exploit the terrible situation for the benefit (of Egypt).

10. Tehillim (Psalms) 126

A song of ascents.

When the LORD restores the fortunes of Zion
—we will be like dreamers—

our mouths shall be filled with laughter,
our tongues, with songs of joy.
Then shall they say among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them!”

The LORD will do great things for us
and we shall rejoice.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negev.

They who sow in tears
shall reap with songs of joy.

Though he goes along weeping,
carrying the seed-bag,
he shall come back with songs of joy,
carrying his sheaves.

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב יְהוָה אֶת שִׁיבַת
צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים:

אֲזַי וּמָלֵא שְׂחוֹק פִּינוּ וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה אֲזַי
יֹאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת
עִם אֶלֶּה:

הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הָיִינוּ
שְׂמֵחִים:

שׁוּבָה יְהוָה אֶת שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כַּאֲפִיקִים
בְּנֶגֶב:

הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ:

הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבְכֹחַ נִשָּׂא מִשָּׁךְ הַזֹּרֵעַ בָּא
יָבֹא בְּרִנָּה נִשָּׂא אֲלֻמָּתָיו: