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**Where Is God?**  
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As a rabbi and as an American, I appreciated the National Day of Prayer that President Bush proclaimed last Friday. It was important for our country to come together as one and see religious leaders of all faiths and backgrounds, Americans one and all, calling on God to hear the prayers of our country, to heal our hurt, to help our suffering, and to give us strength.

It was an important opportunity for us to open our hearts and share the pain that we have been feeling. To let out the oppressive tension that had settled upon our chests. To stand side by side with friends and strangers, and shed the same tears. To feel the strength and solidarity of our country and be nurtured by the power of prayer.

The Day of Prayer also gave our country an opportunity to send an important symbolic message. By uniting in worship, we sent a message to those who attacked us, to those who believe that we are godless heathens. It gave us a chance to demonstrate that we also call on the protection, strength and might of God; that faith is a part of our nature too; that God stands with those who have been wronged – with us; and that we believe, no, that we know, that God is with us.

This, too, was an important statement for us to make. For if those who have brought terror to our country believe that God is a weapon of war, that God is at their disposal, then let our enemies know that we possess the same weapon that they do.

Yes, I appreciated the National Day of Prayer for all these reasons; both the spiritual significance and its symbolic importance. And yet, with that being said, I also have to admit that, as I listened to the words of the clergy who had assembled together, and as I heard the message of Billy Graham, I knew that their words were not meant for me. In fact, they said so themselves. The clergy who gathered together in Washington D.C. spoke of their faith and their belief in God, in the only language they know. They spoke as Christians.

Now I know that they weren't trying to offend us, or convert us. No, they were only trying to give comfort and solace, to give answers to the questions that all of us are feeling. It's just that the answers they offered were Christian ones. And Christian theology just doesn't speak to me as a Jew. Where was God? How could God let this happen? Their answers, as heartfelt and sincere as they were, didn't help me.

Now I have to be honest with you. A week ago, I wasn't going to try and answer the question: "Where is God?" either. I wasn't going to answer it, even though I sensed that I needed to. I sensed it because, well before the bombing took place, our community was already dealing with some very tragic circumstances.

Over the last few weeks, several young men and women, contemporaries of ours, good people with families, had died. And I know that many of you had questions of God then. Many of you were scared

and angry. Many of you felt that your hearts were breaking and you were looking for some answers. And that was before the terrorists attacked. And so, in the aftermath of the bombing, I could not ignore your questions any more. I could not ignore your pain.

Where has God been? Why did He let these things happen? Friends, I wish I could tell you that this is all just a part of God's plan. That this is the way that the world is supposed to work. I wish I could tell you that, one day everything will even out, and we'll understand it all. I wish I could tell you those things, but I can't. It's not that those answers aren't possible, because they are. And there are a lot of brilliant men and women who rely upon them. People who believe that everything happens for a purpose, and that God doesn't give us more than we can handle. A lot of people believe this, and it gives them strength, comfort, and reassurance.

But not all of us possess that type of faith. I don't have that kind of faith. It's hard for me to see how there could be a plan here, that people died because that's how God wanted it to be. Why would God want it to be this way? Why would God want our hearts to break? Why would God want us to see our loved ones die before their time? Why would God want to cause us so much pain, misfortune, and misery? Indeed, if this really is the way that God wants things, then I would consider giving up on God. After all, who needs God for that? There are enough people in the world who do evil. We don't need God to add to our woes. So if this is all just a part of your plan, God, then keep it. Keep it all. Because I don't need that plan and I don't need you.

No, the idea that death, sickness, misery, and misfortune are a part of God's plan does not sit very well with me. It does not give me comfort. It does not restore my faith. But I am a rabbi, and I do believe in God. So what is happening here? And where is God?

When I have moments of doubt, when I have questions of faith, I start looking for answers by turning to the Torah. For the main purpose of the Torah is to tell us about our relationship with God. In order to discover where God is in our world, where God is in our lives today, we have to start by looking at where God was at the very beginning of human life, when we were created. We have to look at those first stories of the Torah; at the messages we learn from the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

When God created Adam and Eve, He didn't let them roam free around the earth. No, He placed them in the Garden of Eden. The garden was a safe and peaceful place, where Adam and Eve could grow and learn. It was a protected place, where Adam and Eve could live, and would never face any harm. If they were hungry, God provided them with food. If they were cold, God kept them warm. The Garden of Eden was a perfect place. It was a peaceful home, where there was no pain or hunger, no sickness or sadness, no terror or death. Indeed, it was almost like heaven.

And Adam and Eve lived in this place for some time. They were nurtured and sustained there. They grew up there. But eventually, they began to get a little bored.

Think about it. There was nothing for them to do. What could they do? They didn't have to work. They didn't have to learn. They didn't have to grow. Everything they could possibly desire was right there at their fingertips. They lacked nothing.

But as time passed they began to wonder: Why were we created, God? Why are we here? Aren't we supposed to be doing something, making something, building something? Don't we have some purpose in life, God?

Now this was the moment that God had been waiting for. You see, for all that time, God had been sitting there watching Adam and Eve. He watched them and he wondered: Why aren't they doing anything? Why did I create these creatures? They're just sitting around in my garden, eating my food, getting fat on my couch. Why did I make these creatures? What good are they? What do I need them for?

It was a great question that God was asking. What did God need us for? If all we were going to do was rely on God, if all we were going to do was eat His food and drink His beer, if we were never going to go out into the world and make something of ourselves, then why did God bother creating us in the first place? God couldn't have eaten His own food?

No, God made us for a purpose. God made us, so that we would one day grow up and go out into the world on our own. So that one day we would live our own lives and seek our own ways. God made us so that there would be another creature in the universe that could create, that could build, that could grow. And so the day that Adam and Eve finally realized that they were bored was a day of great celebration for God. It meant that Adam and Eve were growing up.

Yes, that was a happy day for God. It was the day God realized that He would not have to be alone in the universe. It was the day God knew that He would have a partner, someone to talk to, someone to be with. It was the day that God knew that all of His nurturing and loving care had been worthwhile.

But it was also a scary day for God. You see, up 'till then, God had been in charge, of everything. God knew where every animal slept and where He had left every single blade of grass. There was a place for everything, and every thing was in its place. But once Adam and Eve would go out on their own, all of that would change.

They were going to go out into the world and off on their own. They were going to find their own paths and build their own homes. They were going to disrupt the beautiful, pristine, perfect world that God had created, cause problems, and make mistakes. They were going to break something. And God wasn't sure if He was ready for all of it.

“Maybe I shouldn't let Adam and Eve go,” He thought. “After all, they're going to get into trouble out there. They're going to make mistakes and get hurt. They're going to get sick and die. But if they stay here, inside the garden with me, I can watch over them, protect them, and keep them safe from all harm. Maybe I should just keep them here in the garden.”

But as God looked down at Adam and Eve, he realized how unhappy they were. There really was nothing for them to do in the garden. They really did need to go off on their own. And even though He knew they would make mistakes, even though He knew they would get hurt, he also knew that he had to let them find their own way.

As I was thinking about this scene, I couldn't help picturing myself as the parent of a sixteen-year-old child, who was asking for the car keys. I'm sure that by the time a child reaches sixteen, you can't wait for them to drive. For how long do we have to schlep them around, take them on errands, pick them up from their friend's houses, take them to the mall? When can they start taking care of some of their things on their own?

On the one hand, giving them the keys is a release. It's a sign of growth and maturity, a recognition that they will soon be all grown up and out on their own, an understanding that there comes a time when they do need to take care of themselves.

But on the other hand, giving them the keys is a bit terrifying because, let's face it, they're going to make some mistakes. We all do. And so will they. Hopefully the mistakes will be minor and they'll learn from them and grow. But once I give them the keys, once I let them drive off on their own, I can't protect them anymore. And even if it's not their fault, even if they do everything right, they can still get hurt. They can still get killed. They can do everything right and still be blindsided by a semi. You know what? My daughter's never going to drive.

But of course, I really won't have any choice in the matter, will I? She'll want to drive, and I'll want her to. I'll be worried, and scared, but I'll let her. I'll let her drive the car because I will have faith in her. I will have faith that she will do what's right. I will trust her, rely upon her to do what's right, and have faith in her. Despite my fears and worries, despite the danger that she will do something wrong, or that someone else will; despite the fact that she could die behind the wheel, I'll give her the keys to the car.

And that, my friends, is exactly what God said. God said: "I will let Adam and Eve leave the garden, even though they will make mistakes, even though they'll get hurt and die, I'll let them leave the garden because I have faith in them. I have faith in them that they will do what is right." God let us leave the garden; God let us have the run of this planet because God has faith in us. It's kind of ironic, if you think about it? We're not sure that we have faith in God, but God has faith in us.

Friends, we no longer live in the Garden of Eden. We no longer have God watching out for us, protecting us, shielding us from all harm. We're out here in this crazy world where anything can happen, where you can do everything right and still die. We're out here dealing with crazy people, making some mistakes and getting some things right. We're working hard, raising families, and usually trying to be good. And where is God? Where is He right now?

He's riding shotgun. He's in the passenger seat, letting us do the driving. Could God take the wheel? Of course, any time. But sooner or later he'd have to have trust in us, depend on us, rely on us to do what's right and let us drive ourselves, or what would be the point of it all?

When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, God gave them some driving instructions, the "rules of the road"; and He gave them an "Onstar" button, so that they could call whenever they needed direction; and last, He gave them the keys to the car. God had enough faith in them. He had enough faith in us, that He gave us the keys! We are driving the car. We are making the choices. We are deciding where we're headed. You and me, and two hundred million other Americans and some crazy people in Afghanistan and a billion Chinese . . . We have the keys to the car. We decide where we are headed. And God is standing here with us, watching where we go, offering us support, encouragement, and direction, and trusting that we will figure it out and head the right way.

Where is God? He's letting us drive the car, make the decisions, choose the course. Sometimes we'll make mistakes. And sometimes even if we do everything right, we'll still be blindsided by that semi. But most of the time we'll get where we were headed. And sometimes we'll find a new path, one that had never been considered before. And every once in a while, we'll arrive at a destination that will astound us.

It's not the safest journey in the world. Life is not the safest journey in the world. But it is **our journey: to choose how we live, where we want to head, and what we want to do.**

God, like any parent, wants us to be safe. God has given us a path to follow that will help us to be safe. God will be with us, encourage us, help us, strengthen us, and watch over us. But God will let us choose our own path. Because, best of all, God has faith in us. Faith in who we are, what we can be and what

we can achieve. God believes that we can be His partner in this world, His companion, His friend. And we can. It's our choice to make. It's up to us.

Where is God when bad things happen to good people? He's standing right beside us, crying the same tears that we shed. He's mourning that some people still drive drunk. He's mourning that we still haven't solved all of the problems that we face on the road. He's hoping that we'll use our God-given talents to make the journey safer for everyone. He's hoping that we'll reach our destination in peace. And He's praying that we'll always remember that He has faith in us: In what we can do, in who we can become, in what we can build, in what we can achieve.

God gave us the keys to the car because He believes in us. That's where God is. That's what God has been doing. The rest of it, friends, is up to us.

Life is a journey, our journey. And it's up to us to make the most of it. I know that we're up to the challenge. After all, God has faith in us. Amen.