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The following meditation is written by Dr. Hoods, son,
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From Why to Where

READ:  (John 9:1-3) (Common English Bible)

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus’ disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God’s mighty works might be displayed in him.

REFLECT:

On December 26, 2004, the third largest earthquake ever recorded struck the west coast of northern Sumatra, rocking the fault-lines with the power of over 1,500 atomic bombs, vibrating the entire planet by one centimeter. The cataclysmic shockwaves birthed a series of apocalyptic tsunamis that reached upwards of 100-feet high. Due to the relative historical scarcity of tsunamis in the Indian Ocean, the surrounding coastal communities had no practical tsunami warning systems, guaranteeing local populations were unaware of their impending doom while the waters rushed their way. Almost a quarter million in fourteen different countries were killed, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history. A global humanitarian relief effort was swiftly organized, with food, medicine, and over $14 billion in international aid distributed to survivors and first responders. When the waters finally receded and the destruction cleared away, millions were left with a simple question: why? How, in a just, sane universe, could this happen?

In the January 8, 2005 issue of The Los Angeles Times, reporters Teresa Watanabe and Larry B. Stammer published an article that examined the different theological responses to the 2004 tsunamis from the major world religions. Their findings revealed stark differences in how mankind’s great faith traditions grappled not just with tragedy, but with the theological implications of disaster. Buddhists, according to a former Sri Lankan ambassador, believe in the doctrine of karmic law, not random chance, implying that the casualties received their just reward for the sins of their past or current lives while the survivors benefitted from their past or current goodnresses. According to a prominent Hindu faith leader in southern California, Hindus also believe in karma, but their belief in god(s) implies the intercession of a divine will: the god(s) sent the tsunamis to punish the afflicted communities’ bad karma. Meanwhile, a Wiccan high priestess in Wisconsin explained that earthquake and tsunamis were the result of “Mother Nature stretching—she had a kink in her back and stretched.”

The response from the Abrahamic faiths were different. When asked, a prominent rabbi teaching at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles responded that such disasters were a “natural consequence of God’s decision to make a finite world.” But this begs the question of why, if God deliberately created a finite world, he couldn’t design one without physical and natural laws that periodically drown a quarter million innocent people. Meanwhile, according to
the leader of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, mankind is called not to ask “why” but “what now”: “We should take it as a test from God to see how human beings respond.” It’s this last interpretation that perhaps comes closest to the Christian theological outlook, finding the idea of God’s causing the tsunamis a non-issue. As Baptist minister Douglas McConnell explained to Watanabe and Stammer, “believing that God deliberately caused the [tsunamis] is a difficult leap for those who believe God was revealed in the compassionate Jesus.”

We see this belief here in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John where Jesus’ disciples ask him if the suffering of a man blind since birth was karmic punishment for his family’s sins. Notice how Jesus responds. He doesn’t just reply in the negative, he rejects their premise that mankind’s suffering is ordained. Jesus changes the question, instead saying that what matters now is that in his presence, the mighty works of God might be displayed. Just as Jesus rejected their premise, this text invites us to change our question from why there is suffering to the location of Christ in the midst of said suffering. The answer can always be found in the midst of the church’s response to devastation: the donating of money, the sharing of shelter, the giving of food and medicine. It’s in the healing of the world that we come closer to Christ. We have no time for wondering why.

**RESPOND:**

1. How has this scripture or meditation spoken to you?

2. What insight can you apply to your life this week?

3. What one specific act do you intend to take, an attitude to change, a person to see, or prayer to pray?

**PRAY:**

*Lord Jesus, draw me from a preoccupation with searching questions that cannot be answered to experiencing your presence and love more deeply. Amen.*