



Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a Time of Pandemic. Number 6: Where is God

At the present time the news is dominated by two things, the rapidly increasing number of deaths from the Corona Virus Pandemic and the disruption it creates. The social isolation forces us in on ourselves and makes us face up to our personal thoughts, fears, and challenges that we might otherwise have hidden away. In these *"Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a time of Pandemic"*. I describe some of these, and how through facing them we may find fulfilment in the lives we seek.

When there is so much unfair and cruel suffering in the world, people often find it difficult to believe that any Loving God could exist. There is a further barrier to overcome. Christianity claims to offer peace and relief which is open to all... but we do not find that peace and relief unless we ask for it. In Luke, Chapter 11 verse 9-10, Jesus says *"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened"*. Therefore, no door will be opened if people do not knock. In the previous poems, we have seen how guilt, fear and rejection have created barriers which may be hard to overcome. Furthermore, opening a door and stepping through it is moving from one environment into another and being able to face the challenges that brings. People need to find the courage, hope and belief in the face of suffering to take that step, no matter how great the welcome beyond it may be. It is the duty of us all to provide that support.

Some people on their own do seek hope at times of distress and crisis. That is often seen in an increasing search for hope, spirituality, and the security that that religion can offer. For others that leads to a withdrawal, where misery, despair and thoughts of suicide take over their lives. Still others may seek to hide from all challenges in attempts to escape. In this poem I seek to respond to some of these issues. I examine suffering, how unfair it often is, and how it affects our lives

WHERE IS GOD?

Where is God?
I fear to look
For in the distance I might see
Not God, who loves me as I am
But how I've hidden God from me

Is this the God?
The God of Hate
In battles fought by people's tribes
No this is God, the God of Love
Who welcomes all; and heals divides.

How could God?
Who in this world;
Permits the hunger, hurt and pain
Yet in our struggles, toil and strife
Help us all to live again

Who is God?
Who stands beyond:
Assessing all I think and do
Or is it God who lives this life?
Fulfilling all I seek in me

What is God?
The Lord most High
Dispensing justice to the world?
What I now see is God who hurts
To heal the weakness true to me

Is this our God?
Who makes us one
When in the death of his only Son
Expressed on the cross on which He died
We find the peace His love provides

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REFLECTION

This poem asks the question "Why do people suffer?" Since Christianity and all religions accept the interplay of light and darkness in terms of good and evil, it should not be surprising that suffering occurs. Some religions may personalise the divine forces or powers which drive suffering and goodness in terms of Satan and God, others may describe them in terms of pure essences of good and evil instead. Yet others may define them in purely secular terms. However, we do not create evil alone. Evil is created when our actions attack or destroy the wellbeing of our own communities, and groups that are deemed to be outside them. Thus, the need for religious belief is not driven by science and philosophy, it is driven by the communal need to find a deeper meaning to life.

What religious beliefs, both sacred and secular do is to identify explanations for these powers beyond what science or philosophy can ever prove, no matter great their capabilities of analysis and deduction become. That is the essence of faith: for it is the pro-active nature of faith and commitment which empowers, and it is science and reason that checks. The nature of this empowerment encourages people to work for the greatest good, but when faith and commitment is misused or misplaced the greatest evil may be found. Some of the most destructive religious and secular movements in society have been created when this faith has been misplaced, where the creation of tribal and social divisions is justified by its misplacement and is also enforced. When that happens some of the greatest suffering which is encountered by innocent people occurs.

What should be a greater concern is the unfairness with which suffering is applied, either through the cruelty fundamental to nature and evolution, including the illnesses, chronic pain, mental anguishes, and disabilities created without fault, which people face. The argument that the sins of the fathers are visited on their children in the Ten Commandments does not help. The miracle working ministry of Jesus is presented as evidence of how suffering may be relieved. However, suffering does not end for others, and these miracles are presented in the bible as a demonstration of the power of faith in the ministry of Jesus on earth. Therefore, innocent people do not only suffer just because of the actions of others. The processes of evolution provide other areas where unfair suffering takes place. Nevertheless, suffering is present in the world because it is needed, since it is also a protective mechanism built into our existence to prevent us doing ourselves harm, and ensuring we avoid other situations where harm to us could occur. All religions work from a base which recognises evil and the abilities of nature to shape our lives. Rather than asking questions about why does suffering exist? and why is it so unfair? perhaps the questions we should ask are about how can it be minimised? and how can it be removed?

We have seen that in the Gospels Jesus says: *“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened”*. In this passage, one might concentrate on the rewards of an inner peace, heaven, and the after-life that is offered for those who do knock the door. For that to happen people also need to have the confidence to find the door, seek the hope that lies beyond it, and want to knock. As we have seen, that may be more difficult for people who are trapped with no hope in a web of misery and despair. In my poem *“Where is God?”* some of the concerns I encountered are described. Like many people, how could I give any credence to a God who allowed such evil and unfair suffering into the world?

The Gospels suggest that the disciples of Jesus might have had similar difficulties. This passage on knocking on the door appears in Matthew 7:7 and in Luke 11.9. However, it is repeated in saying 94 in the Gospel of Thomas. Again, I emphasise that the Gospel of Thomas is not being used here as sacred scripture, it is treated entirely as a secular and independent text. Thus, in the accepted Gospels we read of how the hope and expectations of the disciples were crushed at the time of the crucifixion, and how that door only flung fully open for them because of their later realisation and their searing conviction that the resurrection of Jesus had occurred. The passage only occurs once in each of the Gospels, but it is directly or indirectly referred to in sayings 2, 38, 59, 92 and 94 in the Gospel of Thomas, which perhaps gives a more detailed description of how this journey of discovery may have been made. Here a more stuttering realisation takes place.

No religion claims to eliminate suffering. But the ability to accept the reality of this love for those who suffer, and the ability to give it for those who provide support, can enable the calm and security which allows suffering to be healed, reduced, or endured.

According to our own beliefs we ask or pray for the spirit of hope which breaks down all barriers and brings us to the knowledge..... however we may express it, of the true essence of Love. Grant that through faith and hope we may find ways of resolving or better managing the suffering that many of us must endure. Give us the faith which helps us to find the positive things in life and not to dwell on the negative things instead. Let us know that we are loved for who we are, regardless of what we do, and also to know that when we knock, the door will be fully opened, and that we may find life in its fullness instead.

The complete collection of reflections is available is available at: www.com.tqdr.co.uk/articles/001C-PandemicThoughts.pdf