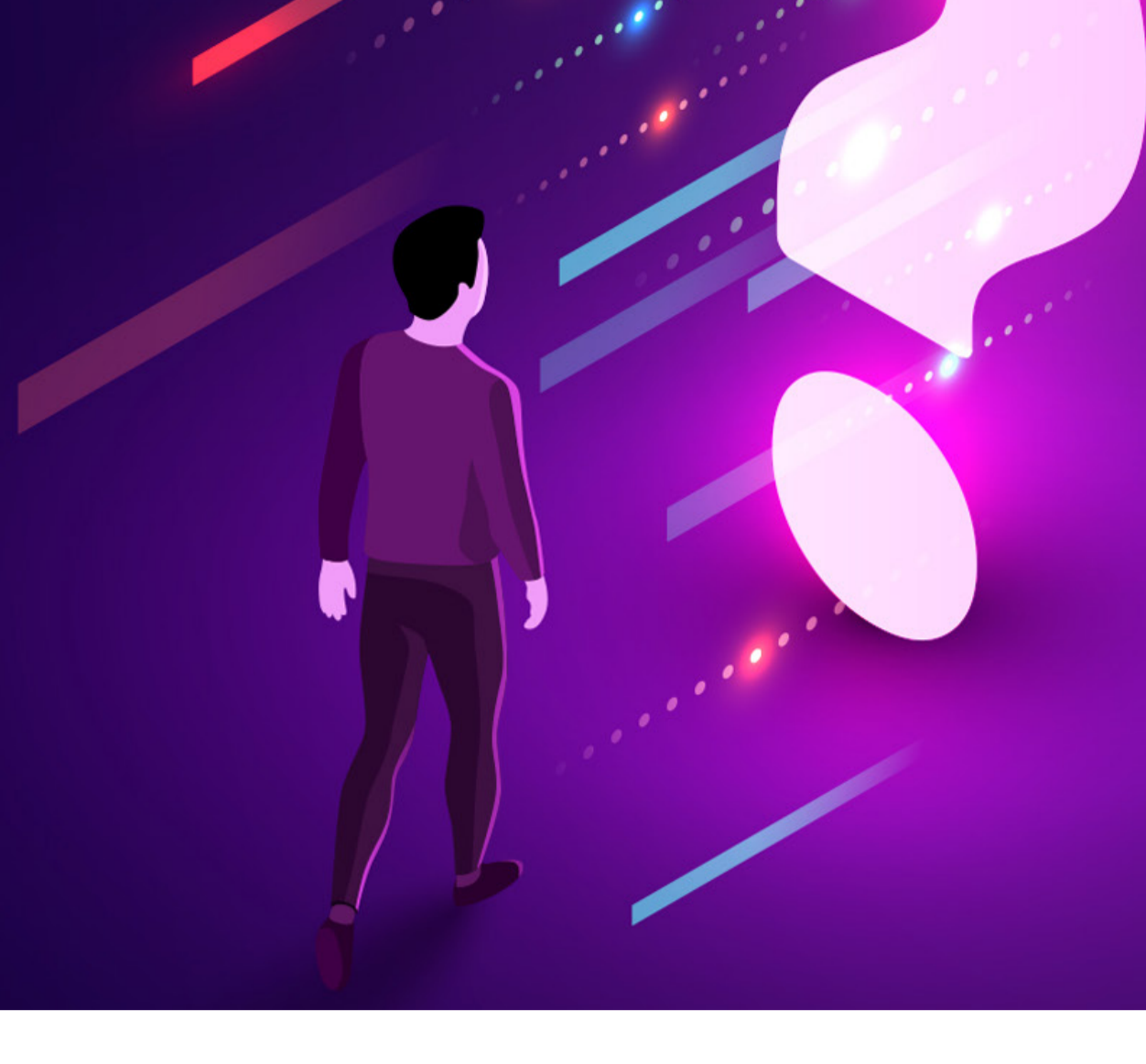


Why Lord do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalms 10:1



Reflection:

June 2023

When hardships and misfortunes torment us, it is the presence of God that gives comfort to the soul of the believer. The Psalm opens with the anguish of the psalmist at the apparent absence of God in his troubles. When we realise that this Psalm was probably written by David while he was fleeing from King Saul, we get a better perspective of the misery in the Psalmist's heart. Yet this verse has something for us to meditate on - how to pray when agony fills the believer's soul and the evil doers seem to flourish around him.

In one of his books, Author Rabbi Harold Kushner narrates an incident about his atheist doctor friend. The doctor's brother died of cancer, and Kushner attended the funeral. The doctor was devastated and in despair. On seeing Kushner, he said, "I wish I could believe in God, like you. When bad things happen, you can always cry out, question and complain to God because you believe He exists, and is in charge. I can't and don't believe, so I am in this all alone, and being a doctor, I have only myself to blame for my brother's death."

To be able to question and complain to God is a privilege we often take for granted. We naturally question God when we are faced with unexpected circumstances such as financial loss, failure in exams or careers, unforeseen illness, etc. But there are times when we tend to think that questioning God shows our lack of trust in Him and our weak faith. In the Psalms, we see countless examples where the psalmist struggles to understand what God is doing. Questioning God is part of the human experience. When we face trials and tribulations, asking questions to understand what is happening is normal. The psalmist questions God about his faithfulness and love, asking if He has forgotten him and why He hides his face. This shows that it is possible to question God, express our doubts and uncertainties and that He is great enough to deal with our emotions.

Some of us feel really guilty about questioning God. The great philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard's father, Michael, is an example. As a young shepherd boy, in the midst of suffering and dire poverty, out of frustration and despair, he once climbed a hilltop, shook his fists at the sky and solemnly cursed God. Though his fortunes changed and he was able to see better times later, he carried tremendous guilt for having cursed God and saw all subsequent sufferings in his life as a punishment from God. Even though he was a deeply religious man, he carried this guilt and melancholy to his deathbed.

God does not get angry with our questions. He is not intimidated by them. He invites them. He wants a relationship with us. Through our questioning, we often come to a deeper understanding of who God is. When we hide our questions, we hide a part of ourselves from God. God does not want blind allegiance. Many times, it is through our questioning that our faith and trust in God is built. Like the suffering Job in the Old Testament who expressed his frustrations and struggle as well as hope in God by questioning Him, it can turn out to be a humbling experience whereby we come to realize that we are finite beings trying to grasp an infinite God.

Although questioning and complaining to God expresses the transparency and freedom in our relationship, how we do it matters. Can we do it frankly and at the same time be aware that He is still in charge of the things we are perturbed about? As we approach God with our questions, can we come humbly, understanding that we do not have all the answers, but that He does? There is a difference between asking questions of God and accusing Him. This psalm ends with the psalmist mellowing down, expressing his trust in God who upholds the meek. However, even when we accuse God, He still forgives us because He is a big God who can handle our tantrums. After all, we are His darling children and He loves it when we approach Him with our frustrations rather than try to solve them by ourselves or forget them with the empty pleasures that clamour for our attention.

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