

BY JIM MERRITT

Special to Newsday

From biblical plagues to the COVID-19 pandemic, humankind has been beset by serious illness and the suffering that accompanies it. This week's clergy discuss how believers can face such afflictions with the patience of Job.

Rabbi Mendy Goldberg

Lubavitch of the East End

Any time any innocent person suffers, we are faced with a conundrum: on the one hand, the belief that God is kind and just, and on the other, how does he allow the suffering of innocent people? Some may prefer the easy way out of this moral tension and throw their hands in the air and say: Either God doesn't exist, or the victims were not innocents and they deserved punishment.

I don't have all the answers, but Jewish thinking tells us to look at it from another angle. It's called faith. We don't accept the theology that God is not responsible. For who is responsible for nature if not God? Faith is a most basic component of human living, of our ability to cope with all that happens around us. We can be disappointed with God. Even the most righteous people in the Bible objected to God's decisions.

We must pray and cry out to God and demand an end to such pain. We don't control the circumstances in our lives, but we do have full control over our response to any given challenge. How to respond to your life's curveballs?



Mendy Goldberg

RABBI MENDY GOLDBERG



Jennifer L. Brower

UU CONGREGATION AT SHELTER ROCK



Marjorie Nunes

HOWARD SCHNAPP

choices. I believe the Holy is available to us throughout it all — our sickness and suffering, our wellness and the good fortune that often goes unnoticed.

The Rev. Marjorie Nunes

Senior Pastor, Hicksville United Methodist Church

On July 27, my 17-year-old cousin died of kidney cancer. This young man was a very talented football player, an excellent student and a devoted and loving son and brother. He gallantly fought to live. At his funeral his older brother cried, "What kind of kid deserved radiation, chemo and pain?"

The issue of sickness and suffering is always a difficult one to deal with. But believing in the sovereignty of God, there is no other option than suffering being something God allows and/or causes. Yet, the key is remembering that God's ways are higher than our ways. This does not mean sickness is always from God or that God always inflicts us with sickness. We live in a world tainted by sin, sickness, disease and death, all of which always are with us. Some sickness is simply a result of the natural course of things in this world.

But one thing is for sure. Sickness and suffering should not cause us to lose faith in God. When people are suffering, it is our responsibility to minister to them, care for them, pray for them and comfort them. Suffering people need our love and encouragement.

ASKING THE CLERGY

Why does God allow suffering?

Well, that only you can answer. With faith in the one above.

The Rev. Jennifer L. Brower

Minister for Pastoral Care, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock

The answer to the question depends entirely upon one's beliefs about the nature of the Holy. The tradition in which I serve, Unitarian Universalism — product of the 1961 consolidation of the Universalist and the Unitarian traditions — a covenantal and non-creedal tradition, has grown increasingly theologically diverse. This diversity allows for many possible, faithful

answers to the question.

Each person's unique theology will dictate her/his understanding of God's involvement in sickness and suffering. In my view, we humans are complex, organic beings subject to expected and surprising natural physiological change through injury, aging and illness. Sickness or a change in physiology is a natural part of being embodied. Like sickness, suffering is not a punishment meted out by God. Suffering is a natural part of life and takes many forms. It is created by many different factors.

Over our lifetimes, we may suffer in mind, body or spirit as a result of circumstance or as a consequence of our

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