

God in History Cantor Gershon Silins

In the story of our people, the role of God in history and in the particular needs of a particular people, poses a problem – why these people, why now? How long did the Israelites have to cry out to God before God remembered the covenant? And why did God hear their cry and not the cry of the Egyptians standing over the bodies of their first-born?

But this same historicity gives us more than just a problem. It also tells us that we and our actual lives in our actual time – now – are important; we are not just afterthoughts in the eternity of the universe, which is no more likely to care about us than it did for the near infinity of extinct species whose fossils we find today. What we can know is that, beyond the ever-increasing cloud of our understanding of the world, there is a shadow always beyond that cloud, which is never overcome by it; our knowledge will always be incomplete. But that incompleteness is the canvas upon which we create a future. It allows us to hope.

One of my favourite stories is about a bible study group in which the members were asked to tell their favourite passage from the bible. One man said, “And it came to pass...” Everyone waited for him to continue, but he said, no, that’s it. I was always happy that it didn’t say, “And it came to stay.” The Torah continues to remind us that, whatever questions arise about God’s role in the world, our tradition has never been static, and it allows us to grow as our concept of God grows, to encompass both what our ancestors held to be sacred as well as what we need to ask of it today. What questions do you think Liberal Jews will explore through our tradition in the coming years?