

Why have you treated me this way? You are sad, I am sad. Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me....If this is the way you are going to treat me, if you care about me, put me to death at once and do not let me see my misery. (Numbers 11:11, 14-15)

The Book of Psalms also has many examples of despair. Psalm 13 begins:

How long, O Adonai? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

And if we think the list of problems we face today is overwhelming, we have only to look at Jewish history from the time of the Bible onwards for a devastating list of disaster: conquest, destruction, exile, persecution, ghettos, pogroms, concentration camps. How is it possible that Jews did not give in to despair, that we continued to live as Jews and to hope?

One answer is an optimistic view of human nature. Genesis teaches us that we are created in the image of God and the daily morning service tells us that "the soul You have given me is