

Our God, some contend, is immutable,
And their faith is, indeed, irrefutable,
When He does what he should,
It's because He is good,
When He doesn't, His ways are inscrutable.

We do indeed have the habit of twisting ourselves into theological pretzels when it comes to defending God. Defending God is a practice that theologians call theodicy. But why should God need defending at all?

First, we have a concept that God is perfect. If God is perfect and anything seems to challenge that assertion, God, or at least God's perfection, needs defending. I do not plan to argue tonight that God is perfect, so I decided to do what lawyers do. They look at each other's evidence in a process called discovery. I indulged in some discovery. I spent much of the afternoon looking in Jewish sources for statements that God is perfect. Guess how many I found? Zero.

"But wait!," you cry out. "It is the first of Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith!"
But no, it isn't.

"Yes it is!," you insist. "I just read it online today!"

But the translation you read was wrong.

"Impossible! I was on Chabad dot org!"

And yes, that is the translation of the first of Maimonides 13 Principles on Chabad dot org, but it is absolutely not what Maimonides wrote in Hebrew. In fact, the only references to God and perfection that I found in Jewish sources were ones referring to God as a perfect whole, a perfect unity, or in other words, absolute oneness as opposed to the three thirds equals one of the Christian trinity. But nowhere in the Talmud could I find a statement that God is perfect.

I admit, the Talmud is huge, it does not come with an index (I do have some that were published in the modern era), and just because I didn't find it does not mean it is not there beyond a shadow of a doubt. But to continue the legal metaphor, I can tell you it is not there beyond any reasonable doubt.

So let us go back from the Talmudic period to the Torah itself. Surely the Torah says God is perfect. Doesn't it? Maybe. In the last poem in the Torah, not God, but God's *actions* are called perfect. But that's not true, is it? Do we live in a perfect world?

In fact, that is my first piece of evidence. We do not live in a perfect world, and if the Creator was perfect, how could He create imperfection?

Next, we know God Himself thought that He had made a mistake by creating humanity. Either He made a mistake, which means He is not perfect, or he thought he made a mistake but He was wrong, which also means He is not perfect.

God made decisions and then changed His mind more than once in the Torah. By definition, perfection cannot change. Perfection is perfection, period. If anything about God changed, God can't be perfect.

So we have a God so powerful He can create a universe, a God so holy that He can demand of us that we, too be holy ones and unlike animals, do the same things they do but elevate them so that we do them in a holy way and thus make life holy; we have a God Who is moral, so much so that His morality is still the basis for the best set of moral values that have ever existed even thousands of years after revealing them to humanity, and yet the Torah does not depict God as perfect? With what kind of God are we left?

We are left with a more realistic God, a more lovable God, a God in Whom we can more easily believe. We see the suffering of the righteous in the world and we are expected to believe that this is the work, let alone the will, of a perfect God? Judaism never asks that of us. We put that demand on ourselves. Faith, as I said on the High Holy Days, is difficult. Faith and doubt go hand in hand. Let us not make faith even more difficult by ascribing to God an attribute that not even the Torah nor the Talmud do. God is great and God is holy. God is not perfect. And we are better off with an imperfect God.