



One of the mysteries of the world is why about 10% of us are left-handed. I happen to be one of those people.

I was fortunate in that neither my parents, my school, nor anyone else ever tried to make me a right-handed person, but I do play golf, the trumpet, and swing a bat right-handed. My handwriting is pretty bad, but I don't think that can be blamed on left-handedness.

Handedness is one of many possible attributes such as being tall, short, having red hair, having curly hair, or any of dozens (maybe hundreds?) more. Our Jewish friends even have a list of "The Thirteen Attributes of God," which they take from Exodus 34:6-7.¹

Mark Galli, former editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote a book several years ago about the attributes of God, of which God's "handedness" was one.¹ Have you ever wondered whether Jesus was right-handed or left-handed? I doubt that we'll ever know, but Galli's musings have set me thinking about the matter.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about "God's right hand." Here are just a few examples:

- *"The LORD gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand"* (Psalm 20:6).
- *"Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered"* (Psalm 60:5).
- *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (Isaiah 41:10).²

The basic idea in God's "right hand" is omnipotence and power. God speaks, and the Cosmos is flung into being. God speaks, and the plagues fall on Egypt. God speaks, and a path appears in the depths of the sea. Jesus speaks, and the demons flee. Jesus speaks, and the blind see. Jesus speaks, and the dead are alive once more. Pretty spectacular stuff.

Although the Bible never speaks of God's "left hand,"³ Galli plays with this idea, which he apparently got from Fr. Leslie Chadd.⁴ Chadd noted that Jesus "is the Messiah who turns all our cherished right-handed ideas upside down and says that children are [at] the top of the pile, not at the bottom of it. He is the one who rebukes the strong right-handed Boanerges brothers who would knock out those difficult Samaritans with a divine thunderbolt. He is the King who could call an army of angels to his aid but who refuses the help of Peter's sword-

¹ Mark Galli, *A Great and Terrible Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Attributes of God* (Baker Book House, 2009). This column is inspired by Mark's article, "Serving a Two-Handed God: How we love our neighbor depends on what we think divine power looks like," *Christianity Today*, April 2009, 30-33.

² See also Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalm 17:7, 18:35, 21:8, 44:3, 45:4, 48:10, 63:8, 73:23, 74:11, 77:10, 98:1, 108:6, 118:15-16, 137:5, 138:7, 139:10; Isaiah 48:13.

³ Although "Wisdom" is said to have "riches and honor" in her left hand (Proverbs 3:16).

⁴ Leslie Chadd, "God's Left Hand," in *Crucible*, the Quarterly Journal of the Board for Social Responsibility (1989).

bearing right arm. He is the God who will not slay his enemies with his strong right arm but who says instead, ‘if there is any killing to be done, it will be done to me, not by me.’”

While there were plenty of moments in which Jesus did use raw power, including cleansing the Temple with a whip, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday remind us that God is most powerful when appearing to be the most weak. When we scream at the heavens, “How can an all-powerful God stand by and do nothing while the planet writhes in travail!?!” Good Friday reminds us that God isn’t doing nothing. Galli points out that **“The suffering of the planet has become [God’s] suffering, and divine suffering is always redemptive.”**



“We still have an omnipotent God,” Galli notes, “but we don’t exactly get the omnipotence we imagined. . . . In these latter days, God seems to have decided to reveal his power mostly in weakness.” While we much prefer a God who blasts away our enemies and causes things to always work in our favor (as the health-and-wealth prophets falsely proclaim to be the case), the God Who Is tells us instead,

*“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. **Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.** I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:13-17).*

“Right-handed power,” Galli asserts, “can insist on obedience and justice, but it can’t change people. Left-handed power cannot bring justice, but it can move hearts. *Right-handed power brings order. **Left-handed power transforms lives.***”

May the experiences of this week be transforming for us all.

Dave

“The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: first, it is a very unusual event; and second, if you believe it happened, *you have to change the way you live.*”

Wolfhart Pannenberg

ⁱ The “**13 Attributes of Mercy**” are generally described as follows:

1. The Lord! (Adonai)--God is merciful before a person sins! Even though aware that future evil lies dormant within him.
2. The Lord! (Adonai)--God is merciful after the sinner has gone astray.
3. God (El)--a name that denotes power as ruler over nature and humankind, indicating that God's mercy sometimes surpasses even the degree indicated by this name.
4. Compassionate (*raham*)--God is filled with loving sympathy for human frailty does not put people into situations of extreme temptation, and eases the punishment of the guilty.
5. Gracious (*v'hanun*)--God shows mercy even to those who do not deserve it consoling the afflicted and raising up the oppressed.
6. Slow to anger (*ereh apayim*)--God gives the sinner ample time to reflect, improve, and repent.
7. Abundant in Kindness (*v'rav hesed*)--God is kind toward those who lack personal merits, providing more gifts and blessings than they deserve; if one's personal behavior is evenly balanced between virtue and sin, God tips the scales of justice toward the good.
8. Truth (*v'emet*)--God never reneges on His word to reward those who serve Him.
9. Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations (*notzeir hesed la-alafim*)--God remembers the deeds of the righteous for the benefit of their less virtuous generations of offspring (thus we constantly invoke the merit of the Patriarchs).
10. Forgiver of iniquity (*nosei avon*)--God forgives intentional sin resulting from an evil disposition, as long as the sinner repents.
11. Forgiver of willful sin (*pasha*)--God allows even those who commit a sin with the malicious intent of rebelling against and angering Him the opportunity to repent.
12. Forgiver of error (*v'hata'ah*)--God forgives a sin committed out of carelessness, thoughtlessness, or apathy.
13. Who cleanses (*v'nakeh*)--God is merciful, gracious, and forgiving, wiping away the sins of those who truly repent; however, if one does not repent, God does not cleanse.

www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Hashanah/High_Holidays/Selichot/13attributesofmercy.shtml?p=2