

## WHEN THE SHOW MUST GO ON

### A Devotional Meditation on Shmini (Eighth)

Leviticus 9:1-11:47, 2 Samuel 6:1-7-7:17; Malachi 3:1-6;  
Luke 12:54-13: 5; Hebrews 12:1-2, 13:8; 1 Peter 1:13-16

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Bud Abbott and Lou Costello still make me laugh. Not long ago, I saw one of their movies from the 1940s that I had first seen as a child. It was still very entertaining. What really makes me laugh, though, is their classic comedy routine, *Who's On First*. That sketch has been a feature of American popular culture ever since Abbott and Costello first performed it on the radio in 1938.\*

We remember Abbott and Costello as a successful comedic team, but when we look beyond their stage personas, we find two ordinary men trying their best to navigate life like all the rest of us. They experienced as much joy and tragedy as anyone. Perhaps the greatest tragedy occurred in 1943. Lou had been unable to work for six months due to illness, so it was quite an occasion when the team returned to the radio on November 4 of that year. As they were rehearsing the show, Lou received word that his infant son had drowned in the family's swimming pool. It was an accident that no one could have foreseen. No one was at fault, but everyone was at fault, including Lou, who had asked his wife to let the baby stay up late to hear his father on the radio. He had every reason to cancel the show, but in honor of his son, he continued with the performance. The audience never knew about the tragedy until the end, when Bud explained what had happened to Lou and his family.

How does a person cope with tragedy like that? Ideally, there would be time to grieve, with a support group of family and friends to help carry the burden. But that doesn't always happen, especially if the loss occurs to someone in a position of great responsibility. It could be argued that Lou Costello was such a person. America in World War II needed the morale boosting comedy of gifted entertainers like him. He was an essential part of America's collective trauma therapy. Lou continued performing that night, and afterward, helping millions of Americans work through their pain even as he worked through his own.

I don't know what kind of relationship Lou Costello had with God, but I do know he had to wrestle with the same questions we all face. When we are on the outside of someone else's tragedy, we tend to sidestep their searing pain by wondering why it



*Bud Abbott and Lou Costello in the NBC radio studios, May 13, 1942. NBC Radio, Public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#).*

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\* A performance of *Who's On First* from The Abbott and Costello Show on television is available at <https://youtu.be/yJnm5fuwskY?si=ZiLXq7qk9YYaiC6>.

happened. Did they do something wrong? Was this some kind of divine judgment? That's what Job's friends did, insisting that he had somehow sinned and therefore incurred the wrath of God. That was their mistake. Often, it's best to set aside the question of why and simply deal with the how – as in how to get through this without making the suffering worse. That may be something Messiah Yeshua was hinting at when people asked Him about a senseless tragedy:

Now there were some present at the same time who told *Yeshua* about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans are worse sinners than the rest of the Galileans because they have suffered these things? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you all will perish the same way. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and were killed, do you suppose that they are worse sinners than all the people living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you all will perish the same way."

Luke 13:1-5 TLV

What a harsh answer! Or is it? This is where context is essential. From Yeshua's response, I surmise the people who told Him the news of Pilate's tyranny were not seeking sympathy and compassion. Either they wanted to incite anger against the Roman occupation, or demonstrate how these hapless Galileans were somehow beyond God's protection. Yeshua had just been exhorting the people to discern the times, not so they would raise a Messianic rebellion against the wicked Romans, but so that they could get right with God and man. In other words, there is a higher priority for us all, and that is to get right with God and help others do the same.

This is never easy, but sometimes it's far more difficult than we like to imagine. That may be why we prefer not to dwell on the tragedy that happened to Aaron, Israel's first High Priest, at the very moment he and his sons began their holy service. We are dismayed not only at the horrendous tragedy that came upon them, but at the way Moses commanded them to deal with it:

Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his own censer, put fire in it, laid incense over it, and offered unauthorized fire before *ADONAI*—which He had not commanded them. So fire came out from the presence of *ADONAI* and consumed them. So they died before *ADONAI*. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what *ADONAI* spoke of, saying: 'To those who are near Me I will show myself holy. Upon the faces of all the people I will be glorified.'" Then Aaron kept silent.

Then Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come near, carry your relatives away from the front of the Sanctuary to outside of the camp." So they drew near and carried them, still in their tunics, outside of the camp, as Moses had said.

Then Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons: "Do not uncover your heads or tear your clothes, so you may not die and He will not be angry with the entire congregation. But let your kinsmen—the whole house of Israel—mourn over the burning that *ADONAI* has kindled. You must not go out from the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, or you will die, for the anointing oil of *ADONAI* is on you." So they acted according to the word of Moses.

Leviticus 10:1-7 TLV

We could shake our heads and complain about what some have regarded as the “angry” God of the Old Testament, or we could look deeper and find out what was really going on. This is the God Who never changes. The standards He set at the beginning are the standards He maintains to the end, and beyond into eternity. That’s why Peter quotes from Moses when he tells Yeshua’s followers:

Like obedient children, do not be shaped by the cravings you had formerly in your ignorance. Instead, just like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in everything you do. For it is written, “*Kedoshim* [holy ones] you shall be, for I am *kadosh* [holy].”

1 Peter 1:14-6 TLV

Holiness transcends tragedy. That’s why our Messiah focused on the joy set before Him as He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. It wasn’t fair for Him to suffer such a senseless tragedy, any more than it’s fair for us to suffer.

There is no comfort in reminding a suffering person that such things are an unavoidable part of life. We all know that, and that’s why we wrestle with the meaning of life and question the character of God when terrible things happen. It helps to remember that this world, with all its joy and sorrows, is a place of refinement for God’s holy ones. Clinging to that bit of hope just might give us what we need when we’re hurting, but the show must go on.