

# Just Ask the Trees

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How much of our pain is self inflicted? How much of our confusion is self-generated? As Bishop Butler remarked, "men first kick up a dust and then complain they cannot see."

The *midrash* offers a kindred insight. The Rabbis tell us that when iron was created, the trees began to tremble. Here was their certain foe in the shape of the axe. God said to them "Why are you trembling? If wood is not joined to it, not one of you will suffer." Without the axe handle, the iron is useless. The *midrashic* lesson is clear: that which we fear often gains its power through our own contribution.

In the Bible, characters are sabotaged by situations of their own creation. Saul's failings lead to David's rise which then drives Saul deeper into despair. Jacob's favoring Joseph stimulates the brother's resentment, which deprive Jacob of his beloved son for decades.

Many of the ills that afflict us are a result of our creation, or our consent. In his journal, Emerson wrote: "Henry Thoreau made, last night, the fine remark that, as long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way." It has been that way since creation. Just ask the trees.