Periodically, someone says to me, "Rabbi, your job is so hard." When I ask why, they generally answer about the need to be available at any time, and the need to be whomever someone needs me to be, when they need it."

That's not hard. Actually, it's the best part of being a rabbi. Let's face it. Is there anything better than being able to help someone who is genuinely in need? The mitzvah is huge; as is the gratification. I don't think it's hard. I think I'm lucky.

But certain days are really hard.

The phone rings. Something terrible has happened. We don't have to get graphic. I – Rabbi Dantowtiz, Cantor Epstein – we do what we can. The moment can be awful. It can be sad. But we know what we're supposed to do. It's not hard.

Except, when someone asks the question: Why did this happen? Why? What did I, or he, or she, or they, or whomever, do to deserve this? What kind of God would let this happen? Rabbi, answer me!

Jewish tradition says this is when I should bring up Job. If we haven't read the Biblical book for which he is named we know about him. The pious man whom God knows will never forsake him. God says to Satan, my son Job, a wonderful God-fearing man he is. Satan snorts, that's only because you've made his life so good. Take all that away. Then let's see how pious he really is.

They shake hands. The trial begin. Painful illness. Economic ruin. The death of those closest to him. Catastrophe after catastrophe. Job doesn't understand but his faith does not falter; at the end, God, validated, returns all He has taken from Job, and more.

Job is Jewish tradition's archetype for faith no matter what. But it has never occurred to me t raise his name with someone who has just suffered a terrible loss. I don't think being told what Job endured is going to make anyone feel better.

And that's where we run into trouble. At a time of crisis we want to seek refuge in tradition. It sounds good. But realistically, it's not always helpful. And if that's the case…how can I do what I do?

Every year, sometime in the early spring, our weekly reading of the Torah takes us to the end of Leviticus, and Parashat Behukotai. "If you follow my lays and faithfully observe all my commandments…you will eat your fill of bread and live securely in your land…but if you do not obey me and do not observe all these

commandments, rejecting my laws and spurning my rules, I will bring misery upon you…."

The text is clear. Do what is right in the eyes of the Lord and good shall be yours. Don't, and feel his wrath. It is a beautiful idea. But there is a problem. The world is filled with good people to whom terrible things happen, and bad people who always seem to get away with it.

Some take the Torah literally. Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, founder of the Satmar Hasidim, once wrote, "Because of our sinfulness we have suffered greatly. Heretics lured the majority of the Jewish people into awful heresy. God lashed out in anger, and righteous people perished, because of the iniquity of the sinners and corrupters was so great." Yes. That was the Holocaust he was talking about.

Years ago, we had a speaker one Shabbat. Klara Samuels. For many years she taught physics at Livingston High School, and her visit coincided with the publication of her autobiography: God Does Play Dice.

Klara Samuels was born in Poland. She was a Holocaust survivor. She wrote about her early years and her time during the war in which she and her family were constantly and horribly on the run.

The title of her book intrigued me. Especially, coming from a physics teacher. Physics teaches that the world has order. Atomic particles orbit along their paths; mathematics can predict chaos. But a student of physics writes a book entitled God Does Play Dice?

When she began to speak, I understood. She rejected the notion that the Holocaust fit into some kind of divine plan. She refused to acknowledge that, beyond historical forces, there was a reason it happened. The Holocaust was loathesome and horrible and unimaginable and ghastly. And it happened. God was not behind it. It just happened. The world, she taught us, was a place where sometimes even terrible things happen.

She posed a question: why do people feel a need to think things happen for a reason? She answered herself. Because otherwise we have to accept that there is randomness in the world. And that often scares people. Klara Samuels passed away five years ago. She was right. Sometimes things just happen. Or as she put it, sometimes, God does just roll the dice.

In 1985, I moved back to the United States from Brazil. Shortly after I left, a young woman from my former congregation was kidnapped. The story did not end well. Many months later I was in Brazil and went to visit her parents. They were religious people, both born in Brazil, of Sephardic Moroccan families whose lineages they could trace back for generations.

They told me a story. They had sought mightily to answer the question of why this had happened, and their quest led them to New York, where they went to see a famous rabbi, Haham Salomon Gaon, former Chief Sephardic Rabbi of the British Empire, then a professor at Yeshiva University. Haham Gaon was known for his wisdom, insight and compassion. And his piety.

Samuel and Solika told me that after they told him their story, his eyes filled with tears. And then he said. "Meus filhos, isto nao e coisa de Deus, isto e coisa de homem." "My children, this was not something done by God; this was something done by men."

I spoke to Samuel earlier this week. I wanted to make sure my recollections were correct. They were, and I think that moment was when they began to realize that the future would be…okay…and that they would be…okay. Not the same…but okay.

Klara Samuels was right. Sometimes things happen. The Haham Gaon was right. People do terrible things.

So rabbi, why?

If you drive your car down the road erratically, and a policeman suspects you of being under the influence, by law, in every state, he or she can test the level of alcohol in your blood. This is possible because of something called implied consent. The act of driving on a public road implicitly constitutes the driver's consent to be tested. Period.

Implied consent.

We are all subject to implied consent when we are born. We did not ask to be born. We had nothing to do with it!

Nevertheless, simply by being born we implicitly consent to be governed by the laws that govern the universe. And one of those laws is, that sometimes because of

nothing we or anyone else has done, bad things happen. There is randomness in the world; dice get rolled.

But if that is the case, how can I, as a rabbi, stand here and say the words I say, by what right can I urge you to be the Jew I hope you will be?

There are artistic moments, for me in music particularly, where I find the divine almost tangible. There are moments in prayer when I absolutely sense the ineffable, the inexpressible. But my faith as a Jew comes from our historical experience.

It is illogical that we are here. Four thousand years ago God and Abraham established the covenant. And we continue that, through not just centuries but millennia, of history, great migrations, empires come and gone, cataclysms.

As Mark Twain wrote: "The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian, the Greek and the Roman, the Jew saw them all, beat them all…all things are mortal but the Jew. What is the secret of his immortality?"

I do not know if we are immortal. But I believe I know our secret. Our ancestors were given a gift – call it what you will – a way of life, a religion, a culture, a set of moral imperatives – that if followed would prove to have a supernatural ability to preserve us.

I believe this not because of what any text says. I believe it because logic permits me no other conclusion. Our texts teach values and wisdom in which my heart delights; my belief that they are part of something greater comes from our continuity as a people against all odds.

And so I believe. But I am not naïve. Bad things happen. Evil exists. How do we reconcile that?

Tomorrow we recite U'n'tane Tokef, that central High Holy Day prayer. The prayer contradicts itself. At the beginning, the predestination is explicit: who shall live and who shall die, who by fire and who by water. All is foretold, we are nothing.

However, at the end: But repentance, prayer and charity can overturn the evil decree. The power is in our hands.

Which is right? Both. The world proceeds along a certain course, but we impact can alter the route.

My study of history, my sense of the world around me, and my understanding of Judaism teach me this. There are no guarantees. But if we live as a Jew is supposed to live, we maximize the likelihood that we will have the lives we want. Bad things do happen. But we have been given a path. And thousands of years of Jewish history convince me it is a good one.

Some people say everything happen for a reason. I reject that. Things happen. The task of the Jew is not to look for some hidden cause, but to take what happens, twist it and turn it, find meaning from it.

On Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about our member Mark Schonwetter, like Klara Samuels a Holocaust survivor. I don't believe Mark spends his time thinking about what kind of God could permit a Holocaust could happen. And though no-one would blame him if he chose to live a life of indulgence, he amazingly does what a Jew is supposed to do. To learn from what happened and, in his case, take an active role in teaching about what happened to prevent it from happening again.

Like any population, our congregation has families with members suffering different illnesses…juvenile diabetes, muscular dystrophy, cancer, Crohn's, alcoholism, mental illnes…. I know that in dark moments loved ones ponder the larger questions. But so many of these people stand up, organizing, advocating, raising money to attack the disease they have come to know too well. They are an inspiration! Such activism is the responsibility of the Jew, for we know there is much in the world our efforts can change.

We are taught. One of the greatest mitzvot is *nichum avalim*, to comfort the mourner. And when we go to a house of mourning, we do not speak until we are spoken to. We do not open our mouths, until the mourner says something to us.

Possibly, we could spend an entire visit and not say a single world. Because there are moments for which they are no words. Moments for which there are no answers. Yet, we are still obligated to be there, at the shiva, to be there, with whomever is in pain. Because our presence comforts. Our presence helps. Our presence sends that most important of messages. You are not alone. I am here.

For four thousand years, we Jews have been saying to one another, I am here. And so we gather on this holiest of nights to say it to one another. Some among us are

sad. Some among us are in pain. Whatever troubles you, let us share it. Whatever troubles you, know you are not alone.

The Jewish New Year lies before us. We cannot know exactly what awaits. But our four thousand years together make it clear: if we care about one another, and if we care for one another…then best possible year will be ours.

Shanna Tova.