

JOB'S FRIENDS;
A STUDY IN THE INTRICACIES OF OFFERING CARE TO A
GRIEVING FRIEND

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Summary of Thesis

Job's Friends; A Study in The Intricacies of Giving Comfort to a Grieving Friend

This thesis consists of an introduction and four chapters, the fourth chapter being a conclusion. This thesis will follow Job's friends, their intentions and actions, from the moment they find out about what has happened to Job until God rebukes them at the end of the book. Doing so will guide the exploration of what makes a good friend at various times in one's life, particularly during distress. The first chapter will look at the friends' call to action and how they ministered their care according to the biblical narrative. It will continue with an examination of how the rabbis have interpreted the friends' desire to comfort as well as their views on the causes of their behaviors. The second chapter will provide a more contemporary, clinical analysis of the friends' reactions and why they may have reacted in the way that they did. Then, it will explore why those reactions may have caused more pain. The third chapter will focus on the role of empathy in the process of caring for another as well as how a friend can use empathy to help care for another. The third chapter will also look at what can block that empathy and how one can teach empathy. The fourth chapter will bring this all together and present the issues stemming from this research such as the role of training in pastoral care giving for friends and where this research may lead a congregation.

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Introduction

This thesis was set into motion about four years ago when I was interning for the Health Care Chaplaincy and working as a student-chaplain at one of the New York hospitals, visiting with patients in oncology. On a few occasions a good friend would come for visit and come in while I was already with the patient. It happened maybe three or four times that the patient would ask his or her friend for a moment of privacy with me. When the friend stepped out for that moment the patient would ask me to come back in 10 minutes “to check in” which would allow an excuse for the patient to send the friend home. I was baffled in each one of these cases because this was the patient’s good friend, would not he or she want his or her friends there? When I asked the response was, “She’s my best friend in the whole world, but right now, she has no clue how to talk to me, and I can’t stand the pain.”

Since this happened on multiple occasions I wanted to understand what could make friends, and good friends in particular, such bad caregivers. To answer that question I turned to our sources and found the Book of Job, which contains the most poignant biblical example of friends who could not offer effective care.

The book opens with a story about a righteous man named Job. Job has a large family and has also amassed a significant amount of wealth. Life is going well for Job. However, at the urging of the adversary, usually called Satan, God permits the adversary to test Job in order to determine whether Job will remain faithful to God. Satan then creates a series of disasters that deprive Job of his children, strip him of his worldly

possessions, and leave him the victim of a horrible skin disease. At no point in the story is it ever revealed to any of the characters involved why all of this is occurring to Job.

Job's wife, upon seeing him this upset, suggests that he should just renounce God and thereby put an end to all of his suffering. If Job had heeded her, the adversary's prediction would have proved correct. Instead Job's response is one of unshakable faith. He asks, "Should we accept only the good from God and not accept the evil?" Despite this statement, Job is distraught over what has occurred.

Job has three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. When they learn of Job's sufferings they immediately travel swiftly from their respective lands to give him comfort. They arrive together at the same moment but when they get to Job they cannot recognize him. When they finally realize that the man they see before them is Job they cry, rip their clothing, and cover themselves with dirt. They sit on the ground with him for a week and do not say a word to him.

After a week of uninterrupted silence Job turns to his friends and gives a lament in which he curses the day of his birth. In reaction to this lament Job's friends initiate what becomes a series of debates and lectures that are aimed at trying to "fix" Job.

While arguing with his friends Job mainly speaks about wanting to understand the order of the universe. Essentially, he wants to comprehend why bad things happen to good people. At the end of the book God speaks out and tells Job that human beings will never be able to understand the way the universe works. While not answering Job's question of why these things occurred, God is still able to give Job comfort by validating Job's feelings of suffering. God also informs Job's friends that they have acted very

poorly and tells them that they must ask Job for forgiveness before God will absolve them. Ultimately, both Job and God forgive the friends.

While the Book of Job can be used as a starting point for discussions on the topic of why there is suffering in the world or even on the topic of how we respond to suffering in the world and in our own lives, it can also be used to explore how grief works and how individuals respond to seeing others grieve.

In contrast to the trained professional, the average individual usually has a poor understanding of grief and may not know what to expect from the griever. Not understanding the grieving process can make it very difficult for the comforter to know what type of aid or comfort to offer. However, just because a comforter may know what to expect it does not mean that they know how to comfort. Even the best of friends, who seem to inherently know what the other is thinking or feeling, may be at a loss when it comes to knowing how to comfort their friend during moments of distress. The qualities that make an individual a great friend during a moment of homeostasis might not be the same qualities that make someone a great friend when tragedy occurs. Something that has normally pleased, amused, or calmed an individual when they were not a griever may now become something that hurts, annoys, or aggravates the griever. When someone makes a switch from fine to distressed it might not be an obvious transition. They may continue to outwardly behave as if they are still operating as they previously had been, however, that may no longer be internally true. In other cases, it may be very difficult for the comforter to understand why a friend is behaving in a manner that is so foreign to how they normally behave.

This thesis will follow Job's friends, their intentions and actions, from the moment they find out about what has happened to Job until God rebukes them at the end of the book. Doing so will guide the exploration of what makes a good friend at various times in one's life, particularly during distress. The first chapter will look at the friends' call to action and how they ministered their care according to the biblical narrative. It will continue with an examination of how the rabbis have interpreted the friends' desire to comfort as well as their views on the causes of their behaviors. The second chapter will provide a more contemporary, clinical analysis of the friends' reactions and why they may have reacted in the way that they did. Then, it will explore why those reactions may have caused more pain. The third chapter will focus on the role of empathy in the process of caring for another as well as how a friend can use empathy to help care for another. The third chapter will also look at what can block that empathy and how one can teach empathy. The fourth chapter will bring this all together and present the issues stemming from this research such as the role of training in pastoral care giving for friends and where this research may lead a congregation.

Chapter 1

Job's Friends According to the Biblical Narrative and Biblical Commentaries.

At no point in the Biblical sources do we find any examples of Job interacting with his friends when their lives are in a time of homeostasis. Because of this fact there are no clear examples of how his friends behaved as friends when they were not trying to comfort him. However, it is possible to find clues within the text that help us understand their friendship. The first clue is linguistic: the friends are referred to, as רעי איוֹב friends of Job. To understand this term, this chapter will look at two different types of literature. The first is biblical usage and the second is medieval and modern commentary on this phrase. The second clue is behavioural: the friends respond and behave in various ways that are interpreted by both medieval and modern commentators. Looking at these clues and sources helps one derive an understanding of what intentions Job's friends had when they came to his side. The next step is to compare those intentions with how they actually responded to Job's suffering. Finally one must look at the last chapter of the Book of Job when God speaks to the friends to understand the import of the term רעי. Here too the commentators read into God's remarks in order to explore the incongruity between their intention and actual behaviour.

Linguistic Clues

When Job's friends are first mentioned in the text they are introduced as רעי איוֹב , friends of Job. There are many Hebrew terms for "friend," but why is the term רעי used

here? What is its significance? This term for “friends of”, רעי, appears in a variety of places in the *Tanakh* and is often used to denote someone who is intimate and loyal.¹ This includes: 1 Chron. 27:33, describing an intimate royal counselor; Leviticus 19:15-18, describing a neighbor or kinsman; Deuteronomy 13:6 describing a close companion. Exodus 32:27 uses the term רעהו as being synonymous with brother or neighbor. Furthermore, Proverbs 18:24 states, “איש רעים להתרעע ויש אהב דבק מאח”, “The man of many friends will prove himself a bad friend, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”²

Through analyzing what the term רעי means in the Bible, it can be determined that the friends were in fact the best of friends, just as close to each other as they would be to their own brothers. Rashi’s³ understanding aligns with the usage of the term רעי in the Bible. Rashi’s commentary to “שלושת רעי איוב” in Job 2:11 states that “רעי” is an indicator that they are “those that loved him (אוהביו).”⁴

When Job’s friends are first introduced in Job 2:11 it states that Job’s friends came “each from his own place” to go to Job’s side in order “to mourn with him and comfort him.” Their intent was to relieve him of his pain as fast as possible as many friends feel called to do when they learn that someone they care about is bereaved.

Kohelet Rabba 7:4 notes that intent when it focuses on the phrase “each from his own place.” In fact, Kohelet Rabba’s interpretation of this phrase speaks of their eternal fate. It states that each of us has a seat in *Gehinom* and a seat in *Olam HaBah*. When an individual shows him or herself to be wicked their seat in *Olam HaBah* will be lost and when an individual shows him or herself to be righteous their seat in *Gehinom* will

disappear. This text asks the question what does one do to merit one or the other? To answer this question the text uses Job's friends and Oag, a character from *midrash* set in Abraham's time, as illustrations of the two categories. Oag is said to have never attended the house of mourning; he only went to the house of festivals and for that fact he was not excluded from *Gehinom*. Job's friends, however, attended the house of mourning and because of that action are excluded from *Gehinom*. According to this interpretation when the Book of Job states that they "came each from his own place" it means that they were excluded from their own place in *Gehinom*. Job's friends will never receive the fate that is reserved for the wicked.⁵ This text highlights their intentions "to mourn with him and comfort him." In fact, the rabbis are very cognizant of their desire to help Job.

Bava Batra 16b has a slightly different interpretation of what it means that they came from various places. Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav "this teaches that all of them [Job's friends] simultaneously entered Job's town through the same gate,"⁶ a remarkable feat when considering that they were coming from different lands, and they were not in communication with each other.

According to the rabbis, Job's friends had multiple methods of being able to determine how they would be able to learn about each other's wellbeing. The *Targum* states that the friends knew of Job's misfortunes without being told because they saw that the trees of their orchards had withered, the food of their repasts had turned to raw meat, and the wine of their feasts had turned to blood.⁷ These signs told them that their friend was in need.

Along similar lines Bava Batra 16b describes two other possibilities for how the friends could have come to learn that Job was in great distress. The first was that they each might have had a crown on which the faces and names of the other three were engraved. When suffering would befall one of them, the appearance of his face on the crowns would change. The other possibility that Bava Batra 16b gives is that they each had three trees that were named for each of the other friends. When the tree that bore the name of one of the friends withered they would know that an affliction had come upon him. Bava Batra maintains that it was because of the loyalty and love that they had for each other, implicit in these mechanisms, that people use the Talmudic saying, “או חבֵּרָא כַּחֲבֵרֵי דַּאִיּוֹב אוּ מִיתוּתָא” “[Give me] either friends like the friends of Job, or death.”⁸ The rabbis of the Talmud identify having friends like Job’s as something good and desirable.

The friends described here were deeply caring and loyal individuals. They had mechanisms put in place that did not follow the laws of nature so that they would instantly be able to respond to a need for aid. Who would not want a set of friends like them?

Modern commentator, Prof. Amos Hakham emphasizes the love and loyalty that the friends had for Job. His commentary to Job 2:11-12 looks at how they assembled and why. “They gathered in a place determined in advance by messengers or letters. The more friends who came together to console the mourner, the greater is the respect shown toward him and the greater is the effect of the consolation.”⁹ Dr. Hakham teaches that they came together as a group not to inflict more pain, but rather to be able to show greater respect and give him better care and relief.

Behavioral Clues

Moshe Kimchi¹⁰ reads Job 2:12 and comments that Job's distress was so great that even "from a distance they saw him coming toward them, weeping and crying bitterly over his misfortunes."¹¹ Rashi claims that Job's face had been changed as a result of his agonies¹² and Zerachiah¹³ reinforces that while Job's appearance had changed so significantly, they still knew intrinsically who he was or they would not have physically reacted in the way that they did.¹⁴ When comparing these interpretations one can note the differing levels of ability of the friends to recognize Job and that what has occurred to Job resulted in a physical change.

Dr. Hakham explores their physical reactions to reinforce the fact that they came to comfort. Job 2:11 states that the three friends "assembled together to come to show sympathy לנחם with him and to comfort him."¹⁵ Dr. Hakham examines the meaning of לנחם and claimed that it literally means, "to shake their heads," not as a gesture of scolding, but of consolation. "This is a sign of mourning...Those who came to comfort a mourner would themselves adopt some of the customs of mourning. In this way they showed that they shared the grief of the bereaved person."¹⁶ Dr. Hakham takes a physical movement, the shaking of a head, typically a sign of disapproval (with which Job's friends are aptly connected) and reassigns it to reinforce their desire to mourn with Job rather than abuse him.

Despite their intent, when the friends showed up their behavior ended up causing pain rather than relieving it. The balance between wanting to relieve pain and unwittingly

causing it is evident when Dr. Hakham looks at Job 2:11, “שלושת רעי איוֹב”. Dr. Hakham claims that, “Job had many friends, but all his other friends, when they heard that Job had come down in the world, abandoned him. These three remained faithful to him and came to console him, thus becoming, unwittingly, instruments in Satan's hands.” Prof. Hakham indicates that despite the fact that they were true friends with loving intentions, there was something happening to them that changed their behavior.

Prof. Hakham teaches that it was not their true intention to hurt Job, but rather Satan's intention to use them as hurtful tools. It was their love and worry for Job that allowed Satan to use them as another way of testing Job. In this comment Prof. Hakham tries to offer an explanation of how it could have been that Job's רעים could have hurt him so callously when they will later respond to Job's cries of lament.¹⁷ When Dr. Hakham focuses on Satan in his commentary an enhanced understanding of why there are discrepancies between the intent of the friends and their actions starts to emerge. They were not in control of their behavior. A question for later is “what does Satan here represent in terms of a psychological response to seeing the pain of another when giving care to console to them?” This will be discussed further in chapter 2.

Prof. Hakham continues in his commentary to 2:12 on how it could come to be that the friends started to lose their ability to properly console Job. “They could not recognize him. [Meaning that] Grief changes a person's appearance (as seen in Ruth 1:19).... They had already heard about ‘all this evil that had come upon him,’ but hearing is not like seeing, and when they saw him with their own eyes, they were shocked and burst into tears.”¹⁸

Prof. Hakham also explores their physical reactions to show just how disturbed they were by what they saw.

Each of them tore his cloak just like Job (Job 1:20). The cloaks of distinguished people were made of very expensive materials such as שש [fine white material], משי [silk], תכלת [light blues material], and ארגמן [purple cloth]. Tearing such materials entailed considerable loss. Nevertheless, Job's companions did not spare their cloaks, but tore them. And they threw dust on their heads. The putting of dust on one's head is one of the standard ceremonies of mourning (Lamentations 2:10). However, Job's companions, in their great emotional turmoil, took a large amount of dust and threw it upward, so that it would fall on their heads.¹⁹

This extreme turmoil was so incapacitating that they were not able to find the words to help, they had no idea what was even appropriate for them to do. The imagery used to describe Job is heart wrenching. It is easy to understand why any loving friend would have trouble seeing this sort of pain in someone they cared about.

This turmoil was not only incapacitating, it later became blinding. It blinded them to what Job is saying to them and blinded them to how they should react to him. In his commentary to Job 2:13-3:1, Prof. Hakham highlights how incapacitating this turmoil can be and also tries to account for how the friends inadvertently caused Job to begin his lamenting.

And they sat. They practiced the customs of mourning and sat for seven days and seven nights of mourning. And none spoke a word to him. They were silent and did not console him. Perhaps they were silent because they were astonished by the enormity of the disaster and did not know what to say. Perhaps they were silent in observance of the customs of mourning, according to which the mourner sits in silence...during the entire seven days Job could have attributed his companions' silence to their desire to observe the seven days of mourning. However, when the companions continued to maintain silence even after the seven-day period, it was clear to Job that they remained silent because they were unable to console him. This intensified Job's grief, so that he could no longer restrain himself from speaking.²⁰

This intense grief was then what came out in Chapter 3, when Job cursed the day he was born and declared at the end of his lament that “I am not tranquil, and I am not quiet, and I do not rest; and turmoil (רגז) comes” (3:25). It is with this statement that Job’s friends lost their ability to stay calm and quiet.

The discomfort that the friends felt with Job’s speech in Chapter 3 is commented on by Ibn Ezra²¹ in reference to Job 4:2. In response to hearing Job’s heart wrenching lament, Eliphaz asked, “Who can withhold words?” To which Ibn Ezra comments, “At times, a person cannot restrain himself from answering an argument he overhears, particularly if the argument is definitely false, or if the speaker derides his friend.”²²

Eliphaz claimed that Job’s argument was invalid and infuriating because he believed that Job had spoken falsely about God. What was lacking in Ibn Ezra’s response was the acknowledgement that people cannot restrain themselves if they *believe* the argument is false or infuriating. As of this moment none of the characters in the story knew definitively what the truth was; they just had their own notion of what they thought the truth was. The friends’ intention was not to berate Job; it was to fix him. However, what they did not realize was that what Job was saying might not have even been a truth for him, rather a feeling expressed as such.

In addition, in reference to Job speaking improperly about God, Metzudat David²³ states, “a person is not to be punished for what he says when he is troubled.”²⁴ This comment shows an understanding that those experiencing such emotions as רגז, or those

in mourning, may not have the ability to comprehend what is happening around them. In these moments of heightened pain or grief someone can easily say or feel something that is only true for them in that moment, but that feeling may pass after some time has elapsed. Although Job's friends were not troubled in the same manner as Job, they too were troubled by the רגז that Job was feeling and not able to control what they said.

Dr. Carol Newson points out that רגז, the “noun and its cognate verb and adjective denote a state of agitation. With respect to inanimate objects they describe a physical shaking (2 Sam 22:8; Amos 8:8, Hab 3:7); when used of human or divine beings, they denote intense emotional agitation (2 Sam 19:1; Jer 33:9; Joel 2:1; Ps 99:1).”²⁵ It is probable that this type of extreme or intense emotional agitation was more than Job's friends could handle. Job's physical features were already barely recognizable to his friends and his personality had changed as well. He was no longer the calm centered individual that they used to know. In fact, their responses to Job seem to be more accurately a response to his רגז.

One can categorize most of their responses under three headings. First, the friends resist *rogez* by attempting to construe Job's experience in terms of narrative structures that integrate and ultimately transcend the present turmoil (esp. chaps. 4-5, 8). Second, they strongly advocate the specific religious practice of prayer, which through its symbolic forms, words, and bodily gestures has the therapeutics capacity to enact a form of order that displaces *rogez* (chaps. 5, 8, 11, 22). Third, they offer Job iconic narratives (the so called “fate of the wicked” poems that combine narrative frameworks with a set of generative metaphors that reassert the moral order of the world and thus deny *rogez* an ontological status (chaps 5, 18, 21).²⁶

It is clear from this explanation that their purpose in visiting him was exactly what the plain meaning of the text of Job 2:11-12 would indicate; that they wanted to comfort

and console him. This was true not only of their intention for visiting Job in the first place, but in all that they said to him as well. However, their discomfort with what Job was saying made it hard for them not to respond, or at least to respond in the proper manner.

Clues Within God's Reaction

Their intent might have been a worthy one, however, they still hurt their friend deeply. Because of the pain that they inflicted, do they now become enemies or villains? The only place in the book where we can truly derive the answer for this is in the final chapter when God finally addresses the friends. If it were the case that they were truly evil individuals the concluding chapter should validate that. Instead it is in alignment with the belief that they were true caring friends who were not able to care properly.

In Chapter 42 God corrects their behavior and commands them to seek forgiveness from Job. The whole exchange between God and the friends and then the friends with Job takes place over only three verses, 42:7-9, but those three verses are very rich with clues about how the author of Job believed God understood what occurred. In these verses God reprimands the friends through Eliphaz and commands them to atone with a sacrifice. God also warns them that the sacrifice will only be accepted if first Job forgives them.

In Job 42:7 God states, “My wrath burns against you [Eliphaz] and against your two companions [Bildad and Zophar], for you have not spoken of Me correctly as did My servant Job.” But why did God directly address Eliphaz? Amos Hakham insists that God

addressed Eliphaz because he “was the most prominent of the companions. Moreover, he had visions.”²⁷

Prof Hakham also looks at the phrase חרה אפי בך, “my wrath burns against you” as well as why it is that God is so wrathful against them.

My Wrath Burns. The verb חרה "burns" is in the past tense with a present meaning: I am wrathful, I am angry with you... [*For you have not spoken*] *correctly [about Me]*. [Correctly here means] words of truth, נכונה is an adverb, like מרמה “deceit,” and others. God means that their words were hypocritical. Thus He confirms Job's words: ‘Will you speak iniquity on God's behalf, and for Him will you speak deceit?...He, too, will be my salvation, for no evil person will come before Him.’²⁸

Prof. Hakham points out that God said all that Job had said was valid and true, which included the phrase that “...no evil person will come before Him,” and here were the three “evil” friends standing before God. If Job’s words were true, then it would have been impossible for the friends to go before God. There can only be one possible explanation that allows these statements to be true. The friends were not wicked; rather, they were friends whose actions deviated from their intentions. The very next verse furthers this point of view. God instructs Job’s friends on how they could be forgiven, not only by God, but by Job as well. God allows them the opportunity for תשובה because God did not see them as true villains. Instead God reprimands them in a loving way as found within the text of Sifrei Deuteronomy, “For whom God Loves, God corrects, just as the father corrects the son in whom he delights.”²⁹

In Job 42:8 God says, “And My servant Job will pray for you; for him I will accept, and I will not treat you with disgrace...” Prof. Hakham’s commentary on what it meant that God would not treat Job’s friends with disgrace confirms this understanding.

“And I will not act towards you with disgrace.” I will not act toward you in the way that it is customary to act toward wicked men. In other words, I will not punish you in the way that wicked men are punished. Some commentators say that נבלה translates here as ‘disgrace,’ meaning ‘shame,’ a shame that happens to someone who is punished in public. Others say that נבלה means a cruel act, or a cruel, merciless, punishment.³⁰

Prof. Hakham believes that this statement shows God’s capacity for being able to give a “visible reprimand with a hidden love.”³¹ God’s ability to forgive the friends despite their grievous actions was possible because they did not intend to hurt Job from the outset.

These commentaries and exegeses on the Book of Job paint a slightly different picture of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These additions do not highlight the pain that was inflicted; rather, these additions highlight the love, care, and loyalty that the friends wished to bring to Job. The friends instinctively came from far and wide to meet as one solid unit to console a friend whom they loved. Through the usage of the term “רעי אִיּוֹב” a bond is communicated to the reader that they were not just friends or acquaintances. They were kinsman, brothers, and companions of the highest level. Yet when they saw Job for the first time since tragedy has struck him they barely recognize him.

The friends did not recognize him physically and for that they over emphasized their mourning rituals. They did this by bursting into tears and rending their expensive clothing, by not just placing dirt upon themselves, but also by heaping large amounts of dirt towards the heavens so that it would fall upon them. They were stunned and speechless and felt quite helpless.

They also could not recognize the internal Job either. What Job said in his lament was not the Job they knew. The Job they knew would not say that sort of thing or carry those beliefs. They were scared, but they were no longer speechless. They saw a man, a loved one, in turmoil and pain and they were compelled to act.

The broken unrecognizable Job that sat before them was more than they could handle. They could not comprehend what had happened to him. They lost track of what their intentions were and they went to his aid, but the aid that they gave him was not good aid. Job just wanted to be heard. He wanted his pain to be recognized. Job's world was coming undone and while at the time he meant what he said, over the long term, those words would become less accurate. They were unaware that that one needs to excuse words of that nature from those who are that distraught.

If they were true caring friends why were they not the type of comforters that Job needed? They could not do that because they were too close to him to be able to step back and think logically or critically about what was happening to him on a psychological level. They did not want to wait for him to go through the grief process; they wanted him "fixed" immediately. They loved him too much to see him like that, they wanted their old friend back and there was too much *חֶסֶד* within all parties to be able to think critically about what was happening. And so they reacted in the manner in which they did.

However, as Metzudat David states, "a person is not to be punished for what he says when he is troubled." God was aware of this. So with a hidden love God allowed the friends to correct themselves instead of treating them as if they were wicked individuals.

God corrected Job's friends after first speaking to Job in chapters 38, 40 and 41. In these final chapters of the book God acted not only as a caregiver for Job by acknowledging Job's pain, but God also served as a role model for Job's friends.

God had the ability to treat them as if they were wicked; God did not, because they were not. However, this does mean that what makes someone a good friend during one moment might not make someone a good friend during another. Also it is important to acknowledge that intent counts for something. If they had intended to treat Job as they did then God would probably not have been so lenient to them.

God also forced the four of them to reconcile with each other. In order for the friends to be able to move on with their lives they needed to speak with Job again. At the very end of the Book of Job, they were forgiven and all was well.

¹ Norman C. Habel, "'Only the Jackel Is My Friend': On Friends and Redeemers in Job," in *Interpretation* 31, no. 3, (1977): 228

² Translated by Philip Bazeley with aid from various translations.

³ Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac (1040-1105) was medieval French rabbi and a leading commentator on the Bible and Talmud.

⁴ Otzar HaMidrashim on the Book of Job (Machon Hamidrashim, Jerusalem, Israel), 13

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 13

⁷ Miqraout G'dolot on the Book of Job n.d., Nanuet, NY. 18

⁸ Otzar HaMidrashim on the Book of Job, 13

⁹ Amos Hakham, *The Bible; Job* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kuk, 1984). 21

¹⁰ Rabbi Moshe Kimchi was born in Narbonne around 1127 and was the eldest son of Rabbi Joseph Kimchi and brother of Rabbi David Kimchi, known as the RaDak. He wrote a number of commentaries on the Bible.

¹¹ A.J. Rosenberg, ed. *Job; A New English Translation of the Text; Rashi and A Commentary Digest* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1995). 13

¹² Otzar HaMidrashim on the Book of Job, 13

¹³ Zerachiah ben Isaac ben She'altiel Chen was born in Barcelona in the first half of the 13th Century and was the first Jewish philosopher after Ibn Tibbon to produce an interpretation of Job.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, *Job; A New English Translation of the Text*, 13

¹⁵ Hakham, *The Bible; Job*, 21

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 22

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 22

²¹ Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra was born in Toledo in 1092. He is known for his commentaries on the *Tanakh* because he utilized a philological approach to scripture to

derive new meaning from the text based on different applications of specific words, phrases and syntactical combinations.

²² Miqraout G'dolot on the Book of Job, 30

²³ Metzudat David was written by Rabbi Yechiel Hillel Altschuller in the 18th Century as a concise Bible commentary

²⁴ Babylonian Talmud: Bava Batra 16b

²⁵ Carol A. Newson, *The Book of Job; A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 94

²⁶ Ibid., 96

²⁷ Hakham, *The Bible; Job*, 437

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Otzar HaMidrashim on the Book of Job, 13

³⁰ Hakham, *The Bible; Job*, 438

³¹ Ibid.

Chapter 2

When Comfort Hurts

While Job's friends were not his enemies, they certainly should not be considered positive role models of how one should act when consoling the bereaved. As shown in Chapter One the word רעי indicates that they were not just friends, it was if they were related by blood, kinsman of the closest degree.

A popular misconception is that close friends know how to respond to a friend's grief. How close one might be to their friend does not automatically dictate an understanding of how to respond to their grief. In addition, the friend may not be able to emotionally separate himself or herself from the griever to be able to properly give them care.

This chapter will begin by focusing on two different ways friends can hurt those they are trying to comfort. The first section is on what the comforter says. This includes basic responses that one would expect to hear at a moment of consolation. These phrases have become somewhat standard and are generally unhelpful, but coming from a friend can be more painful. The second section presents assumptions that the comforter might hold. These include assumptions on the nature of grief as well as about theological needs and beliefs. Once these areas have been explored the chapter will offer a few solutions addressing the comforter's inability to hear what is being said, such as utilizing a rite of passage narrative, including storytelling and laments.

What the Comforter Says

When a friend visits a griever to give comfort he or she might feel added internal pressure to respond in a particular way because of their emotional proximity to the griever. The griever may tell the friend something that the comforter may not know how to deal with. As a friend, they might feel compelled to say something that would soothe despite the inappropriateness of the response. Or perhaps they simply do not know what to say.³² This is often manifested in the phrase, “I know how you feel,” which could be one of the least helpful phrases that someone can use in offering comfort.³³ The truth is that while many pains are similar, every relationship is unique. Since every relationship is unique, the consoler, in fact, does not know how the griever feels despite having suffered the same type of loss.³⁴ The statement “I know how you feel” sends the implied message that their pain is nothing special and that they should recover quickly from their loss (because many others have before).³⁵

Being confronted by a friend’s grieving may heighten one’s anxiety. This anxiety may make the friend inadvertently change the subject or focus. The comforter can even do this without being aware of it. Despite how subtly this may be done, the mourner can still pick up on it. Since a friend changed the subject it might actually cause the griever more pain. This is because it sends the message that mourners cannot talk about their grief even to someone they are close with. An example of this is when the comforter asks the griever how they are feeling after the death of a parent. The griever responds by answering that he or she is heartbroken. The comforter then responds by saying that the griever should not feel bad, because the parent is not in pain anymore.

This response changes the subject off of how the griever is feeling and onto how the deceased is feeling. Furthermore, by saying that they “should not feel bad, because...” it sends the message to the mourner that they should not be feeling the way they are and that that feeling is an incorrect feeling to be having at that moment.³⁶ In addition, by talking about how the deceased parent is currently feeling, the comforter has the potential of starting a larger theological conversation, one for which they are probably not prepared.

Another way in which friends can inadvertently say something that can hurt the griever is by intellectualizing what is occurring. This can be done through phrases like, “be thankful you have another son,” “he is in a better place,” or “be grateful that you had her for as long as you did.”³⁷ The rationalization of a traumatic event sends the message to the griever that they do not have a right to feel the way they do. Also this prohibits the griever from expressing the emotions and feelings that they have, and instead moves the griever to the realm of thinking and perhaps even to masking emotions, which does not help with their grieving processes.

There could be a couple of different possibilities as to why someone might use one of these responses that would inadvertently hurt a griever. A simple reason is that these slogans are so ingrained in society that the comforter just does not understand what they truly mean. Another is that the comforter may not think, because of whatever cultural norm they grew up with, that it is appropriate for an individual to show strong emotions, even if it is amongst friends. The third is that there is something about the particular grief of the individual they are visiting that makes it too difficult for them to hear the lament or witness the pain. It has more to do with the psychological or

emotional make up of the comforters themselves than the griever.³⁸ Their intent to give comfort gets overridden.

Examples of most, if not all, of these can be found within the Book of Job starting in chapter 4 with the friends' response to Job's initial lament. Job curses the day he was born and speaks in terms of extreme turmoil. The first thing that Eliphaz says to him, immediately following his lament, is on the type of person Job used to be (Job 4:1-4). This changes the topic immediately and does not give any validation to what Job has just said. Instead of sitting with Job's voiced emotions and letting them get expressed, Eliphaz and the other friends turn it into an intellectual conversation. After Eliphaz speaks, Bildad continues, speaking about why Job should not be feeling the way he does, and tries to give reasons for why the events occurred (Job 8: - 23). Job repeats his petition to be heard throughout the entire book. Each time he makes this plea he waits to see if they will hear him, but it is to no avail and the damage has been done.

Assumptions

Why do Job's friends seem to work against Job for nearly the entirety of the book, rather than finally hearing what he is saying and responding to his desire to be heard? Perhaps it is because they do not realize that there are multiple ways to grieve. Instead of being open to hearing what Job needs for his grieving they try to force their image of grieving onto him. It is as if they believed that Job were a puzzle that could only be solved by using their pattern. Grief can be very complicated. Without proper training or background in the subject it can be hard to understand. One of the pitfalls for Job's

friends is that they are assuming a certain type of grief as well as a certain way of how he should deal with it. This directs how they think they should comfort him.

Ruth Konigsberg, in her book *The Truth About Grief*, answered that question in the affirmative. She wrote about widowhood and mentions the website www.YoungWidow.org. This forum, like many others, has created its own lexicon for talking about themselves and others. One such term is “DGIs” that refer to those who just “Don’t Get It.” These DGIs, according to website, can cause the largest amount of pain, because they see the behaviors of these widows or widowers and make assumptions on how they are grieving, both in positive and negative ways without checking those assumptions. They make a judgment call based about those assumptions, which ultimately causes more pain.³⁹

Grief can be caused by many different events or occurrences. It can be caused by a death, divorce or a break up, or even the loss of a job. No matter what the cause of the grief, grief behaves in very similar ways. This has led many psychologists to formulate various theories to explain how human beings grieve. These theories are used as guides for psychologists, health care practitioners, and pastoral caregivers as they help others through the grief process. In addition these various theories have also found their way into self-help guidebooks aimed at individuals who want to understand what they are going through.

The more widely accepted theories share certain beliefs, including⁴⁰: 1) A person needs at least a year to work through the emotions associated with grief; 2) These emotions will be expressed non sequentially, i.e. some will do anger then sadness and

back again while others will not; 3) Multiple emotions may occur at the same time; 4) Some people never finish grieving.

This thesis will focus on the Worden Model formulated by J. William Worden in his book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*. The reasons for focusing on the Worden Model are because it is used by many hospice bereavement professionals and aligns closely with the type of grief that Job experienced.

The four stages in the Worden Model includes:⁴¹

1) To accept the reality of the loss. Someone in this stage might be feeling a sense of shock, denial, and numbness. The griever may be trying to work through what has occurred in order to come to the realization that the person is dead and will not be returning.

2) To work through the pain of the loss. The physical responses may include crying, nausea, loss of appetite, irritability, and physical illness. Emotional responses may include loneliness, depression, guilt, and anger.

3) To adjust to the absence of the deceased in environments that they frequently shared. The griever becomes aware of the roles played by the deceased person and may feel disorientated as he or she begins to reorganize his or her life. The griever may feel helpless or inadequate, and may feel some resentment about having to develop these new skills. The griever will also have to adjust to a new reality where the individual that they cared about does not exist.

4) To “relocate” and memorialize the life. In this stage the griever is able to remember the deceased, yet is able to make new relationships and form a new life without the deceased individual’s part in that life.

Throughout the course of the Book of Job, from the time the catastrophes conclude until the final chapter, Job goes through many of Worden's stages. He is silent and in shock over what has occurred. His physical appearance as well as his health and well-being have declined. He voices his anger at what has occurred, and he formulates a new reality and theology in order to understand a world that can account for what happened to him. However, he does not truly accomplish the final process of Worden’s list, being moved forward in life, because instead God has restored everything to him thus removing the need to work through this process.

Something that is also important to note is that once Job begins his lament the story no longer includes any time frames. The reader has no idea how long all of this is occurring. This is fitting because there are no set timeframes for how long any given grief process may or must take.

For Job, as well as most griever, these grief units happen in their due course; his friends did not understand this fact. What the friends expected from him was that he would be able to spend a week working through his grief and then be fine. They might have voiced their opinions because they thought there was a certain inherent way or order in the grieving process. Perhaps they thought that they could “fix” Job by pushing him through that order or just skipping him ahead to the final stage. The erroneous beliefs that one could quickly cycle through grief or even be pushed through it are prevalent in

modern society. For example, there are many businesses in America that offer only three days for leave when an employee experiences a loss. When the employee returns to work it is almost expected that he or she would be fine and have already dealt with the loss.

The emotions and behaviors Job was going through after his loss were very typical for the period of time immediately following his tragedy. For example, in the first few weeks after a loss it is normal to feel isolated from others, the shock and denial has started to wear off and is replaced with more vibrant emotions. It is common for the griever to cry, scream, or curse out loud abruptly in addition to expressing feelings of panic, anxiety and guilt.⁴² These emotions become heightened when the griever has experienced a tragic loss. It also becomes increasingly difficult for the individual to create a sense of normality in his or her life.⁴³

Ruth Davis Konigsberg, in her commentary to Kubler-Ross's stages of grief, points out that the stages of grief occur at different times and in different ways for different people. While grief is unique for everyone, we all follow the same patterns.⁴⁴ The difficulty comes when a comforter makes the assumption that the griever is in a certain phase of their mourning or the griever's action is inappropriate.⁴⁵ By making this kind of assumption a value judgment is then levied upon the griever, which will then filter into the "care." What the care provider must remember is that uncertainty is crucial attitude to bring with them when going to give comfort to a griever. This is a skill that psychoanalysts are often trained in and while Job's friends are not trained professionals, some of the techniques of an analyst could be helpful for them in this situation.

It seems unanimously accepted that the cardinal instruction Freud gave all who practice psychoanalysis was that analysts were to become uncertain and

unknowing. But in this prescription Freud insisted that the analyst invite a state of mind that we ordinarily observe to be unpleasant.⁴⁶

It is their lack of uncertainty that destroys any chance that Job's friends have of giving aid to Job or for the four of them to maintain their friendship. Their certainty about what Job needs convinces Job's friends that Job is indeed a wicked man. At no point in time do Job's friends try to determine with Job what he needs in order to grieve. What the characters in the Book of Job are experiencing is a clash of certainties.

We now turn to the rich contrapuntal contributions of Job's three helpers. These sages attempted to minister to Job by offering advice and explanations, and the poem grants their efforts weight by making the advice offered quite reasonable and the theological interpretations sound. Their shared and sanctioned convictions, their explanatory schemes and their urging of Job to change contrasts with Job's bewilderment and insistence on searching for understanding within his own experience. When Job's friends leave him, they are convinced Job is a wrongdoer and adversary. Their minds are otherwise unchanged. Job, in contrast, comes to radical changes of mind.

A mind plagued by uncertainty clashes with minds glutted with certainty. A mind seeking its transformation clashes with minds seeking its appropriation. A mind made stranger to familiarity clashes with minds made strangers to novelty. The poem sets forth, in short, powerful images of the convictions and certainties of well-meaning men destroying their attachments to a suffering friend, as well as their ability to learn or to minister to him.⁴⁷

Being told why something occurred on a theological level can be very detrimental to the grieving process and it is something that Job's friends do habitually in the book. Job's friends are trying to justify their theological beliefs. Meanwhile, Job is trying to reconcile multiple theological beliefs that he holds, which simultaneously contradict each other.

When all is said and done, if Job is not guilty, how is it possible to explain what has befallen him, but they [Job's friends] cannot do so except on the basis of their own vision of things, their own theology. Eliphaz, leader of the group, speaks to counsel his unfortunate friend. He knows his words will seem harsh to Job, but he also knows that he must offer correct teaching⁴⁸

Eliphaz is not deliberately trying to hurt Job, he believes fully in what he is telling Job. With this understanding Eliphaz is not trying to intellectualize what has occurred in order to prevent Job's emotions from coming out, or to provide rationales to make himself feel safer in this unpredictable world. Rather, he is firm in his theological reasoning for what has happened and he believes that the sooner he is able to convince Job of that truth, the better it will be for Job. Oddly enough, despite the pain initially inflicted by the friends, the conclusion of the story as well as Job's new realizations would not have been possible without them. As Gustavo Gutierrez explains, "The friends' replies elicit a violent response from Job. However, they also help him to broaden his own horizon, refine his argument against the doctrine of retribution, and discover new perspectives."⁴⁹ Though this may be true it is also incidental and nowhere in the text is there any sign that this was their intent.

Listening to the Griever

What Job wants is a caring ear to hear his plea and lament. It is a constant anthem that he repeats throughout the book. In Job 19:21-22 Job cries out to his friends, "Pity me, pity me! You are my friends; for the hand of God has struck me! Why do you pursue me like God, maligning me insatiably?" In Job 21:2-6 Job begs, "Listen well to what I say, and let that be your consolation. Bear with me while I speak, and after I have

spoken, you may mock. Is my complaint directed toward a man? Why should I not lose my patience? Look at me and be appalled, and clap your hand to your mouth. When I think of it I am terrified; my body is seized with shuddering.” Despite the intentions of Job’s friends, they miss the point of what Job is asking for.

If these men were to be silent and listen, they would demonstrate the wisdom they claim to possess. Those who experience at close range the suffering of the poor, or of anyone who grieves and is abandoned, will know the importance of what Job is asking for... They also have the experience of receiving deceptive expressions of concern from persons who in the end only make their problems worse.⁵⁰

While Job was looking for a way to integrate what occurred into his future, his friends were looking backwards into his past. This is just one of the reasons why the friends focus so much on assigning blame rather than hearing pain.⁵¹

They [Job's friends] wish to reduce his suffering by espousing an age old moral-theological theory of illness containing both etiology and cure. Illness emanates from sin, while symptoms are due to divine punishment. To deny wrongdoing is to obstruct the healing process. To get well, Job must repent. Yet Job's "healer's" fail miserably. Rather than being supported, Job feels offended and betrayed by his friends' moral preaching.⁵²

Job’s friends are concerned not only for the well being of their friend, but also for their own well being; they want to know that they are safe from having this happen to them as well. If his sinning is the cause of his predicament, then they are free from the possibility of it happening to them. Meanwhile Job is looking forward because the events have already occurred to him; he needs to figure out how to move on.

Both Job and his "healers" attribute Job's calamity to divine intervention. But while Job experiences his disaster as a betrayal of his world of meaning, his friends cannot accept Job's interpretation, or even feelings, and need to reject it while tenaciously adhering to their moral belief system. They fail to recognize

their own defensiveness, their own fear of losing meaning and their need to adopt rigid, moralistic dogma as a defensive mantle against their own despair. If such a disaster could befall Job, their equal or even their better, who can safeguard them from similar catastrophe? To feel safe they need to place Job on the other side of the moral fence. Job refuses to be quarantined in the sinners' ward, and, by authentically expressing his emotions, he exposes his healers' ineffectiveness: 'So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was so righteous in his own eyes' (32:1)⁵³

The comforter needs to be able to 1) sit with pain that he or she might not understand 2) know that people grieve in their own ways 3) be able to fully hear what is being said.

Job's friends did not know what to do with his lament. They saw it as a threat rather than a tool for understanding what Job was going through. One way of finding coherence between what is being said and what is being heard can be found through understanding the purpose of a lament.

More than a mere verbalization of his inner reality, Job's words actually help recreate his being. The delicate dance between expression and experience continues interdependently, each leading, each following, each birthing the other. While the experience certainly shaped the pattern of the expression, it is also true that the pattern of expression helped to shape the experience, and Job shows how old worlds are relinquished and new worlds are embraced. Persons and communities are not fully present in a situation of disorientation until it has been brought to speech. Thus, Job's rageful outbursts and accusations, which are considered unacceptable by his community, justify Job in the end who 'spoke more honestly than his friends' (job 42:7). This articulation is not only a cathartic moment for Job, but like the poetry puts forth the entire creative movement bringing it from intuition to expression and thus leads his audience into pre-objective awareness.⁵⁴

Job's lament serves as a mechanism for letting his community know that something has changed with him. He has participated in a "rite of passage." Job is no longer the same individual that he once was; he is changed and is different. What has

occurred here in the Book of Job follows a formulaic structure on how a rite of passage comes to be.

As we study rites of passage, we find data which supports the fact that isolation from one's community is a component in the transformative process. Arnold Von Gennep, a Dutch Anthropologist who coined the phrase, "Rites of Passage"... formulated a system of stages. The first stage he defines as a separation from old and familiar social context and being put through a symbolic death experience. Since then, studies prove disparity in passage rites from culture to culture, but the separation component is always present. We can thus assume that alienation from one's community is in some way intrinsic to passage experiences and can facilitate the transformation process. The person leaves the community with one identity and in the furnace of his alienation becomes someone new and different. He then reenters the old community with a new identity⁵⁵

The way one speaks about a rite of passage is just as important as living through it. The telling of the story not only informs the community about the change in the individual, but the constant telling and retelling of the story also allows the individual to better formulate their new reality.

People tell stories not just to work out their own changing identities, but also to guide others who will follow them. They seek not to provide a map that can guide others – each must create their own – but rather to witness the experience of reconstructing one's own map. Witnessing is one duty to the commonsensical and to others...Storytelling is *for* an other just as much as it is for oneself. In the reciprocity that is storytelling, the teller offers herself as a guide to the other's self-formation. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognizes but *values* the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story *for* the other. Telling stories in postmodern times, and perhaps in all times, attempts to change one's own life by affecting the lives of others. Thus all stories have an element of testimony...⁵⁶

When someone states what is happening to them, they do not necessarily want advice or help, they might just want to be heard. By offering advice or giving one of the previously mentioned responses a comforter not only does the damage mentioned above, but also makes the griever feel unheard, when all they want is a validation or

acknowledgement that they are hurt. Grievors want and need to be heard, not fixed.⁵⁷

When a friend does not listen to the griever more harm can be done because the griever may be leaving their comfort zone more when venting to a friend than to an acquaintance.

Therefore the lack of acknowledgment can be even more painful.

When, as seen in the Book of Job, a griever is not allowed to tell their story it not only inhibits their being comforted, it also inhibits their ability to create a new reality for themselves. The lament then becomes vitally important to be able to communicate these various changes. However, a lament is more than that. A lament is an unrestrained cry from someone whose

unexpected circumstances challenge the old world view and previous presuppositions. They are speeches of surprised dismay and disappointment from the speaker who never expected this to happen to him or her. From this place of dislocation and disorientation anything may and will be said, the juices flow, and the animal is loose.⁵⁸

A lament is more than just venting about the chaos of the world. The very nature of a lament is rooted in language and it is the use of language, even chaotic language, which makes a lament so powerful.

According to our mystical tradition, language precedes everything, for the world is created with the alphabet. To unmake a world is to undo the alphabet of creation, to plunge the world constituted by language back into disorder, to strike it wordless. But how can the alphabet so violently broken be reconstituted? How can the broken reenter the realm of language and speak the unspeakable? The doorway, I would maintain, is lament. In lament, the boundary between the made and unmade universe is thinnest, for it is the cultural form closest to the proverbial howl of pain. Lament can be incoherent and chaotic, picking its way through broken rubble of unbearable vivid happenings and intolerable sensations. Its content is dangerously dark and disordered, and in it's meaning may be nonexistent, rejected, or found wanting. And yet I want to argue that the doorway through which lament enters the world is a *petach tikvah*, a doorway of hope.⁵⁹

The content of the lament is severe suffering that has shattered the worldview of griever. On the other hand it also shows a desire to create order as well. C. Westerman claims that a lament always has three elements to it: an invocation, lament, and petition.⁶⁰ Samuel Balenstine has a slightly different list of what the three components of a lament are. For him, they include: “1) Some crisis in the relationship between the pray-er and God; 2) A response to the crisis in the form of a prayer that raises questions about divine justice and divine intentions; 3) Some resolution or at least explanation of that crisis that is depicted as the result of the pray-er’s engagement with God.”⁶¹

Through all of these definitions there is one element that remains the same; the personal nature of a lament. The Book of Lamentations and other laments that focus on cultural traumas, such as the holocaust, still use a personal voice. However, the community that the lament is speaking to can often be blind, not necessarily to the events that transpired, rather to the internal impact of those events to the sufferer. The sufferer then needs to communicate that change to the community through a lament.

The ability to look beyond the pain of what is being said and to be able to understand the message behind it is what helps a comforter give aid. This is an ability that Job’s friends did not demonstrate. It is also one of the challenges that a friend might encounter when they go to give aid. Despite the intent of the caregiver, when presented with seeing a friend in pain the comforter may no longer be able to control their reactions and their statements. They replace the care that the griever needs with the care the comforter would want if the roles were reversed. Assumptions are quickly made without any form of checking those assumptions and aid is administered based on those assumptions. However, when a comforter is able to approach the stories and comments

made by the griever as a resource, rather than as a threat to serenity, then they might be able to enact their intentions.

³² John W. James and Russel Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbok*. 20th Anniversary Expanded Edition (New York: Collins Living, 2009), 39

³³ Ibid., 40

³⁴ Ibid., 40-41

³⁵ Ibid., 52-53

³⁶ Ibid., 43

³⁷ Ibid., 44

³⁸ Ibid., 39-51

³⁹ Koningsberg, *The Truth About Grief*, 43

⁴⁰ Deborah E. Bowen and Susan L. Strickler, *A Good Friend for Bad Times; Helping Others through Grief*. Minneapolis: (Augusburg Books, 2004), 4

⁴¹ Ibid., 9-10

⁴² Ibid., 46-47

⁴³ Ibid., 105 - 109

⁴⁴ Ruth Davis Koningsberg, *The Truth About Grief; The Myth of Its Five Stages and The New Science of Loss* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 2011. 15

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17-41

⁴⁶ J.J. Anderson, "Biblical Job: - Changing the Helper's Mind," in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, no. 27 (1991): 456

⁴⁷ Ibid., Pg. 467

⁴⁸ Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job; God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 21

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24

⁵¹ Ilan Kutz, "Job and His "Doctors": Bedside Wisdom in the Book of Job," in *British Medical Journal* 321 (December 2000): 1613

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 1614

⁵⁴ Patricia Huff Byrne, "'Give Sorrow Words': Lament - Contemporary Need for Job's Old Time Religion," in *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 255 – 256

⁵⁵ Ibid., 257

⁵⁶ Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Story Teller; Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17-18

⁵⁷ Ibid., 45

⁵⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms; A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 19-22

⁵⁹ Rachel Adler, "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament," in *The Chronicle*, (2006): 16

⁶⁰ C. Westermann, "The Structure and History of Lamentation in the Old Testament." in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, ed. John Knowx, (Atlanta: Fortress Press, 1981), 165-213

⁶¹ Samuel Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of the Divine Human Dialogue* (Atlanta: Fortress Press, 1993), 120

Chapter 3

The Role of Empathy In Consoling a Mourner

Defining Empathy, Sympathy, and Compassion

Empathy, sympathy, and compassion, play critical roles in the process of comforting. While there is evidence of individuals who display sympathy and empathy in our ancient texts, the terms, sympathy and empathy, are relatively new, starting in the 20th Century.⁶² In addition, the way in which these processes have been defined has also shifted over time.⁶³

In particular, the term empathy is one that is mired by “ambiguity and controversy”⁶⁴ over how it is defined or even understood as a concept. Dr. Mohammadreza Hojatⁱ offers a definition and explanation that takes all this history and description into account. He states that at best empathy can be described as “a cognitive attribute featuring understanding of the experiences of others; at other times, as an emotional state of mind featuring sharing of feelings; and at still other times as a concept involving both cognition and emotion.”⁶⁵

Dr. Hojat maintains that, while the matter of how to differentiate between empathy and sympathy is somewhat unsettled, it can be “addressed by viewing empathy as a predominantly cognitive attribute featuring understanding of other’s concerns... and

ⁱ Dr. Hojat is Research Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior and Director of the Jefferson Longitudinal Study of Medical Education at Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His work, *Empathy in Patient Care; Antecedents, Development, Measurements, and Outcomes* is on the importance of empathy when it comes to a patient’s physical and mental care.

by viewing sympathy as a primarily emotional concept featured by sharing emotions and feelings...”⁶⁶

While Dr. Hojat’s basic description of empathy states that it is predominantly cognitive, he does acknowledge that there are two types of empathy: cognitive and emotional.⁶⁷ Cognitive empathy involves processes such as taking the perspective of another. This is done by the “transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another, and so structuring the world as he does.”⁶⁸ Emotional empathy involves processes such as the generating of feelings and the sharing of emotions between two people. This would mean having “an emotional response elicited by, and congruent with, the perceived welfare of someone else.”⁶⁹

Both empathy and sympathy involve the sharing of emotions, however, there are very clear differences between the two. One of the primary differences that Dr Hojat claims is that “the aim of empathy is to know another person's concerns better, the aim of sympathy is to feel another person's emotions better.”⁷⁰ A distinguishing characteristic of empathy is the ability to see similarities in another and what they are experiencing, yet still be able to maintain a clear separation between one’s self and another.⁷¹

Not only are the internal emotional results different between empathy and sympathy there are also different behavioral motivations as well.

The underlying behavioral motivation in empathy is likely to be altruistic, but is more likely to be egotistic in sympathy. The ultimate goal of altruistically motivated helping behavior is to reduce another person's distress without any expectation of reward, whereas the primary goal in egotistically motivated helping behavior is to reduce one's own level of stress, to avoid adverse feelings, or to receive rewards.⁷²

These various behavioral motivations also have an impact on the griever and the distinctions between empathy and sympathy are incredibly important when it comes to caring for another because

joining the patient's emotions, a key feature of sympathy, can impede clinical outcomes. A clinician should feel the patient's feelings only to a limited extent to improve his or her understanding of the patient without impeding professional judgment...When experiencing empathy, individuals are able to disentangle themselves from others, whereas individuals experiencing sympathy have difficulty maintaining a sense of whose feelings belong to whom.⁷³

This is as true for a therapist-patient interaction as it is for a comforter-griever interaction.

Empathy and sympathy occur over a spectrum. One is not simply empathetic or sympathetic when he or she reacts to someone's grief. This reaction to grief is an act of compassion. How much empathy or sympathy makes up the compassion determines the type of care that is provided.⁷⁴ When compassion is primarily caused by empathy it will be more altruistically motivated than when it is primarily caused by sympathy and even then, we do not know if it will be successful. The empathic motivation helps determine how the comforter will listen to the griever and what they will do with what they are hearing.

"Practitioners of empathy are committed to objective knowledge of other personalities. If we use our own feelings, it is for the purpose of learning more about what actually belongs to the other person. But we do not exercise our own feelings to gratify our needs. When we sympathize, we are aware of our own state of mind and much of our attention is still devoted to our own needs. When we empathize we cannot fully escape our own needs but we discipline ourselves to use our own feelings as instruments of cognition....Sympathy has many shortcomings as a cognitive process. Preoccupation with our own feelings blunts our sensitivity to others. When we see the slightest indication of a similarity of feeling between the other person and ourselves, we may imagine that the

correspondence between him and ourselves is complete. We are then no longer curious about his feelings because we take for granted that they are identical with our own. We thus project our own feelings on the other person. Having received one or two cues, which enable us to establish a link between him and ourselves, we subsequently have no doubt about the accuracy of our estimation.⁷⁵

Empathy and Job's Friends

In the Book of Job chapter 3 Job's friends come to comfort him. They sit silently for a while with him. Are they empathically connecting with him or are they too sympathetic to be able to respond? As the first chapter of this thesis discussed, there are commentaries that show both of these viewpoints.⁷⁶ Depending on which interpretation is selected they are either being empathic or sympathetic.

As stated, empathy is being able to understand the feelings of another, but being able to keep those feelings separate from your own. If Job's friends were employing empathy in chapter 3 then they knew that he was in a lot of pain and they were patiently waiting to speak because they knew he would not be able to hear them yet. As stated, sympathy is the feeling of another's emotions, but without being able to distinguish the feelings of the griever's with the feelings of the comforters. If Job's friends were employing sympathy, then they were sitting on the ground feeling all of Job's pain and were unable to respond because of that pain.

It is more likely that the latter is what was occurring to Job's friends because of the many parallels that were demonstrated between Job and his friends. For example, Job covered himself in dirt and ripped his clothing and they also covered themselves in dirt and ripped their clothing. Job was quiet and they were quiet. Job emotionally lashed out and Job's friends emotionally lashed out as well.

Their ability to comfort him only outwardly started to break down after Job's initial lament in chapter 4, mainly because they failed to honor Job's chaos narrative. Job's speeches were full of anxiety and grief and did not flow linearly. In fact, his speeches fit the definition of a chaos narrative,⁷⁷ a type of presentation, which often makes it anxiety provoking for listeners. Despite their chaotic nature, there is a healing quality that can be achieved when a chaos narrative is not only heard but also honored.

The need to honor chaos stories is both moral and clinical. Until the chaos narrative can be honored, the world in all its possibilities is being denied. To deny a chaos story is to deny the person telling this story, and people who are being denied can not be cared for. People whose reality is denied can remain recipients of treatments and services, but they cannot be participants in empathic relations of care... Those living chaotic stories certainly need help, but the immediate impulse of most would-be helpers is first to drag the teller out of this story, that dragging called some version of "therapy." Getting out of chaos is to be desired, but people can only be helped out when those who care are first willing to become witnesses to the story.⁷⁸

Time and again Job shared his chaos story with his friends and time and again they failed to hear him; they failed to honor his narrative. He pleaded with them to listen and not to react,

"If only you would just be quiet! – In you that would be wisdom!" (Job 13:5)

Yet they continued to miss what he had to say. They rebuked him and spoke of guilt and responsibility and still Job tried to be heard and pleaded with them.

How long will you keep tormenting me,
crushing me with words?
Ten times now, you have insulted me,
treated me coldly, shamelessly.
But if I have really been at fault,
does my fault wholly lie with me?
If you wish to act as my superiors

and scold me for my own disgrace,
just know that a god behaving crookedly
got his net around me. (Job 19:2-5)

Job informed them that they had not heard him. At the end of this response Job stated,

When you say, “Look how he is persecuted,”
That the root of the matter must be in me –
Fear the Sword –
yes, the Rage, the Sin-Sword-
that you may know Shaddai’s doom. (Job 19:27)

The combination of these two passages implies that only after Job’s friends understand his pain and feelings will they be able to care for him. With the definition of empathy and sympathy in mind, it is possible to hypothesize that Job’s friends were not able to care for Job the way Job needed caring because the friends might have been reacting to their own pain and needs instead of Job’s. If so, they would have been sympathetic, but not empathetic.

If Job’s friends had empathy and the ability to separate their emotions from Job’s, they might have been able to respond appropriately to what Job was experiencing. They might have been able to be emotionally present during his laments and pleas throughout the book. Job was calling on his friends to hear and witness, but that was not how they responded.

When Job needs a friend, he is confronted with theologians; when he calls for sympathy he is given doctrine. His friends feel compelled to justify God before man...His [Job] lament is at the same time a poignant plea for empathy, a call for his friends to be true to their function. In the dace of betrayal, however, Job is lead to redefine that function in radical terms which his friends would find little short of blasphemous...Reasoned advice is no comfort; to befriend a man rejected by God means more than explaining God’s actions.⁷⁹

There was another role that Job expected his friends to play as they assumed the mantle of comforter and that was the role of גאל, redeemer or vindicator.

Pity me, pity me! You are my friends;
for the hand of God has struck me!
Why do you pursue me like God,
Maligning me insatiably?
O that my words were written down;
Would they were inscribed in a record,
Incised on a rock forever
With iron stylus and lead!
But I know that my Vindicator [גאלי] lives;
In the end He will testify on earth —
This, after my skin will have been peeled off.
But I would behold God while still in my flesh,
I myself, not another, would behold Him;
Would see with my own eyes:
My heart pines within me. (Job 19:21-27)⁸⁰

As Norman Habel wrote,

He [Job] seeks a friendship that will prove to be redemptive; he longs for a liberator, who will act out of genuine empathy. The friendship he seeks is now identified explicitly as a redeemer *go'el*. While a *go'el* is normally a kinsman, the preceding development of Job's argument about an advocate seems to demand that this redeemer is the ultimate friend. He is an empathetic advocate ready to represent Job and defend his integrity at the final hearing... his friendship will bring redemption, vindication, and peace.⁸¹

What Job needed in this instance was not someone to debate with, rather someone who could hear his pain and alleviate it. Job's friends missed the needs of Job. Job was not asking for theological reasoning nor was he asking for an explanation for what occurred. Job wanted to tell his story and be heard by friends who could be present and witness his pain. If they could have done this for him they would have served as his redeemers or vindicators. As Job states,

A despairing man needs the loyalty of a friend when he loses faith in the Almighty.⁸² (Job 6:14)

Norman Habel posits what Job's friends should have done following hearing Job's plea. "The true loyalty of a friend, he [the Jobian poet] claims is only fully evident as a genuine human reality when there are no other value systems upon which to rely. To be a friend is to be cohuman in a dehumanized situation where a despairing man has lost his religion as a source of inner support."⁸³

Origins and Development of Empathy

But where does empathy come from? Human beings have evolved to be social. We are pre-wired, from an evolutionary standpoint, to be connected to each other for the sake of survival.⁸⁴ Overall, indications point towards an individuals' upbringing as a primary source of empathic skill rather than their religious affiliation or activity.⁸⁵

Our survival depends on our ability to understand others and skills to communicate our understanding. Social relationships provide opportunities for empathic engagement, which in turn reinforces human connections, a cycle that has always been in motion in the evolution of humankind.⁸⁶

This social connectedness has not only evolved for the purposes of providing an increased defense against predators,⁸⁷ but also to provide social affiliation, which is a necessity for life. The absence of social connectedness can actually be detrimental to one's health.⁸⁸ One of the primary causations of humanity being able to build this social connectedness is empathic engagement.⁸⁹ This empathic engagement is also a necessity for group building as well as giving emotional and psychological aid.

Both nature and nurture are critical in the development of empathy.⁹⁰ It is the interaction between “nature and nurture that contributes to the development of social behavior. Human beings are born with a potential for ‘engageability,’ which is triggered to a certain degree by, and will develop to a certain extent depending on, environmental and experiential factors.”⁹¹

However, what happens if the environment needed to build empathy is not present during an individual’s childhood or if for some reason an individual has not developed this skill? Can one Learn or acquire empathy later on?

This is an issue that William O’Malleyⁱⁱ addresses when considering the lack of an emotional response to disasters amongst his students.⁹²

Is anyone still able to grasp upon reading tabloid headlines: "Mother Leaves Strangled Infant in Dumpster," "9,000 Die in Floods," "Four Children Dead in Drive-By-Shooting"? On the other hand, we're also besieged with public service announcements showing African children with great glistening, mournful eyes, flies drinking their tears, making us feel helplessly soul-bruised, to the point where it just becomes too much. We flick the dial, turn the page, render ourselves amnesiacs about it. Is it just too much overload for anyone to cope with.⁹³

The “amnesiac” behavior described above could be caused by desensitization due to the overwhelming presence of these images in the media, but it could also have something to do with one’s proximity to the events. “Moral obligations to help [in a tragedy] seem intuitively stronger than when such factors [like immediacy] are absent.”⁹⁴ In addition, this lack of a reaction could also be due to a psychological response that distances one from indentifying too closely with a victim.

ⁱⁱ William O’Malley, S.J., teaches at Fordham Preparatory School and in the Fordham University School of Liberal Studies.

Empathy, sympathy, compassion. Different words, but made up of similar parts. Em-, sym-, and com-, are Greek and Latin roots meaning "with." Path and passion mean "suffer." So all three words mean "to suffer with." They denote a reality inside a person that resonates with the anguish inside another human being, identifies with it. In a sense, they're all "victim" words, and since few of us court victimhood, they can be scary even to consider.⁹⁵

O'Malley sees a possible way to break down this barrier. For him, respect is the starting point for building a caring relationship for someone you might not know.

Empathy, sympathy and compassion go far beyond what my uneasy student meant by "feeling sorry for," a pity which can be very remote, chill, only slightly warmer than indifference. It also goes beyond respect, which we can honestly offer to another person without any personal involvement or cost. Respect is the first step on the road to justice; empathy is the first step on the road to love.⁹⁶

Recently, New Zealand has been grappling with how to improve classroom performance.⁹⁷ Several studies tried to determine the causation of this academic problem and it was determined that it was caused by a feeling of distance between the students and each other as well as the students and the teachers.⁹⁸ It was resolved that there was a need to "acknowledge the growing cultural diversity in classrooms and to develop the shared understandings required to bridge the gap between the different cultural circumstances in which students learn social protocols."⁹⁹ The researchers, in conjunction with the school system, then decided that the best way to foster this cohesion was to create a forum where students would be able to tell their narratives to each other. "Through this process students fostered empathy, compassion, tolerance and respect for differences."¹⁰⁰

Storytelling is incredibly important, not only as discussed earlier in terms of emotional healing and the building of empathy. Storytelling allows emotional intimacy to occur.

Being Able to Utilize Empathy

Stories have to repair the damage that illness has done to the ill person's sense of where she is in life, and where she may be going. Stories are a way of redrawing maps and finding new destinations.

The second and complementary call for stories is literal and immediate: the phone rings and people want to know what is happening to the ill person. Stories of illness have to be told to medical workers, health bureaucrats, employers and work associates, family, and friends. Whether ill people want to tell stories or not, illness calls for stories.¹⁰¹

This is as true for those healing from illness as it is for mourners. Not being able to tell their story or not having their story validated in some way can prolong their healing. However, there are times when a caregiver is not able to deal with the story being told and aren't able to listen. The story could be misinterpreted, the subject might be changed, or something might arise that calls the listener to be elsewhere either physically or mentally.

Dr. Robert Katz describes this kind of response as putting up a wall of anxiety. This wall is not always deliberate and individuals are not always aware of it when it goes up, but it can severely damage the comfort that is being given.

Even with the best of intentions, we often miss the mark in empathy because our anxieties shorten and narrow the range of our feelings... One reason for underempathizing is the temptation to detach oneself too soon from empathic involvement. We recognize some parallels and vaguely apprehend some quality of the experience of the other and then proceed, quite without the necessary supporting evidence, to make inferences regarding the whole personality.¹⁰²

Self defense mechanisms are one way for listeners to deal with a story that is very disturbing. An example of this can be found in an episode following Primo Levi's discussion of the Holocaust to schoolchildren.¹⁰³ While describing his life in the

concentration camp, one boy responded with a detailed plan of how he could have escaped. Why might the child have done this? Because on some level “all of us on the outside of some chaos want assurances that if we fell in, we could get out.”¹⁰⁴ This is true of the little boy who responded to Primo Levi as well as for Job’s friends.

The other downfall that the friends experienced was that they were becoming authoritarian in how they interacted with Job. They were telling him what his grief should have looked like and how exactly he should have responded to his the pain. This too was a wall of anxiety.

Authoritarianism in the professional is actually little different from the fundamentalism of the layman who scores low on empathy tests. It is rooted in the same tendency to hold rigidly to stereotypes and to defend conventional ways of thinking and of feeling...The authoritarian demands deference from others and is blind to his own deficiencies.¹⁰⁵

While that statement was with the professional in mind, it can also be applied to friends as well. It can be very difficult for individuals to move beyond these various protective stances. Empathy can lead to an emotional intimacy, which can be very scary. "The only obstacle to that enrichment is our own fears about being ‘taken in,’ hoaxed, made to look foolish. But if you never let yourself be taken in, you'll never see the inside of anything."¹⁰⁶

Some pastoral guidebooks have created resources to help ease the comforter into a place where they can hear and be present for what they are about to deal with. *Death and the Caring Community*, provides guidance with regard to a Christian who provides care for the terminally ill. One section of the book recommends asking questions such as:¹⁰⁷

- 1) Who was the last person in your family or congregation who died? How did the community respond? What was your own involvement and how did it feel?
- 2) If you had a terminal illness, which would you prefer: a closed awareness, suspected awareness, pretense, or open awareness setting? Jot down as many advantages and disadvantages as possible.
- 3) Imagine that you have been stricken with a life-threatening illness. What changes might your illness make in you family's life style? How would you expect each family member to react? What kinds of support from a caring community would be most helpful, or most needed by them?

These questions enable the comforter, no matter his or her religion, to think about what death would mean for the mourner and consider what their reactions would be as well as the reactions of others in their family. The goal of the guide is to have the prospective care giving group share their response in order to come to the realization that everyone grieves differently. Going through this training helps the caregiver be present even under circumstances that would normally be distressing for them. This then aids the caregiver in being present for their friend.

The Book of Job demonstrates what can happen when the listener cannot be present for the teller. Job sought out care from his friends, but did not receive the comfort he was expecting. He was given advice rather than an empathetic ear to listen to his pain. His friends were individuals who were unable to help him. Job's friends did not intend to hurt Job; rather they wanted to help him. They just were not equipped to be able to do so. In fact, many people are ill equipped to help individuals grieve. The Book of Job should not be read as a model for how one effectively comforts a mourner, rather as a reminder of the necessity to receive empathic responses and enjoy the presence of friends in a time of mourning.

Providing Empathic Care in Today's Synagogue Communities

According to Rabbi Richard Address, Senior Rabbi at Congregation Mkor Shalom of Cherry Hill, NJ, and former director of the Department of Jewish Family Concerns for the Union of Reform Judaism, the fostering of a caring congregational community is played out in three primary ways. Rabbi Address states that “what congregations can do to build a caring community is within three distinct methods: direct service; educational programming; and support programming. Each congregation may have different programs, and there are hundreds of different variations, but they are all just variations of these three main themes.”¹⁰⁸

Direct service can include services provided by the professional staff as well as through congregant-to-congregant services (which may or may not be guided by the professional staff). Educational programming includes teaching about what the concern is as well as teaching about Jewish tradition related to the issue. Support programming includes anything from peer support groups to professional counseling and various forms of follow up work. According to Rabbi Address the best way to reach congregants who need support as well as to guide other congregants to support them is to align education through these different themes. A congregation needs to determine what the congregants need and, if there is one issue in particular that needs to be raised, educate around it and then guide the congregants to action.

Rabbi Marion Lev-Cohen of Central Synagogue of New York City also sees the interplay within these three factors. There she runs several support groups for individuals who are dealing with various griefs. That involves connecting people within the group

and also educating them on grief and the particulars of what they are going through. In addition she gives one-on-one support and then will match people up on an individual basis to other congregants who can act as a supports as well.¹⁰⁹

Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York City has taken a different approach when it comes to support that places education as a primary resource for support. They believe that with proper training a group of congregants can be a significant part of the caring community. Their support program consists of: conversations with clergy; adult education classes; programs run by the Caring Community Committee; as well as services provided by a social worker. To do this they have created an adult education curriculum that teaches its members about the various forms of grief and their manifestations as well as how to properly give support. The rationale for this curriculum states that the motivation “came from congregants and clergy who recognized the need for the synagogue to give people spiritual, emotional, theological, and practical resources to help engage with issues.”¹¹⁰ For Congregation Rodeph Sholom, this added education makes it possible for the congregation to actualize a caring community that is comprised of both the professional staff and the laity.

⁶² Michael Slote, "The Philosophy of Empathy," *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* (Spring 2011): 13

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Mohammadreza Hojat, *Empathy in Patient Care; Antecedents, Development, Measures, and Outcomes* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2007), 3

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7

⁶⁹ Ibid., 8

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10-11

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 11-12

⁷³ Ibid., 13

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11

⁷⁵ Robert L. Katz, *Empathy; Its Nature and Uses* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 8-11

⁷⁶ Amos Hakham, *The Bible; Job* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kuk, 1984), 17-18

⁷⁷ Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Story Teller; Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 97

⁷⁸ Ibid., 109-110

⁷⁹ Norman C. Habel, "'Only the Jackel Is My Friend': On Friends and Redeemers in Job," *Interpretation* 31, no. 3, (1977): 229

⁸⁰ As translated by JPS 1999

⁸¹ Habel, "Only the Jackel Is My Friend": 235

⁸² As translated by Norman Habel

⁸³ Habel, "Only the Jackel Is My Friend": 230

⁸⁴ Hojat, *Empathy in Patient Care*, 17

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- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 47
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 17
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 31
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 17-29
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 17
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 47-62
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 48
- ⁹² William J. O'Malley, "Teaching Empathy," *America*, (April 10, 1999): 22-26
- ⁹³ Ibid., 22-2623
- ⁹⁴ Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 28
- ³⁸ O'Malley, "Teaching Empathy": 23
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Delia Baskerville, "Developing Cohesion and Building Positive Relationships Through Storytelling in a Culturally Diverse New Zealand Classroom," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27 (2011): 107
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 107-108
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 108
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 109
- ¹⁰¹ Frank, *The Wounded Story Teller*, 53-54
- ¹⁰² Katz, *Empathy*, 166-167
- ¹⁰³ Frank, *The Wounded Story Teller*, 102
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵ Katz, *Empathy*, 172
- ¹⁰⁶ O'Malley, "Teaching Empathy": 24
- ¹⁰⁷ Larry Richards and Paul Johnson, *Death & The Caring Community; Ministering to the Terminally Ill* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1978), 22 and 82
- ¹⁰⁸ All information attributed to Rabbi Address happened via a phone conversation on November 8th, 2011

¹⁰⁹ All information attributed to Rabbi Marion Lev-Cohen happened in during a conversation on November 10th, 2011

¹¹⁰ Rabbi Robert Levine, Sally Kaplan, and Stephanie Lasher, *Preparation and Consolation; An End of Life Resource Manual for Synagogues* (2010), i

Conclusion

This thesis set out to help me understand the ways in which friends comfort one another in times of grief and despair. I had seen examples of poor or even disastrous caring provided by friends to each other and I wanted to understand why. It got to the point that I had to ask the question, is being trained in pastoral care the only way that one can actually give comfort the helps rather than hurts or at gives a neutral impact? I was amazed that whenever I mentioned the Book of Job, both rabbis and lay people offered contradictory and somewhat charged responses about the friends. Some saw Job's friends as misguided, ignorant, evil, villainous, tragically lost. Very few actually saw them as friends. What was the cause of such discrepancies?

I wanted to understand who Job's friends really were. Were they friends or were they enemies? To do this I looked at the actual terminology of the book to figure out how the Book of Job looked at these friends. Ultimately the research showed that they were closer than just acquaintances and really cared for each other's well being. Job's friends had good motives and intent, but for whatever reason they could not actualize that intent. Something occurred that was a catalyst in that break down. One moment they were able to care for him and the next they were not. That moment of transition, from helpful to hurtful, seemed to occur after Job's initial lament in chapter 3. This suggests that there were reactions that occurred within the caregiver that affected how they responded to the griever. The intent of the friends and their behaviors were so contradictory that it stands to reason that these psychological reactions were ones that they as caregivers were unaware of.

This made me wonder about the various ways in which a comforter who offers aid can hurt the griever. I focused on two different ways, the first, through the things that are said, and second, the assumptions that are made (whether based on what they think the griever needs or on the nature of grief). What I found was that Job's friend's hurtful responses can be understood in a couple of ways. It could be that they were just not mindful of the implications of what they were saying, or they changed the subject, whether inadvertently or not, because they just could not handle what was happening.

The implication is that with training they would have been able to better understand what impact their words had on the grieving process. Training could have also helped them understand the grieving process. Many individuals are not aware of how the grieving process actually works. If individuals believe that there is a certain set way in which one should grieve they may try to "fix" or modify the grieving of others in an attempt to help them.

By not allowing friends to grieve in their own way the caregivers lack of real empathy leaves the griever feeling abandoned. Looking back at the Book of Job it seemed as though some of the friends' mistakes were caused by their inability to tell the difference between Job's pain and their own pain. Empathy is being able to see emotional and or cognitive similarities between yourself and another yet being able to tell the difference between self and other. Perhaps Job's friends were having difficulty because they were confusing their pain with Job's pain. The research on the subject suggests this could have been the case. They had a lot of sympathy for Job, in other words they felt his pain, but not a lot of empathy because they were reacting towards him with their own fears, pains, and concerns. Does this mean that if you aren't an empathetic

individual you won't be a good caregiver? Research has shown that one can teach or train an individual to be empathetic through storytelling and the unpacking of experiences. This yet again begs the question, if one is going to be a successful caregiver, does one need to have some sort of training? As there is an increasing desire to focus our congregations on creating caring communities this is a question that we need to consider.

However, what do we do for those who are Job's friends, but not open for training? They are, after all, good people who truly intend to help. Ultimately, we can offer and require training for those who are part of a Caring Community or a *Bikkur Cholim* Committee, but we cannot tell people that they cannot visit their friends. This is the piece that relates to the final section of the Book of Job. It is within this section of the Book of Job that God intervenes and helps Job and his friends rebuild their friendship. This is where the clergy or other congregational/community leaders can act as guides to help repair hurt feelings and relationships by revealing the true intent of the comforter. We can also be proactive in addition to being reactive and develop programs that address. This could mean building elements of pastoral care and empathy development into the religious school curricula, making advanced training something that is just expected of all congregants, or even including elements of pastoral training as a routine occurrence in sermons or programmatic aspects of congregational life. Essentially it would be making this an engrained part of the community.

Can an individual be a successful caregiver without training? I believe they can, however, it depends on the individual and it depends on the type of care they are trying to give. As one attempts to give more complicated kinds of care one needs training in order to increase the likelihood of success. However, should the goal be to create a community

where everyone can be a care provider or should the goal be to create communities where we foster better friendships during moments of distress? I believe that it should be the latter. By fostering a better understanding of how we grieve and react to distress we, as friends, can offer comfort to each other during moments of distress. Job's friends were already great friends during the positive moments of Job's life; if they had been taught to understand grief and mourning they could have actualized that friendship during the negative moments of his life as well.

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