

The Book of Job: The Power of Dialogue as Healing in the Midst of Depression and Grief

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Introduction

“My lips will speak no wrong, nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me to say you are right; I will maintain my integrity until I die. I persist in my righteousness and will not yield; I shall be free of reproach as long as I live.” (Job 27:4-6 ; JPS Translation)

Throughout time human beings have asked: “Why do we suffer?” As mortal, flawed beings with the capacity for both good and evil (and everything in between), the question of suffering is inescapable for all people. Whether we become sick, lose a loved one, or experience some sort of injustice or tragedy, we may ask in our suffering: *Why did this happen? Why did this happen to me? Where is God in all of this?*

The messiness, harshness and unresolvable parts of life - particularly those parts involving suffering - become most difficult when met with a seemingly neat theology. Job endures an incredible number of hardships - he loses his health, his wealth and property, and worst of all his children. In the ancient world, such a loss must have had a reason in God’s divine plan; that, coupled with a reward/punishment system, means that somehow Job himself must be at fault. Job, however, refuses to be a victim, nor does he admit any inner fault of his own that caused his suffering. Job, as he says in the verses above, maintains his integrity and refuses to accept the paradigms of his day. He demands an audience with God to answer to his suffering, and he receives it.

The Book of Job is a masterpiece in our Bible. Job tackles this larger-than-life question of suffering, by allowing Job to fully lament and rage at God. Through the framework of Job’s friends, whom God later chastises as wrong, the text seeks a more nuanced understanding of God, suffering and the world around us, but it can only happen through Job’s integrity, perseverance, and willingness to argue.

Unfortunately, Job’s prolific arguments provide a striking contrast to the state of suffering in our society. In society it is considered improper to show strong emotions in public or in the workplace, unless one is at a funeral, shiva or memorial service. I believe this is mirrored in synagogues, where congregants do not openly mourn or show bereavement during healing and mourning prayers. Instead of embracing our own suffering, we silence it. Moreover, the Book of Job traditionally read on Tisha B’Av, which is not part of the Reform holiday cycle - therefore Reform Jews rarely encounter the text itself. Facing suffering of ourselves and each other can be difficult and uncomfortable, and our society enables us to shroud and avoid it.

Purpose of the Text Immersion

With this work I engage in the book of Job and create a modern but still critical translation of the text. In addition, I explore avenues by which other Jewish professionals can introduce Job to congregants, either by sermons (a sample included) or by means of study guides (which I include). This study will aim to reintroduce Reform Jews to the beauty of the book of Job, and use it as a lens for grappling with internal suffering, as well as a model for how to best support others who are in suffering.

Chapter 1

1 A man was¹ in the land of Uz named Job. And he was a plainly blameless,² upright³ man, who feared God and shunned evil⁴. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 And his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred she-donkeys, and many servants. And this man was greater than any of the Easterners.

4 And his sons would go and hold banquets, each one in his house on his day [of the week]⁵; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5. When a round of feast days was over, Job sent [word] to them to sanctify themselves. He rose early in the morning and sacrificed burnt offerings, one for each of them, since Job said, “Maybe my children sinned and blasphemed⁶ God in their hearts.” This was what Job did all his days.

6 And it was one day, the children of God⁷ arrived and officially reported themselves to God, and the Adversary⁸ came along with them.

¹ According to the Anchor Bible, the regular formula is “ויהי איש”, “there was a man”; yet the narrative here begins “איש היה”, “a man was.” This construction alerts the viewer that there is no historical connection between Job and any other preceding narrative or character. (Pope 3).

² Hebrew “תם”, a word with varied uses across the Bible. Noah is “*tam* among his generation,” and Jacob is “*tam*”, preferring to remain in the tent unlike Esau. In King David’s song after God saves him, David says he was *tamim* before God (II Sam 22:24). Psalms describes the ideal person who sojourns in God’s tent as *tamim* (15:2, 18:23, 37:18, 84:12), which JPS translates as “blameless”. Moreover, Amos chastises Israel who detests the תמים plea of the arbiter, and animals are tamim, perfect and complete without blemish, in Leviticus. This is difficult to capture in English, so I chose “plainly blameless.”

³ “ישר” is often translated as upright; can also mean “straight.” In I Kings 3:6, Solomon says his father David walked with God and was ישר; in 9:4, God advises Solomon to “you walk before Me the way David walked before me with תם (of heart) and ישר.” In this case, ישר seems to indicate alignment between God’s commands and his servant’s actions - Noah also walks with God, and builds the ark without argument. So perhaps Job, like Noah and David, follows God’s laws without complaint and full integrity of heart.

⁴ This next phrase seems to emphasize just how much Job tried to “walk with God” and be as obedient as possible.

⁵ Determined by Soncino’s commentary. I prefer the logic of this translation because there are seven sons, therefore each hosted one feast each day of the week.

⁶ All translations say “blasphemed” even though the root ברך means blessed. Soncino cites ibn Ezra and Rashi, who both agree it is a euphemism for its antonym.

⁷ Literal term. Interestingly, God’s name changes from Elohim to God.

⁸ השטן, “Ha-Satan.” According to Soncino, “his part is to oppose men in their pretensions to a right standing with God.” (p2). First seen in Zechariah 3:1, with ha-satan standing to the right of God, and was originally in 2 Sam 24:1 before being changed to God (Soncino 2). *Ha-satan* appears as a proper name in I Chronicles 21:1, who rose against Israel and incited David to “number” Israel. Like Job, this verse suggests ha-satan is a catalyst for the rest of the story. I decided against “Satan” or “the Satan” (Soncino, Anchor) because the ה does not suggest a proper name, and because of the Christian implications of the name. Mitchell chooses “the Accuser,” an interesting choice because it describes ha-satan’s behavior towards God, while “Adversary” suggests the behavior is his intrinsic nature. Additionally, it is not clear if ha-satan is an angel or a different force entirely.

7 And God said to the Adversary, “Where did you come from?” And the Adversary answered, “I have been here and there, walking all over the earth.”

8 And God said to the Adversary, “Did you notice⁹ My servant Job? For there is no one like him on earth - a plainly blameless upright man, who fears God and shuns evil.”

9 The Adversary answered God, “Does Job fear God for nothing¹⁰?”
Have you not put a hedge around him, his household and all that he has?¹¹
You have blessed the work of his hands, and his animals¹² prosper all over the land.
But if you sent your hand and touched everything he has, he will surely curse¹³ you to your face.”

12 And God said to the Adversary, “Look, everything that belongs to him is now under your authority¹⁴; only do not lay a hand on him.¹⁵”

And the Adversary left God’s presence.¹⁶

13 And it was one day, Job’s sons¹⁷ and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of the eldest brother.

14 And a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the she-asses were grazing alongside them, 15 when the Sabeans fell¹⁸ upon them and took them, and they slaughtered the youths¹⁹, and only I have escaped to tell you.”

16 As this one was²⁰ still speaking another one came and said, “A fire²¹ of God fell from the heavens and onto the sheep and the youths and consumed them, and only I have escaped to tell you.”

⁹ Lit “Have you put your heart”

¹⁰ First appears in Gen 29:15, Laban asks Joseph “will you serve me for nothing?” i.e. without wages. Other references such as Exo 21:2 and 21:11, 1 Sam 19:5 and 2 Sam 24:24 suggest חנם means for nothing or for naught.

¹¹ Mitchell’s translation. Other commentators also use “fence.”

¹² Same word קנה is used to describe Job’s animal possessions in verse 3.

¹³ Again, the verb “ברך” is used as an antonym.

¹⁴ Lit. “in your hand.” ‘Now’ added for colloquial reasons.

¹⁵ Lit. “do not send your hand.” It suggests that the Adversary may destroy any of Job’s belongings but may not physically harm nor kill Job himself. (The Adversary also does not harm Job’s wife.)

¹⁶ Lit. “God’s face.”

¹⁷ “...ויהי היום ובניו...” JPS uses “One day,” but the vav in “ובניו” suggests that it was on the same day that the Adversary spoke with God.

¹⁸ The imagery of falling continues throughout all four messages.

¹⁹ Lit, “put to the sword.”

²⁰ Lit, “this one.”

²¹ “Fire” is the literal translation, though other commentators use “lightning.”

17 As this one was still speaking another one came and said, “Three bands of Chaldeans raided the camels and took them and slaughtered the youths, and only I have escaped to tell you.”

18 As this one was still speaking another one came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother, 19 when suddenly a great wind came from the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. It fell on the youths and they died, and only I have escaped to tell you.”

20 Job rose and slashed²² his robe, tore off his hair, and fell to the ground and prostrated himself, saying,

21 “Naked did I leave my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. God gave, and God took, and the Name of God is blessed.”²³

22 In all of this, Job did not sin, but neither did he give offensive²⁴ to God.

Chapter 2

1 And it was one day, the divine beings arrived and officially reported themselves to God, and the Accuser came along with them.²⁵

2 God said to the Accuser, “Where did you come from?” And the Accuser answered, “I have been here and there, walking all over the earth.”^{26,27}

3 God said to the Accuser, “ Did you notice My servant Job? For there is no one like him on earth - a plainly blameless, fully obedient man, who fears God and shuns evil.²⁸ And still, he is strong in his integrity, even though you incited me to freely destroy him.”

4 The Accuser answered²⁹ God, “Skin is skin;³⁰ everything a man has he will give for his life. 5 But send your hand and strike him in his flesh, he will surely curse you to your face.”

6 And God said to the Accuser, “He is in your hand, only preserve his life.”

²² Lit “tore”; I chose “slashed” to better reflect the harshness of the moment.

²³ While the other two uses of בָּרַךְ were used to mean “curse,” this instance must mean “blessed,” otherwise the story would not progress to its second stage, nor would Job seek dialogue with God.

²⁴ Occurs only in Job and in Jeremiah 23:13, “In Semaria I saw a תַּפְלָה.” Could also mean blaspheme.

²⁵ The language is almost exactly parallel with 1:6.

²⁶ Parallel with 1:7

²⁷ Why doesn’t the Accuser respond with his actions towards Job?

²⁸ Parallel with 1:8.

²⁹ The Accuser only speaks in answers.

³⁰ According to JPS, a proverb whose meaning is uncertain. Regardless, from context it seems to suggest that a person’s skin is their most personal, valuable and vulnerable possession.

7 And the Accuser left God's presence, and smote Job with severe boils³¹ from head to toe.³²

8 and he took a potsherd to scratch himself, as he sat in ashes.

9 And his wife said to him, "How can you still maintain your humility? Bless God and die!"

10 And he said to her, "Your words are like the speech of a base³³ woman. You say we receive goodness from God, but do we not also receive evil?" In all of this, Job didn't sin with his lips.

11 And Job's three friends heard all of the evil that came upon him. And they came to him, each man from his place - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Na'amite. And they met together to go and console and comfort him.

12 And when their eyes saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices in bitter wails; and each tore his clothing and threw dust into the air and onto his head.

13 And they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, yet³⁴ no one spoke a word to him, for they saw the magnitude of his pain.³⁵

Chapter 3

1 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.³⁶

2 Job spoke, saying:

3 "Perish³⁷ the day on which I was born, and the night on which one said, 'a male³⁸ was conceived.'

³¹ The word שחין, boils, is the same used for one of the ten plagues, but here it is magnified with "רע", literally meaning evil.

³² Lit, "the sole of his foot to the crown of his head."

³³ Can also mean "bastard" or "disgraceful."

³⁴ JPS translates as "and," but I see this as "but" or "yet"; even though his friends were with him for an entire week's time, no one spoke to him.

³⁵ Many translators chose "suffering," but I prefer the literal translation "pain," to better encapsulate his physical state - both manifest from the boils but also his emotional turmoil.

³⁶ Lit יומו "his day," but the context of the poem makes it clear that Job does not curse the present day, but the day of his birth.

³⁷ Mitchell and Anchor translate "יאבד" as "damn" and "God damn." Translator chose "mourn" as direct translation. In Esther 4:16, Queen Esther says "וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי", "If I perish, I perish."

³⁸ Lit גבר, which is very gender specific and implies strength, mightiness. Can also mean a warrior, implying that Job was born with power that was taken away.

4 “May that day be darkness. May God not seek of it from on high, and let light not shine upon it.

5 “May darkness and the shadow of death³⁹ claim it; may it be smothered by a cloud; let what makes the day black terrify it.⁴⁰

6 “May that day be taken to obscurity; may it not be included in the days of the year, may it not come in the counting of [lunar] months.⁴¹

7 “Behold, may that night be desolate⁴²; may there be no shouts of joy⁴³ in it.

8 “May those who curse it⁴⁴ curse this day, those who are destined to awaken Leviathan.

9 “May the day be snuffed out among the stars of twilight; may it seek light in vain⁴⁵; and may it not be seen in the eyelids of the morning.⁴⁶

10 “Because it did not close the door of my belly,⁴⁷ or hide trouble from my eyes.

11 “Why did I not die from the womb, expiring as I exited [my mother’s] belly?

12 “How come⁴⁸ there were there knees to receive me, and what of the breasts that I sucked?⁴⁹

13 “For if so, I would be lying still, sleeping, and I would be at rest,

³⁹ צלמות, commentaries also translate as “gloom.” Famously appears in Psalm 23 as the “valley of the shadow of death.” In Psalm 44:20, Isaiah 9:1, Jer 2:6 and 13:16, tzalmavet refers to a place where the Israelites go as punishment from God, only to be redeemed; in Amos 5:8, God brings on tzalmavet in the morning, and dark in the night. I chose this translation in order to evoke Psalm 23.

⁴⁰ This is the only appearance of כמרי in the Bible; according to Soncino, it comes from the root כמר meaning “black”. He quotes Driver that the blackness “would be eclipses, or the alarming, abnormal darkness of tornadoes or sandstorms.” (10).

⁴¹ Lit “the number of the moons.” Because the Jewish calendar was counted by the moon’s phases, Job names his birthday in this way.

⁴² Soncino notes that the same term is used in Isaiah 49:21 to describe Zion as a barren woman, further adding to the imagery of Job’s mother’s womb. (10)

⁴³ The term רננה is used often to describe joyful shouts and songs of praise to God.

⁴⁴ Soncino quotes Driver who says that enchanters in ancient times could curse a day and make it unlucky. (10)

⁴⁵ Chose Anchor translation

⁴⁶ The term בעפעפי is later used during Birkot haShachar, praising God for removing slumber from the eyelids.

⁴⁷ Strangely, “my womb” would make more sense if it was his mother’s womb. Ibn Ezra explains that Job is referring not to his womb, but the umbilical cord that nourished him as an embryo. (Soncino 11)

⁴⁸ I chose “how come” instead of “why” to note a difference between synonyms למה in the previous verse with מדוע in this verse.

⁴⁹ Job travels in treacherous waters - he does not curse his mother but he comes very close to doing so by cursing the day of his birth.

- 14 "With kings and counselors of the land, the builders of ruins for themselves,
- 15 "Or with princes who had gold and who fill up their houses in silver,
- 16 "Or like one who lies fallen who never was [a stillborn], an infant who never saw light.
- 17 "There the wicked cease to make trouble; and there those without strength can rest.
- 18 "Together prisoners are complacent; they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.
- 19 "Small and great, they are there and the slave is free from the master.
- 20 "Why does he give light to the sufferer, and life to the bitter in spirit?
- 21 "Those who are ready for death but it does not arrive,
- 22 "Who search for it beyond treasure, and are filled with joy to reach the grave?
- 23 "To the male⁵⁰ who has lost his way, in whom God has hedged his hand?
- 24 "For before my bread, my sighing comes; and my roaring pours forth like water.
- 25 "For the fear I feared has come upon me,
- 26 "I had no repose, and I had no calm, and I had no rest, and then trouble came.

Chapter 4

- 1 And Eliphaz the Temanite answered, saying,
- 2 If one tried to give you a word, would you be weary?
But who can stop from words?
- 3 Here, you have disciplined many,
And your hands have strengthened the weak.
- 4 Your words uphold the faint⁵¹,
You give weak knees courage.

⁵⁰ Connects back to גבר in verse 3.

⁵¹ Could also be translated as weak, stumble.

5 But now it comes to you and you are weary⁵²
It touches you, and you are aghast.⁵³

6 Isn't your fear and awe⁵⁴ of God, your confidence,
Your hope, and the humility⁵⁵ of your ways?

7 Please remember, of the innocent, who is punished?
And where are the upright⁵⁶ made extinct?

8 The way I've seen it, those who plow evil,
Will sow mischief, and reap them.⁵⁷

9 They perish from the breath of God⁵⁸,
And cease to be from the wind⁵⁹ of his nose.

10 The great lion roars, the young lion howls,
And the teeth of the small lions are broken.⁶⁰

11 The lion perishes for lack of prey,
And its whelps are scattered.

12 And a word was brought to me in secret,
And my ear took whisper of it.

13 In thought-filled visions of the night⁶¹,
When deep sleep falls upon men,

14 I was overcome with fear and trembling,
And my bones hardened⁶² in fear.

⁵² Same word תלא used in verse 2

⁵³ Pope translation. Soncino translates "affrighted," JPS "unnerved."

⁵⁴ I chose both translations of יראה to better capture its meaning. Some translations kept "fear of God" (Soncino) or translated to "piety" (JPS)

⁵⁵ The mention of תם reminds us of Job's first description in chapter 1 as תם, humble.

⁵⁶ Here is the second of Job's descriptors, ישר. This seems to undercut Eliphaz's argument: he says that Job must be guilty if he was punished, yet he was described as תם וישר !

⁵⁷ According to Soncino, Eliphaz may be quoting Proverbs 22:8 : "He who sows injustice shall reap evil, his rod of wrath will fail." It is similar but with one important difference: in Proverbs 22:8, the two words used are עולה and און, while here it is און and עמל .

⁵⁸ The general "אל" is used here, not the Tetragrammaton.

⁵⁹ The term רוח also means breath and spirit; God breathes the spirit of life into Adam (נשמת חיים) into the nostrils to give him life (Gen 2:7).

⁶⁰ Soncino quotes Buitenweiser: "Some modern commentators suggest that verses 10f were familiar proverbial sayings to illustrate the belief that sooner or later the powerful wicked are overthrown" (p15). The three sizes of lions might be metaphors for different kinds of powerful sinners.

⁶¹ JPS translation

⁶² Also "quake" (JPS), "made to shake" (Soncino)

15 And a spirit⁶³ passed in front of my face,
Making the hair of my flesh bristle.⁶⁴

16 It stood, and I could not discern its disposition
A form was before my eyes,
I heard a still voice⁶⁵.

17 Can a mortal be just⁶⁶ before God?
Can he, from his doings, be purified?

18 If He cannot put trust in His servants,
And if he charges folly⁶⁷ in his Divine messengers,

19 Then how much more so those who dwell in houses of clay,
Whose origin is dust,
Who are crushed before the moth.

20 Between morning and evening they are struck,
They perish forever without any regarding it.⁶⁸

21 Isn't their cord pulled up
And they die, and without wisdom?

⁶³ The term רוח was previously used to describe the breath of God's nostrils. רוח אלוהים, or the spirit of God, encounters individuals by way of a prophecy or truth-teaching. Seen in 2 Samuel 23:2, Isaiah 48:16, 61:1, Zechariah 7:12, Nehemiah 9:30, Joel 3:1, 3:2.

⁶⁴ JPS translation

⁶⁵ Also seen in I Kings 19:12; "and after the fire was a still, small voice."

⁶⁶ JPS translates יצדק as "acquitted," unsure why.

⁶⁷ This is the only time this word תהלה appears in the Bible. Soncino translates as "charge with folly," citing "cognate Ethiopic, meaning 'fault, error.'" (16-17)

⁶⁸ Soncino translation

Chapter 5

17 Look here, happy is the mortal⁶⁹ with whom God establishes⁷⁰; and do not reject⁷¹ the discipline of the Almighty.

18 For He causes pain, but also binds it up⁷²; He smites, but his hands make whole.

19 In Six troubles he will deliver to you, yet in the seventh⁷³ will not strike evil upon you.

Chapter 6

8 Oh if He would give, that what I ask would come; God would give me what I yearn⁷⁴ for!

9 and God would consent, and crush⁷⁵ me; will let loose His hand⁷⁶ and cut⁷⁷ me off⁷⁸.

⁶⁹ “אנוש” is a term often seen in Psalms (9:19, 9:20, 10:18, 26:9 55:13). *Mah Enosh* (8:4) is an expression of wonder and admiration: with all of God’s incredible power and wisdom, “what is a mortal” whom God pays attention to, and given him a sense of divinity. In Job, it is clearly used in a mocking, sarcastic tone. “Mortal” here seems better than “man” as it is gender neutral and contrasts with God’s infinitude.

⁷⁰ Has a range of semantic meanings, from established to prepare to appoint. In Genesis 41:32, Pharaoh’s dreams are *nachon*, established by God; Yitro tells his son in law Moses that his actions are not *nachon* in Exodus 8:26; Exodus 19:11 “let them be ready, *nachon*, by the third day”; Exodus 34:2 “be ready, *nachon*, in the morning”; again a thing is *nachon*, established in Deut 13:24. In 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles, the word is used to “establish” the throne or kingdom, as well as Psalm 9:7, 24:2. A man is “established” by God in Psalm 37:23.

⁷¹ The term מַעַס is pivotal in Job. In Job 42, Job does this at the very end of his reply to God, and so translating it has large implications for the narrative. I found definitions “loathe, despise and reject”, found in Eliphaz’s words parallel Proverbs 3:11, which says to not loathe/despise/reject, על תמַעַס, the *Musar* or discipline of God. (the onl God rejects the man who does not believe in God in Psalms 53:6, and the Israelites loathe the land of Israel in 106:24. Also found in Lev 26:15, 26:43, Num 11:20, 14:31, Judg 9:38, Psa 15:4, Isaiah 30:12, 33:8, 33:15, Ezekiel 20:13, 20:16, 20:24, Amos 2:4, 5:21. I am keeping the translation open to see how I choose to translate the term in 42.

⁷² Soncino connects with Deuteronomy 32:39 (“מַחֲצִי וְאֵי אֶרְפָּא”) and the themes of Hosea 1, in which God punishes Israel for Israel’s own good.

⁷³ Eliphaz elaborates on these seven “cardinal sins” (Soncino 21 in verses 20-23. Pope, Anchor Bible, states that naming a number with its sequel is popular in Hebrew poetry, and Ugaritic myths and epics (45). [good]

⁷⁴ Lit. “hope,” but the term means something stronger than typical English definition. God is our hope in Psa 71:5; Proverbs 19:18 pleads with the reader to teach his son while there is still hope; Prov 26:12 and 29:20 exclaim that fools have more “hope” than an arrogant men. And if Naomi even had “hope” to marry and bear sons, it would be too long for Orpah and Ruth (Ruth 1:12). Also in Jer 31:17, Lam 3:29, Ezek 19:5, 37:11 and Zech 9:12.

⁷⁵ Anchor notes the connection with Isaiah 53:10: “But God chose to crush him by disease,” though he had done no violence (חַמָּס) or spoken no falsehood. (50).

⁷⁶ A handwritten note in my Soncino commentary, from its previous owner, notes the irony here: that God usually opens His hand in mercy, and here Job asks for the “mercy” to end his life. [yes]

Chapter 7

- 1 Is there not a time of service for a mortal on earth? Are his days not like a hireling?
- 2 Like a slave who pants for shade, like a hireling who yearns for his wage.
- 3 Thus I have inherited months of futility, weary nights are appointed to me.
- 4 If I lie down, I think, "When will I get up?" Night drags on⁷⁹, and I am full of tossing and turning until dawn.
- 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of earth, my skin is broken and oozing.
- 6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and run out with no hope.
- 7 Remember that my life is a breath,⁸⁰ my eye will no longer see good again.
- 8 The eye that gazes on me will not see me,
Your eyes are in me, yet I am gone.⁸¹
- 9 A cloud evaporates and vanishes, so too he who descends to Sheol does not ascend.
- 10 He returns no more to his house, and his place no longer recognizes him.
- 11 Even⁸² I will not restrain my mouth,
I will speak in the anguish⁸³ of my breath,

⁷⁷ Anchor notes this is a technical term for a weaver. Also found in Exodus 28:32, 35:35, 39:22, 39:27, in regards to building the Mishkan; also found in Isaiah 19:9, 59:5; a comparable verse might be found in Isaiah 38:12 "I have rolled up my life like a weaver."

⁷⁸ I like Mitchell's poetic rendering of the end of this verse, "snipped my life like a thread." (p27)

⁷⁹ The meaning of מַדָּד is uncertain. Soncino explains that "Rashi cites 'my sleep fled (tiddad)' in Genesis 31:40. But there the root is *nadad* from which *tossings to and fro* (nedudim) is derived. *Middad* is pi'el of *madad*, 'to measure' and signifies 'to be extended.' (p29)

⁸⁰ Can also mean "wind" or "spirit"

⁸¹ Both Rashi and Mesudat David understand this verse to be directed at God, and not Job's friends.

⁸² Appears in Eccl 1:17, 2:15, 8:14, and Sam 19:24.

⁸³ "צַר" appears in Gen 42:21, as Joseph's brothers as they realize they looked on the "anguish of his soul," which the text may be paralleling here, using רָחַם instead of נֶפֶשׁ. Jeremiah 4:31, 6:24, 49:24, and 50:43 use צַר in the context a woman's childbearing pangs.

I will complain⁸⁴ in the bitterness of my soul.

12 Am I a sea, or a dragon⁸⁵
That you must set watch over me?

13 When I say, "My bed will comfort me, my couch will lift my complaints

14 You frighten me with dreams, and terrify me with visions.

15 and my soul chooses strangulation, death from my bones.

16 I reject it; I will not live forever; leave me alone for my days are vapor.⁸⁶

17 What is a mortal, that You should magnify him, and that You should set your heart on him?

18 That You should remember him every morning, and investigate him every moment?

19 How long will you not look away from me, let me be until I swallow my spittle?

20 If I have sinned, what have I done to You, Human-Watcher?
Why have You made me your target, and I am a burden to myself?

21 Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?
For now I will lie in dust,
and you seek me I shall not be.

Chapter 8

1 Bildad the Shuhite responded, saying,

2 For how long will you say these words,
The sayings of your mouth are like a great wind.

⁸⁴ Only appears here and in Psalms 77:4, where the narrator Asaf "complains" and his spirit falls in a time of distress.

⁸⁵ Soncino describes how God limits the areas of the ocean, and in a Babylonian Assyrian creation myth, God subdues a dragon and guards him from destroying the world. (31) God creates "tananim," sea monsters, in Gen 1:21; they are also mentioned in Psalms 44, 74, 91 and 148. In Exodus 7:9 and 7:19, Aaron throws down the rod which becomes tanin, a serpent (suggesting that the animal is more of a sea monster than a regular snake).

⁸⁶ Connection to hevel in Ecclesiastes.

3 Does God thwart⁸⁷ justice?
Does the Almighty thwart righteousness?

4 If your children sinned against Him,
Then He dispatched them by way of their transgressions.

5 If you seek diligently⁸⁸ for God
And to the Almighty you beseech,

6 If you are pure⁸⁹ and upright⁹⁰,
Then God will stir concerning you,⁹¹
And restore your righteous abode.

7 Even though your beginning is small,
At your end you will grow greatly.

Chapter 9

1 And Job responded, saying:

2 Truly⁹² I know this is so,
How can a mortal prove right against God?

3 If one desired a legal quarrel⁹³ with Him
He would not answer one [charge] in a thousand.

4 Wise of heart and courageous in honor -
Who has challenged him and come out whole?

5 He who moves mountains without their knowledge,
Who upends them in his fury.

⁸⁷ Psalm 119:78 liars “thwart” God; Psalm 146:9, God “thwarts” the wicked. Also can mean crooked, Ecclesiastes 1:15: What is crooked/bent cannot be straightened.

⁸⁸ The narrator seeks God or goodness in Psalm 63:1, 78:34; Proverbs 1:28, 7:15, 8:17, 11:27.

⁸⁹ “זך” is used in the Torah in the context of pure oil and frankincense (Exo 27:20, 30:34, Lev 24:2, 24:7); a man is described as clean and pure in Proverbs 16:2, 20:11, 21:8.

⁹⁰ “ישר” is used again from Chapter 1, and we know that Bildad’s logic is flawed: Job *is* ישר and yet he was still “punished.”

⁹¹ Unsure why JPS translates this as “God will protect you.”

⁹² Also seen in Ruth 3:12, 2 Kings 19:17, and Isaiah 37:18

⁹³ The term seems to have grown from a “dispute,” usually occurring between equals: herdsmen (Gen 13:7), children of Israel (17:7), between men (Deut 25:1), to a suit such as in 2 Samuel 15:2 and 15:4.

6 Who agitates⁹⁴ the earth from its place
Until its pillars tremble.⁹⁵

7 Who tells the sun⁹⁶ to not rise;
Who seals up the stars,

8 Who alone spread out the sky,
And trod on the high places of the sea.

9 Maker of the Bear and Orion,⁹⁷
And Pleiades, and the chambers of the south wind.

10 Maker of great things without explanation,
And wonders without number.

9:14-24

14 How then can I answer him?
Or choose my words against him?
15 That even though I am righteous, I would not reply,
To my judge I would beg mercy.

16 If I called to Him and He replied,
I do not believe that His ear would receive my voice.

17 For he strikes⁹⁸ me with a storm⁹⁹,
He wounds me greatly without cause.

18 He does not give me the return of my breath¹⁰⁰,
He only sates me with bitterness.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Outside of Job, only appears Isaiah 14:3 and Habakuk 3:2; can also mean turmoil.

⁹⁵ "יתפלצון" only occurs here.

⁹⁶ Appears in Judges 8:13 and 14:18.

⁹⁷ Different interpretations of which constellations are *ash vikisil*. According to Anchor, *ash* is probably Ursa Major (traditionally a bear), and *kisil*, which means "fool," is probably Orion, who in ancient folklore was a hunter who offended a god. (70)

⁹⁸ "ישופני" appears four times in the Bible, in Genesis, the man will strike the serpent's head, and the serpent will strike the man's heel (3:5); in Psalm 139:11, the darkness strikes the narrator.

⁹⁹ If read with a shin instead of a sin, becomes "with a hair" (as JPS translates), but "storm" makes more sense in this context. Also appears in Nahum 1:3, in which God appears in a whirlwind and a storm. When God appears in 38:1 it is in a storm.

¹⁰⁰ Could also mean spirit.

¹⁰¹ Possibly connects to the bitterness that fills Naomi after the death of her husband and sons, choosing to call herself "Mara" (Ruth 1:20)

19 If for honor - He has the might,
And if for a trial in court, who would be my witness?

20 If I am innocent,
My mouth would condemn me,
I am plainly blameless¹⁰², but he makes me crooked.

21 I am plainly blameless, I do not know my soul,
I reject¹⁰³ my life.

22 It¹⁰⁴ is all one, just as I say,
"He destroys¹⁰⁵ the plainly blameless and the guilty."

23 If a disease suddenly brings death,
He will mock the trial of the innocent.¹⁰⁶

24 The earth is given to the wicked One,
He covers the faces of judges.
If it's not Him, then who is it?

9:32-33

32 For he is not like a man, whom I can reply to;
And go together to court.

33 There is no arbiter between us,
To place his hand on both of us.

I'm just blown away by Job. This might be my favorite chapter so far. His counter to Bildad is eloquent, poetic, succinct and powerful. I was especially moved by line 21 - "I am plainly blameless"; Job plainly states his innocence; "I do not know my soul"; the world has turned upside down and he is completely lost save for his integrity; "I loathe, despise and reject my life"; perhaps suicidal, Job uses that very powerful, enigmatic word to sum up his suffering. I am drawn to the word "ma'as" and tempted to include all three translations of the word - there doesn't seem to be a word in English powerful enough to communicate it.

¹⁰² Bildad has brought up "yashar," and now Job says he is "tam."

¹⁰³ JPS translates as "sick of life," losing the connection of the term *ovm* throughout Job - despise, loathe and reject and at the very end.

¹⁰⁴ Here the "it" is mankind's destiny, regardless of our actions.

¹⁰⁵ Earlier in the Bible means to complete or finish; but later by Psalms means to consume, fail or destroy (Psalm 37:20, 39:10, 59:13, 71:13)

¹⁰⁶ I believe here Job is saying that just like a deadly disease that strikes both righteous and wicked, so too does God strike people regardless of their actions.

Job responds to Bildad, “If it’s not God, then who is it?” Job knows that he did everything by the book, yet the only being powerful enough to punish him is God (it seems that Job is unaware of the Adversary, and regardless he has disappeared from the narrative for good). Later in the chapter Job also explains the unfair power dynamic that God holds: “For he is not like a man,” whom Job can bring to court and air his grievances. God remains all-powerful, all-destructive without recourse. Furthermore, Job paints a picture of a God whose power over the earth is destructive, like a tyrant, making things quake and seal up and become dark - this is like the darkness Job finds himself in as he describes in earlier chapters.

I am currently going through my own suffering right now, and Job has been a cathartic lifeline. He gives words to what there seem to be no words to. I can connect with his pain, his loneliness, and his anger. There is certainly something special to reading Job while in the midst of emotional turmoil, and while it does not impact my translation per se, it does add even more layers of meaning and appreciation.

Chapter 12:1-3

1 And Job responded saying,

2 Truly you [all] are the people,
And with you wisdom will die.

3 But I too have a mind like you,
And I am not lower than you.

12: 20-25

20 He turns aside the speech of the trustworthy,
And takes the judgment of elders.

21 He pours disgrace upon the generous,
And weakens¹⁰⁷ the girdle of the mighty.

22 He uncovers valleys from the darkness,
And brings out light from the valley of the shadow.

23 He exalts nations and then destroys them,
He spreads nations, and then relents.

¹⁰⁷ Has a multitude of meanings throughout Bible but to slack or relax makes most sense in context of a girdle. Also used in this way in Joshua 10:6, 18:3, 2 Samuel 4:1, 24:16, I Chronicles 21:15, 28:20, Ezra 4:4.

24 He turns aside the mind of the leaders of the earth,
He leads them astray without a path.

25 They will grope¹⁰⁸ in the darkness without light,
He leads them astray as if they are drunk.

Job angrily and indignantly replies to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar that they “are the people, and with you wisdom will die.” He calls out their robotic, illogical responses and continues to assert that he is no less dignified. Job then continues his assault on God as a destroyer, a force of wandering and confusion. It is interesting that in 9:34-35 Job says that he “would speak without fear” of God if God didn’t frighten him, but Job seems quite fearless in his words. I am interested in the fact that Job does not speak of his suffering specifically; he doesn’t talk about his kids, his livestock, or any of the other things he’s lost. It makes me think that Job is really a mouthpiece for the lack of morality and sense in the world, rather than a limited character.

Chapter 13

1 My eye has seen all of this,
My ear has heard and understood it all.

2 What you know, I know also,
And I am not lower than you.¹⁰⁹

3 Indeed I shall speak before the Almighty,
I insist on arguing with God.

4 Indeed you are inventing lies,
You are all doctors of idols.¹¹⁰

5 If you would keep completely silent¹¹¹
It would be wisdom for you.

6 Listen to my arguments,

¹⁰⁸ Also found in the darkness that can be felt in the ninth plague in Exo 10:21; the blind man who gropes in the darkness in Deut 28:29.

¹⁰⁹ Repeated in 12:3

¹¹⁰ JPS translates as “quacks,” and other places as “worthless doctors,” but ללל in every other case in the Bible means idols, including Lev 26:1, 19:4, Psalm 96:5, Psalm 97:7. I think Job is referring to usage here in Psalms, doctors of falsehood.

¹¹¹ Silence or holding one’s peace; also seen in Gen 24:21, Gen 34:5, Exo 14:14, Numbers 30:4.

And listen to the pleading of my lips.

7 To God, would you speak iniquity?
To Him¹¹², would you speak deceit?

8 Would you show His face favor?
Would you have a legal quarrel with God?

9 Would it be for good that he would search you out?
Or as one deceives¹¹³ a mortal, will you deceive him?

10 He will surely rebuke you,
If in secret your faces lift up in favor.

11 Does not His high position¹¹⁴ terrify you,
And does fear of Him not fall upon you?

12 Your memorials will be examples of dust;
heroes of clay, you heroes.

13 Withhold yourselves from me, so that I may speak my mind¹¹⁵;
And what passes [because of it] what [do I mind]?

14 For what? I put my flesh in my teeth
But my soul I will put in my hand.

15 Even though he slays¹¹⁶ me, I will not wait,¹¹⁷
In spite of my ways, I will rebuke Him.

16 This will also be my salvation;
For a polluted one¹¹⁸ cannot come before Him.

20 Just do not do two things to me, and then before you, I will hold no secrets

¹¹² "Him" is gendered only for translating purposes, not theological.

¹¹³ The same term is used for Laban's actions against Jacob (Gen 31:7) and Pharaoh's deceit towards Moses and the Israelites (Exo 8:29).

¹¹⁴ Used Psalm 62:4 as reference, for this word has multiple meanings depending on context.

¹¹⁵ Literally, "so that I may speak myself"

¹¹⁶ Only appears here, Job 24:14, and Psalm 139:19.

¹¹⁷ Potentially an error that should be "I will wait for him"; I think it still makes sense so I have chosen to not change it

¹¹⁸ I found this verse very enigmatic. The term "polluted" is also used in Numbers 35:33 and Psalm 106:38, as blood pollutes the land; in Isaiah 24:5 the earth is polluted by its inhabitants.

21 Get your hand far away from me; and do not make me fear your terror.

22 Then call, and I will answer you; or I will speak, and you will answer me.

23 How many sins and transgressions have I made?

My iniquities and my sins, make me know them.

24 Why do you hide your face from me; do you think me as your enemy?

25 Will you cause a driven leaf to tremble,
Will you pursue after dry gathered straw?¹¹⁹

26 That you wrote bitter things against me,
And made me inherit the sins of my birth.

27 You put my legs in the stocks, and guard everything after me;
Around the soles of my feet, you draw a line.

Chapter 14

7 For a tree has hope,
If it is cut down, it will again sprout, and its young branches will not cease.

8 If the root becomes old in the earth and becomes dust, and dies in the ground,

9 The smell of water will make it flower, and make boughs like a plant.

10 But a grown man¹²⁰ dies and goes low; a human perishes and where are they?

11 As water goes from the sea, and the river decays and dries,

12 So too does man lie down, and not rise up;
Until the sky is no more, they do not awake, nor are they stirred from their sleeping.

13 That He would give me concealment in She'ol,
Keep me secret, until your anger passes;
That you would give me a set time, and remember me

14 If a grown man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my service I would wait until he came to pass me on.

¹¹⁹ Also appears in Exo 5:7, 5:12, and Numbers 15:32.

¹²⁰ Chosen to reflect gendered term “gever” as opposed to “adam” or “enosh”

15 You would call, and I would answer you;
You would desire the work of my hands.

Chapter 38

1 And God answered Job from the tempest, saying,

2 Who is this who darkens counsel,
In his words without knowledge?

3 Gird¹²¹ your loins like a man, ¹²²
I will ask you and you will tell Me.

4 Where were you when I laid Earth's foundations?
Speak if you know of understanding.

5 Who was there when she was measured, do you know?
Or who pitched her with a line?

6 On what are her sockets¹²³ sunk?
And who set down her cornerstone?

7 When the morning stars sang together,
And all the divine beings shouted in joy?

8 And who closed the sea behind double-doors,
When it gushed out of the womb?

9 When I put on clouds to clothe it,
In thick clouds I swaddled it,

10 When I made breakers for it,
And I set up a bar and doors,

11 And said, "Until here you may come but no more,
Here your great waves will stop"?

¹²¹ Also found in I Samuel 2:4, 2 Samuel 22:40, 2 Kings 1:8, Psalm 18:32, Psalm 18:39, usually refers to God girding one with strength.

¹²² Chosen to reflect gendered term "gever" as opposed to "adam" or "enosh"

¹²³ The same term is used for the Mishkan in Exodus 26:19, 26:21, 26:25, and multiple times in chapters 27, 35, and 36.

12 Have you ever commanded the break of day,
Assigned the dawn its place?

13 Gripped the corners of the earth,
And shaken out the wicked from it?

14 It upends itself like clay under a seal,
Till its colors are like a garment.

15 Their light is withheld from the wicked,
And the upraised arm is shattered.

16 Have you gone to the sources of the sea?
Have you searched and gone to the deep abyss?

17 Have the gates of death been disclosed to you?
Have you seen the gates of the valley of the shadow?

18 Have you built the expanses of the earth?
Tell me if you know all of this.

Chapter 40

3 Job answered God, saying,

4 Here is my voice; what can I return to you [in response]?
I put my hand to my mouth.

5 Once I spoke and I will not reply;
And twice, and I will not add.

6 And God answered Job out of the tempest, saying,

7 Gird your loins like a man,
I will ask you and you will tell Me.

8 Would you indeed¹²⁴ annul¹²⁵ my justice?
Would you condemn me for the sake of your righteousness?

9 Do you have an arm like a god's?

¹²⁴ As seen in Genesis 18:13, 18:23, and 40:16, not as in "nose" or "nostril."

¹²⁵ Can also mean to break, as in to break the covenant or a commandment (Leviticus 26:44, Numbers 15:31); I prefer annul, as used with vows in Numbers 30:8, 30:12.

Do you have a voice that thunders like one?

25 Can you draw out¹²⁶ Leviathan with a hook?¹²⁷
Can you press down his tongue with a band?

26 Can you put a ring in his nose,
Or pierce his cheek with a barb?

27 Would he plead with you greatly?
Would speak softly to you?

28 Would he make a covenant with you
To take him as a lifelong slave?

29 Would you play with him like a bird,
And tie him down for your young women?

Chapter 42

1 And Job answered God, saying,

2 I know that you can do everything,
And nothing can be cut off from you without purpose.

3 Who is this who conceals counsel without knowledge?
Therefore, I spoke and did not understand
Wonders from before me, and I did not know.

4 Please hear and I will speak
I will ask, and you will tell me.

5 I heard you with my ears,
And now I see you with my eyes.

6 Therefore, I reject¹²⁸ and I am comforted,¹²⁹
Regarding dust and ashes.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Also used in Judges 4:7 to “draw out Sisera”

¹²⁷ Also used in Isaiah 19:8, Habakuk 1:15

¹²⁸ I chose “reject” to remain consistent with my translation of the word throughout the book; in my opinion, Job continues to reject the sense of moral order and justice in the world, and yet he is comforted.

¹²⁹ I chose the literal meaning of the word, because I think Job is finally at peace after voicing his suffering.

¹³⁰ I chose to keep this vague, because I think it can fit a variety of meanings. Perhaps Job is at peace with the “dust and ashes” of the livestock and children that he lost, being dust and ashes. Perhaps he regards the

7 After God spoke these words to Job, God said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My anger is kindled against you and against your two neighbors, for you did not speak correctly about me as did my servant Job.

8 "Now, take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job, and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. And let Job my servant pray for you; to him I will lift my face [in favor] and not disgrace you, for you did not speak correctly about me as did my servant Job."

9 And Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Na'amite went and did as God told them, and God lifted his face [in favor] to Job.

10 And God returned Job's fortunes when he prayed on behalf of his neighbors, and God doubled everything Job had before.

11 And all his brothers and sisters and all who knew him came before him to eat bread in his house. And they consoled and comforted him and all the evil that God brought to him. And each man gave one kesitah, and each man gave one gold ring.

12 And God blessed the later years of Job's life more than his former years; he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand she-donkeys.

13 And he had seven sons and three daughters.

14 He called the first Yemimah, the second Ketziah, and the third Keren-hapuch.

15 And one could not find women more beautiful than Job's daughters in the entire land, and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.

16 Job lived after this one hundred and forty years, to see children, and the children of their children - four generations. And Job died an old man, full of days.

entire living world as dust and ashes, and this is what gives him comfort. However, I do not think he is referring to himself as dust and ashes, as some translations might suggest.

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Text studies

For the educator: These text studies are aimed at giving readers a basic understanding of the concepts and characters in the book of Job. They can be used in conjunction with one another or separately.

These text studies are designed so that one can use them without any prior knowledge of Job; however, reading at least the first two chapters can help greatly with context and deeper understanding.

Text studies 1-3: Mourning

Text study 4: The Theodicy Conversation

Text study 5: Job's Final Response: A Closer Look

Text study 6: Job: A feminist reading

Job and Mourning, part one

Introduction

At the beginning of the book we learn that Job is one of the most powerful, wealthy men in the world in terms of possessions, livestock, and many children. Job fully meets God's approval. He goes beyond expectations, even making animal sacrifices for his children, to make sure all is in done correctly in relation to God. The Adversary, a divine being, tells God that even his best servant Job would not be able to withstand tragedy, and in times of calamity, will relinquish his loyalty to God. God and the Adversary, then, put Job to the test. The first scene below describes four messengers who approach Job, all with bad news that continues to escalate to the deaths of his children. Job reacts in a way that fits with the traditional mourning practices, but he does not relinquish loyalty to God, as the Adversary predicts.

Job Hears the News

TRANSLATION (JOB 1:13–23)

Job 1: 13 And it was one day, Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of the eldest brother.

14 And a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the she-asses were grazing alongside them,

15 when the Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and they slaughtered the youths, and only I have escaped to tell you."

16 As this one was still speaking another one came and said, "A fire of God fell from the heavens and onto the sheep and the youths and consumed them, and only I have escaped to tell you."

17 As this one was still speaking another one came and said, "Three bands of Chaldeans raided the camels and took them and slaughtered the youths, and only I have escaped to tell you."

18 As this one was still speaking another one came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother,

19 when suddenly a great wind came from the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. It fell on the youths and they died, and only I have escaped to tell you."

20 Job rose and slashed his robe, tore off his hair, and fell to the ground and prostrated himself, saying,

21 *"Naked did I leave my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. God gave, and God took, and the Name of God is blessed."*

22 In all of this, Job did not sin, but neither did he give offensive to God.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What do you notice about the four messengers? How do they build on each other? How is there a continued image or feeling of falling?
2. How does Job react to the news? Are any of his actions similar to Jewish mourning traditions today?
3. What do you think about Job's words, which we traditionally recite at funerals
 - a. What do you find comforting about it?
 - b. What do you find problematic about it?
- c. Why do you think it is important that Job doesn't give offense to God?

Suggested take-away: As Job's messengers build on each other Job (and us) fall deeper into the abyss of loss and grief. Job's response, "God gave and God took," is a simple yet profound statement of the reality of Job's situation. He still blesses God's name, but he does not bless God nor God's actions.

Job and Mourning, part two (Job 2:1-13)

Introduction

At the beginning of the book we learn that Job is one of the most powerful, wealthy men in the world in terms of possessions, livestock, and many children. Job fully meets God's approval. He goes beyond expectations, even making animal sacrifices for his children, to make sure all is done correctly in relation to God. The Adversary, a divine being, tells God that even his best servant Job would not be able to withstand tragedy, and in times of calamity, will relinquish his loyalty to God. God and the Adversary, then, put Job to the test. Four messengers approach Job, all with bad news that continues to escalate to the deaths of his children. Job reacts in a way that fits with the traditional mourning practices, but he does not relinquish loyalty to God, as the Adversary predicts. Then, the Adversary challenges God again: what about striking Job personally? God strikes Job with terrible disease and boils. In this scene, Job's three friends react to seeing Job for the first time since these calamities. Their behavior (at this point) serves as a model for interacting with those in mourning.

2:11 And Job's three friends heard all of the evil that came upon him. And they came to him, each man from his place - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Na'amite. And they met together to go and console and comfort him.

12 And when their eyes saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices in bitter wails; and each tore his clothing and threw dust into the air and onto his head.

13 And they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, yet no one spoke a word to him, for they saw the magnitude of his pain.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How do Job's friends react when they see Job and don't recognize him?
2. How have you reacted when you see a friend in pain or in mourning? What do you think is the modern equivalent of what Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar did?
3. Sitting shiva (seven, for seven days) is a traditional Jewish practice in which friends, family and visitors gather at the mourner's home to comfort them. There is a custom in which one always lets the mourner direct conversation. How do you see that originating in Job?
4. 4. What do you think is the power of silence for Job in his mourning?

Suggested take-away: Job's friends act as powerful witnesses to Job's suffering, but their job is not to correct or fix anything. Instead, they mirror Job's pain and sit with him, allowing Job to fully and silently process his grief.

Job and Mourning, part three (Job 3:1-9 and 7:2-8)

Introduction

Job, a wealthy man with many children, suddenly learns that all of his livestock, wealth, and worst of all his children have all been killed and taken from him. He himself is stricken with disease and painful boils all over his body. Job mourns silently for seven days, and now begins to speak.

In this text study, you will hear some of Job's most powerful words as he lashes out against God and the world for this terrible tragedy that has befallen him. The amount of freedom the book gives Job to speak (the majority of the book of Job is Job's monologue), speaks to a Jewish value of communicating one's pain, loss and sorrow, in order to begin the healing process.

Job 3: 1 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.

2 Job spoke, saying:

3 "Perish¹ the day on which I was born, and the night on which one said, 'a male was conceived.'

4 "May that day be darkness. May God not seek of it from on high, and let light not shine upon it.

5 "May darkness and the shadow of death claim it; may it be smothered by a cloud; let what makes the day black terrify it.

6 "May that day be taken to obscurity; may it not be included in the days of the year, may it not come in the counting of [lunar] months.

7 "Behold, may that night be desolate²; may there be no shouts of joy in it.

8 "May those who curse it³ curse this day, those who are destined to awaken Leviathan.

9 "May the day be snuffed out among the stars of twilight; may it seek light in vain; and may it not be seen in the eyelids of the morning.

Job 7:2 Like a slave who pants for shade, like a hireling who yearns for his wage.

3 Thus I have inherited months of futility, weary nights are appointed to me.

4 If I lie down, I think, "When will I get up?" Night drags on, and I am full of tossing and turning until dawn.

5 My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of earth, my skin is broken and oozing.

6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and run out with no hope.

¹ Mitchell and Anchor translate "יִאבֹד" as "damn" and "God damn." JPS translator chose "mourn" as direct translation. In Esther 4:16, Queen Esther says "וְכִאֲשֶׁר אֲבֹדֵי אֲבֹדֵי", "If I perish, I perish."

² Soncino notes that the same term is used in Isaiah 49:21 to describe Zion as a barren woman, further adding to the imagery of Job's mother's womb. *Job, with Hebrew Text and English Translations*. ed Cohen, Rev Dr A. Soncino Books of the Bible. Soncino Press: London, 1960. p10.

³ Soncino quotes Driver who says that enchanters in ancient times could curse a day and make it unlucky. (10)

7 Remember that my life is a breath, my eye will no longer see good again.

8 The eye that gazes on me will not see me,
Your eyes are in me, yet I am gone.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How would you describe Job's mental and physical condition?
2. What does Job want to happen to the day of his birth and why? And why do you think this is what Job says first?
3. If you were a doctor or a psychologist, what would you diagnose him with? Depression, insomnia, suicidal tendencies, and/or something else? (check Web MD or another credible website before making your determinations)
4. What is the power in allowing Job to voice his pain and his suffering?
5. How do Job's words give us the power to not only hear our suffering in Job's voice, but also voice our own suffering?

Job and The Theodicy Conversation (Job 2:9, 4:7-8, 5:17, 8:3-6, 9:14-20)

Introduction

What is theodicy? Theodicy is basically the conversation around why bad things happen to people if there a God and if there is a moral order to the world. Are persons rewarded or punished by their actions? What role does God play - or not play - in that moral order?

This conversation is at the center of the book of Job. In the midst of his suffering, Job contends that he is purely blameless, and did not deserve the punishments given to him. His wife and his friends see the world differently, and so does God who eventually enters into the conversation.

Below is a series of excerpts from Job that more or less encapsulate the spirit of the book's conversation on theodicy. The questions are designed to not only help deepen your understanding but also challenge your own perceptions of theodicy - a challenge that every reader of Job must face.

Job: "Naked did I leave my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. God gave, and God took, and the Name of God is blessed." (1:21)

Job's wife:

Job 2:9: And his wife said to him, "How can you still maintain your humility? Bless/curse God and die!"

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What strikes you about Job's statement? How is it set in the reality of his circumstances?
2. Try reading Job's statement with different emotions and vocal tones. How does his statement allow for different meanings and interpretations depending on how he says it?
3. What do you think Job's wife is frustrated about regarding Job's humility?
4. The word "bless" here can also mean "curse." What changes about her provocative statement depending on which word you choose? (Note: she might mean "die" literally, or metaphorically/emotionally.)
5. Job's wife never speaks again, but we suppose she lives because Job has children with her at the end of the book. What do you imagine her own grief process was like?

Job's friend Eliphaz

Job 4:7-Please remember, of the innocent, who is punished? And where are the upright made extinct?

Job 4:8 The way I've seen it, those who plow evil, Will sow mischief, and reap them.

Job 5:17 Look here, happy is the mortal whom God corrects; and do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.

Job's friend Bildad

Job 8:3 Does God thwart justice? Does the Almighty thwart righteousness?

8:4 If your children sinned against Him, Then He dispatched them by way of their transgressions.

8:5 If you seek diligently for God, And to the Almighty you beseech,

8:6 If you are pure and upright, Then God will stir concerning you, And restore your righteous abode.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How do Eliphaz and Bildad see justice and moral order in the world?
2. What does that order mean for Job, and Job's children?
3. According to Eliphaz and Bildad, what does Job need to do in order to restore himself?
4. Do you agree with Eliphaz and Bildad? Why or why not?
5. 5. What is at stake if one rejects a perceived moral justice in the world?

Job's response to Eliphaz and Bildad (Job 9:14-20)

Job 9:14 How then can I answer him? Or choose my words against him?

9:15 That even though I am righteous, I would not reply, To my judge I would beg mercy.

9:16 If I called to Him and He replied, I do not believe that His ear would receive my voice.

9:17 For he strikes me with a storm, He wounds me greatly without cause.

9:18 He does not give me the return of my breath, He only sates me with bitterness.

9:19 If for honor - He has the might, And if for a trial in court, who would be my witness?

9:20 If I am innocent, My mouth would condemn me.

I am plainly blameless, but he makes me crooked. (9:14-20)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How does Job respond saying that Eliphaz and Bildad's arguments are wrong?
2. What kind of integrity must Job hold onto in order to reject Eliphaz and Bildad?
3. What kind of picture does Job create of God in this passage? How does it differ from Eliphaz and Bildad's image of God?

God's response to Job (Job 38:4-12, 17-18)

Job 38:4 Where were you when I laid Earth's foundations? Speak if you know of understanding.

38:5 Who was there when she was measured, do you know? Or who pitched her with a line?

38:6 On what are her sockets sunk? And who set down her cornerstone?

38:7 When the morning stars sang together,

And all the divine beings shouted in joy?

38:8 And who closed the sea behind double-doors, When it gushed out of the womb?

38:9 When I put on clouds to clothe it, In thick clouds I swaddled it,

38:10 When I made breakers for it, And I set up a bar and doors,

38:11 And said, "Until here you may come but no more, Here your great waves will stop"?

38:12 Have you ever commanded the break of day, Assigned the dawn its place?

38:17 Have the gates of death been disclosed to you?

Have you seen the gates of the valley of the shadow?

38:18 Have you built the expanses of the earth?

Tell me if you know all of this.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How does God define him/herself as a Creator?
2. What point do you think God is making to Job?
3. In what way is God proving Job's response correct? That is, what is God missing or not recognizing of Job's pain?

Job's final response to God (Job 42:1-6)

And Job answered God, saying,

I know that you can do everything, And nothing can be cut off from you without purpose.

Who is this who conceals counsel without knowledge?

Therefore, I spoke and did not understand

Wonders from before me, and I did not know.

Please hear and I will speak I will ask, and you will tell me.

I heard you with my ears, And now I see you with my eyes.

Therefore, I reject and I am comforted,

Regarding dust and ashes. (42:1-6)

God's concluding response Job 42:7; see also 42:8 for the same message)

Job 42:7 After God spoke these words to Job, God said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My anger is kindled against you and against your two neighbors, for you did not speak correctly about me as did my servant Job.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. This term "reject" is used often in Job; earlier, Job says that he "rejects" his life. Eliphaz warns Job to not "reject" the discipline of the Almighty. Now that Job is finished speaking, what do you think Job rejects? What do you think he finds

comforting? The word can also be translated to “despise” or “loathe.” Do you like one of those translations better? Why or why not?

2. What do you think Job “hears” and “sees” regarding God? Not just God’s power, but perhaps also God’s limitations?
3. How has Job’s theodicy grown from the beginning of his “conversation”? As a reader, what new questions and thoughts are you now struggling with?
4. What do you think our obligation is, as a reader, after hearing this dialogue between Job’s characters about theodicy? How do we continue the conversation?

Job's Final Response: A Closer Look

Introduction

For 40 chapters, Job has vehemently expressed several key assertions: that Job is blameless; that the punishment he and his children received was terribly unfair; and that God is a being with whom we cannot fairly quarrel, legally or otherwise. In Chapter 38, God finally responds to Job, but the response is mostly centered around God's all-encompassing power, rather than Job's pain. In this scene, Job says his final words to God.

Job's final response to God (Job 42:1-6)

And Job answered God, saying,

I know that you can do everything, And nothing can be cut off from you without purpose.

Who is this who conceals counsel without knowledge?

Therefore, I spoke and did not understand

Wonders from before me, and I did not know.

Please hear and I will speak I will ask, and you will tell me.

I heard you with my ears, And now I see you with my eyes.

Therefore, I reject and I am comforted,

Regarding dust and ashes. (42:1-6)

This final line can be translated a multitude of ways. Here are some examples:⁴

(1) "Therefore I recant and relent, Being but dust and ashes" (JPS)

(2) "Therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes" [i.e., in humiliation] (RSV/NRSV)

(3) "Therefore I retract my words and repent
of dust and ashes" [i.e., symbols of mourning] (N. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 575)

(4) "Therefore I reject and forswear
dust and ashes" [i.e., symbols of mourning]. (Patrick, "The Translation of Job," 369-70)

(5) "Therefore I retract my words and have changed my mind concerning dust and ashes" [i.e., the human condition]. (Janzen, *Job*.)

(6) "Therefore I retract my words, and I am comforted concerning dust and ashes" [i.e., the human condition]. (L. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232)

(7) "Therefore I despise and repent of dust and ashes" (E. M. Good, 171)

(8) "Therefore I melt in reverence before you, and I have received my comfort, even while sitting in dust and ashes." (D. A. J. Clines, *Job*, xlvii)

⁴ Translations thanks to preparation by Dr Tamara Eskenazi

(9) "Therefore I will be quiet,
comforted that I am dust and ashes" (S. Mitchell, 88).

(10) "Therefore I yield,
repenting in dust and ashes" (New English Bible)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What are some of the major differences between the translations?
2. How does the meaning of Job's final words change depending on how it is translated?
3. What do you think Job might despise, recant, reject or repent at the end of his speech?
4. Which translation is your favorite and why?
5. What is the challenge, but also the beauty, of a vague final line? What can we as readers experience from many different interpretations?

Job: A feminist reading

Introduction

For those who would like to experience Job through a feminist lens, it is easy to see that we are focused on a man's suffering; his friends are all male, and we are presented with a (mostly) masculine version of an all-powerful creator God.

However, there are four interesting female characters or presences throughout the book that are worth mentioning. The first is Job's wife; the second, Job's mother; third, God as a feminine presence; and finally, Job's daughters in Job 42:14-15.

Job's wife

Job 2:9 And his wife said to him, "How can you still maintain your humility? Bless/curse God and die!"

Job 2:10 And he said to her, "Your words are like the speech of a base⁵ woman. You say we receive goodness from God, but do we not also receive evil?" In all of this, Job didn't sin with his lips.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What do you think Job's wife is frustrated about regarding Job's response?
2. The word "bless" here can also mean "curse." What changes about her provocative statement depending on which word you choose? (Note: she might mean "die" literally, or metaphorically/emotionally.)
3. What do you think about Job's response to his wife? How is it dismissive to his wife's pain and suffering?
4. Job's wife never speaks again, but we surmise that she lives because Job has children with her at the end of the book. What do you imagine her own grief process was like?

Job's Mother

[Job says after hearing the news about his children]

Job 1:21 "Naked did I leave my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. God gave, and God took, and the Name of God is blessed."

Job 3:2 Job spoke, saying:

3:3 "Perish⁶ the day on which I was born, and the night on which one said, 'a male was conceived.'

3:11 "Why did I not die from the womb, expiring as I exited [my mother's] belly?"

⁵ Can also mean "bastard" or "disgraceful."

⁶ Mitchell and Anchor translate "יָאֵבַד" as "damn" and "God damn." JPS translator chose "mourn" as direct translation. In Esther 4:16, Queen Esther says "וְכִּי אִם אֶבְדֵּי אֶבְדֵּי", "If I perish, I perish."

3:12 “How come there were there knees to receive me, and what of the breasts that I sucked?

3:13 “For if so, I would be lying still, sleeping, and I would be at rest.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Job cannot curse his mother, but he comes very close to doing so. How do you see him toeing the line?
2. “A male” is very gender specific and implies strength, mightiness. It can also mean a warrior, implying that Job was born with power that was taken. Why do you think Job specifies himself as a male this way?

God as a feminine Presence

Job 38:4 Where were you when I laid Earth’s foundations? Speak if you know of understanding.

38:5 Who was there when she was measured, do you know? Or who pitched her with a line?

38:6 On what are her sockets sunk? And who set down her cornerstone?

38:7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the divine beings shouted in joy?

38:8 And who closed the sea behind double-doors, When it gushed out of the womb?

38:9 When I put on clouds to clothe it,

In thick clouds I swaddled it. (38:4-9)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How is God comparing God’s self to a mother of the earth in this passage?
2. Why do you think the authors chose this imagery for God in this moment? Why not make God a father or a king?
3. God does not seem to understand Job’s emotional state, even though God associates with motherhood. What are the limitations to the God-as-mother metaphor here?

Job’s Daughters

Job 42:12 And God blessed the later years of Job’s life more than his former years; he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand she-donkeys.

42:13 And he had seven sons and three daughters.

42:14 He called the first Yemimah, the second Ketziah, and the third Keren-hapuch.

42:15 And one could not find women more beautiful than Job’s daughters in the entire land, and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. (42:12-15)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What do you think is the significance of naming Job’s daughters, but not his sons?

2. Why do you think Job gives his daughters an equal inheritance along with their brothers? This was almost never done in ancient times.
3. How could Job's treatment of his daughters symbolize some growth or change through Job's suffering?

Lesson plan - a high schooler's introduction to Job in one class

Goals (*teachers goals to*):

- To teach about the book of Job's basic concepts and main characters
- To inspire students to get to know the book of Job better
- To inspire students to share moments of pain, protest, and difficulty when they arise, in the spirit of Job

Objectives (*students will be able to*):

- Summarize the book of Job in several sentences.
- Describe Job's emotional journey throughout the book.
- Identify with Job with difficult moments students have had in their own lives
- Struggle with the questions of theodicy in the book of Job
- Begin creating their own ideas about theodicy

Materials:

- Activity 1: Laptop and projector (or similar setup)
- Activity 2: Tape or pieces of construction paper taped down to floor
- Activity 3: Text study sheets (see above)
- Activity 4: Copies of questions

Procedure

Intro Activity option 1:

Using the laptop and projector, watch the clip of Arrested Development from season 3, when Gob (pronounced same as Job, stands for "George Oscar Bluth") has a mild breakdown in season 3.⁷

Discuss:

- Why does Gob have his breakdown? (*He cannot figure out how to break up with his girlfriend Ann*)
- What is the significance of the "Sound of Silence" playing at the beginning and end? (*Perhaps his depression, inability to 'break free' and voice himself*)

Ask, how many of you have heard of Job, the biblical character? It might not be total coincidence that Gob Bluth's name sounds like biblical character Job. The irony is that whereas Gob Bluth can't communicate his feelings towards his girlfriend, biblical Job is

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tOwd3p7TsE> - "Arrested Development - Gob's best moment"

a masterpiece of Job voicing his pain and his anger to God over what he sees as unfair punishment for blameless actions.

Describe what happens in chapters 1-2 of Job (see beginning text studies and translation.)

Intro Activity option 2:

Create a 3x3 board either using blue tape or by taping down nine pieces of construction paper to the floor. (If you have a big group, I would suggest creating several boards and dividing the class into smaller groups; have teacher's assistants take the lead for you with each one.) Instruct the students that there is one correct path through the squares which the teacher (or assistant) secretly determines. One at a time, each student will try to guess the correct path by stepping on a square; if they are correct, they may continue and guess again, but if they are incorrect they go back to the end of the line.

For the first round or so, students should eventually find the one correct route through the squares. Once this happens, let several students through on this route to establish a pattern. Then, without warning and without telling them, completely change the route. Keep changing the route every 1-2 students (they will get frustrated and might try to overrun the leader) - you can even change things so that only certain students who tap with either their right or left foot, with certain colored shirts, etc., can go through. Once things become chaotic regroup and discuss.

Discuss:

- What was this experience like? (*Frustrating, disorienting, confusing*)
- How was figuring out the first route (*Fun, it took teamwork, we all figured it out together and then it was easy*)
- What happened when the route changed on you? (*I was confused, I thought I was doing it correctly, it didn't make sense*)
- How did the leader's control of the game change when this happened? (*The leader completely took control and was able to say/do whatever they want; it became less fun and felt like we were being tricked*)

Describe that in the ancient world, this was how many people believed the world worked: If you went the correct route and did particular actions or believed in particular things, you would "complete" the route and get rewarded. If you strayed from the path or made the wrong choice, you were punished. What's difficult about this worldview is that the world doesn't always work that way. Sometimes, bad things just happen, regardless of how good you are or what you do in life.

Describe what happens in chapters 1-2 of Job (see beginning text studies and translation.)

Activity 3: Text Study

Choose one of the above text studies to do with your class. I would recommend either going through the second and third “Job and Mourning” studies, or, if you have a larger group, use the “Theodicy” study and create four stations, with each character as a different station.

Activity 4: What I think About the World

Students stand in a large open space where they can all stand in a circle and see each other. Explain that you will be reading a series of statements and that if you agree with the statement, please take a step into the circle. The leader will then say “step back” to reset the circle.

Read the following statements:

- I don't even know where to begin with the idea of why bad things happen to people.
- God is all powerful and everything that happens in the world is God's doing
- God is all good and cannot stop evil from happening
- God is all good, and evil comes from something or somewhere else
- God has no control over anything
- There is randomness in the universe and that is why evil happens
- God gave people free will and evil comes from us making bad choices
- There is such a thing as good people and bad people
- If something bad happens to someone that always means they deserve it
- If something bad happens to someone that sometimes means they deserve it
- If something bad happens to someone that never means they deserve it
- Where suffering comes from is less important than how we move on from it
- As a human being I am responsible to alleviate others' suffering
- We are the authors of our lives and God is the editor
- Everything happens for a reason
- Nothing happens for a reason

After the final statement, everyone sits in an area where everyone can hear each other. Give students copies of the questions so they can see them.

Discuss:

- What was this experience like?

- Which statements were easy to answer for you? Which ones were difficult? Allow for students to bring up particular statements that sparked a lot of thought or maybe even consternation.
- Which statements were pretty universally answered yes/no? Which questions had a mix?
- Have you ever thought of these statements before? What kinds of things tend to bring up these statements?
- How do you think Job would have answered some of these statements?
- Bring their attention to one line in particular: "Where suffering comes from is less important than how we move on from it." What did you all think about this statement?
 - Eventually, Job realizes that he won't - or can't - get an answer about where his suffering comes from. So instead, he focuses on healing. This is a particularly Jewish concept when you think about Tikkun Olam, healing the world - the goal is not to figure out why brokenness happens in the world, but rather to move towards healing and repair.

Congratulate students for taking the time to think about and discuss these very difficult questions; let them know that teachers, clergy, and parents are always available if you want to continue these conversations.

Bulletin for Mar Cheshvan

Have you ever wished that time could go by faster? The days seem to drag on without end, and that “light at the end of the tunnel” feels further away than ever?

I recently had this experience in late January while waiting for rabbinic placement to begin. Without classes to distract me, the days felt long and arduous, and even though I couldn’t wait for February to begin, time continued to drag at its regular pace.

We are entering the Hebrew month Cheshvan, which the rabbis call “Mar” Cheshvan. *Mar* means “bitter,” and it might ring a bell when we eat *maror*, bitter herbs, on Passover. Why do the rabbis call this a bitter month? We have just spent weeks of celebrating and commemorating through the High Holy Days, and next month, Kislev, we will gather for Chanukah, the Festival of Lights. But Cheshvan has no holidays whatsoever, and therefore, the rabbis call it a bitter month.

The term *mar* shows up in two significant places in Ketuvim, the later writings of our Tanakh. In the book of Ruth, Naomi loses her husband and two sons, and calls herself “Mara,” bitterness, upon arriving at Bethlehem. However I would like to focus on the second instance, in the book of Job.

Job is famous for the huge tragedy that befalls him - he loses his material wealth and his children - all in a matter of moments, due to a divine conflict between God and a divine messenger, the Adversary. However, much of the book is spent with Job as he processes, grieves and laments this tragedy. In this excerpt of chapter 7, Job describes his days in a manner much like the “mar” of Cheshvan:

Thus I have inherited months of futility, weary nights are appointed to me.
 If I lie down, I think, “When will I get up?” Night drags on, and I am full of tossing and turning until dawn.
 My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of earth, my skin is broken and oozing.
 My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and run out with no hope.
 Remember that my life is a breath, my eye will no longer see good again.
 The eye that gazes on me will not see me,
 Your eyes are in me, yet I am gone.
 Even I will not restrain my mouth,
 I will speak in the anguish of my breath,
 I will complain in the bitterness (*mar*) of my soul. (Job 7:3-8, 11)

In this passage, Job complains that while the days are swift and never seem to end, the night drags on until infinity. Job’s days feel futile and weary, perhaps how we might feel

during Mar Cheshvan - we are so fervently waiting for that light of Chanukah that we let the days go by without appreciation and gratitude.

While thankfully most of us are not going through the tragedies that Naomi and Job had to endure, I believe they can teach us a lesson about the upside of “mar,” of living in bitterness. There cannot be darkness without light. If we experienced holy days every month without end, would we really be able to appreciate them?

I encourage us to embrace the bitterness that may come with a holiday-less month as a necessity to really appreciate and enjoy the holidays given to us. Like Job, may this be a month of deep self reflection, that we may come to better appreciate both the ups and downs in our Jewish cycle of time.

HUC Senior Sermon

Lenette Herzog
Senior Sermon
September 29, 2016
Parshat Nitzavim (Deut 29:9-30:20)

Bright, fluorescent lights. Beeps that squeaked and honked and cawed like metallic birds. Nurses and doctors bustled about, not giving me a second glance, as they walked in and out of rooms, struggled to put on latex gloves, compared notes, and carried blood samples. I was on the 8th floor's ICU at St Louis University Hospital. All around me were people providing care to those too ill to be on the medical floor - people whose hearts had stopped or were going too fast; people on machines and ventilators, whose bodies were failing from liver damage due to substance abuse; people who were recovering from self inflicted wounds of attempted suicide.

Today I was going to see James, a triple gunshot wound victim recovering from multiple surgeries. He had been in the hospital since before my CPE program started, going on seven weeks now, and I was used to seeing him every week.

James was forty-six but looked eighty-three, and as I approached his room, I noticed the trach, a breathing device, attached to his neck. Once again, James was unable to talk. I gave James a smile as I lathered my hands in hand sanitizer and entered his room.

"Hi James, is it okay if I come in and spend some time with you?"

James shrugged.

"How are you, James?"

James frowned and shrugged again. I knew what he meant.

“I know you’ve been here for a long time.”

James looked at me with big blue eyes. He started a series of gestures that I can’t understand, and I start guessing what he needs. With each guess - food? Water? Another blanket? Music? - he shook his head and grew more frustrated. How about a pillow? James’s eyes brightened and he started to nod. Clearly I finally got it, and with a nurse’s help I was able to prop another pillow behind one of James’s arms.

I looked at James. “Would you like me to stay?”

To my surprise, he nodded at me.

I may have seen a hundred other patients that summer, but James’ eyes will remain seared into my mind forever. I knew, in that moment, how much I couldn’t help James, as much as I wanted to. All I could do was just be there. And for the next fifteen minutes or so, as I sat with James and watched TV with him, I realized that was really all he wanted.

CPE this summer at Saint Louis University Hospital was equal parts challenging, rewarding and transformational. I helped hold people in their most difficult moments - the terror of arriving at the emergency department after a fall, hearing the news that a child was terminally ill, from broken bones to stopped hearts, I was a chaplain for some version of it. I could fill several sermons with what I learned, and I’m sure I will in years to come, as I continue to digest and gain value from my experiences.

Today, I want to share with you the most important thing I learned.

I learned that we, as clergy, are responsible to sit with others who are in pain and discomfort. We have to see it, to name it, to guide gently or strongly depending on our assessment, and above all, to be present.

In moments of being present, nothing else matters. Nothing else exists. It's just you and the face of the other in pain.

Job and his friends serve as a model in our tradition for sitting with others in pain. At the beginning of his narrative, Job has lost all of his material wealth, his assets, and his children without any reason or explanation. While in mourning, three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, travel together to comfort and console Job. The next verses read,

And when their eyes saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices in bitter wails; and each tore his clothing and threw dust into the air and onto his head. And they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, yet no one spoke a word to him, for they saw the magnitude of his pain.

(pause)

Once Job begins to speak about his pain, however, his friends respond - and they try to come up with answers to Job's unbelievable amount of suffering. They say, you and your children must have sinned and deserve this punishment; they say, God works in mysterious ways and understanding Him is beyond our comprehension. Job refutes these answers, saying that he will not compromise his integrity, and calling for an audience with God. Job remains in his suffering, names it, and wades through the difficult questions.

Job's friends represent both a positive model for sitting with another in their pain, and a negative model for how to guide one through it. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar mimic Job's mourning, getting on his level and becoming companions with Job as he

experiences the magnitude of his pain, which transcends words. They sit with him in the same way that I sat with James in the hospital - without needing or trying to fix anything. Just being there.

After Job's eloquent, heartbreaking monologue of his deep pain and anger, his friends try to fix it, and thus we have the second model. Try to explain, rationalize, justify. That's where Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar fail, as friends and as caregivers. Job's friends needed to continue their first model: to sit with Job and meet him in his pain, to validate it without justifying its cause or its affect. Sometimes though, the pain of others can just become too difficult for us to see. Eventually our minds turn to other things, perhaps because we find it so difficult to face our own fears and mortality.

We could be quick to demonize Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar for their behavior. Who in their right mind would suggest that Job's children deserved to die?Well, people who just witnessed a horrific tragedy and are trying to make sense of it. Job's friends are only human, and they probably fear for their own lives and the lives of *their* children. Just the potential of *no* reason, *no* logic, *no* answers, can be too much to bear.

That is what CPE forces us to do. To sit in the messy, difficult places, sometimes with the same patients, sometimes with different people each day, and be present with them. Judaism, along with every other religion, has answers to why tragedies, small and large, happen to us. But in the hospital, in the waiting room, in the morgue, those answers are not the most important thing.

French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas says, "Since the Other [that is, any other person] looks at me, I am responsible for them; their responsibility is incumbent on me." As a chaplain, I must be present for the pain, discomfort, and

sadness of my patients. As a rabbi, I must be present for the stress, worries and pain of my congregants, staff, and community members.

Sometimes there are no words, and that's when it can be the most powerful.

One patient I enjoyed meeting with the most was Ben, a Jewish patient who was diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of cancer this past January. Prayer and ritual were very important to Ben; over the weeks I gave him Shabbat candlesticks, a JPS Bible, and printed Shabbat prayers so he could celebrate in the hospital. During one of our conversations, we talked about his frequent visits and how they might interfere with Ben's High Holy Days experience.

I had a thought. I wanted to pull away. But I knew, for that exact reason, that I had to say it.

"Ben," I said, "How do you feel about Unetane Tokef? This High Holy Days will be the first time you say 'who shall live and who shall die' since your cancer diagnosis."

The look on his face. I can't even describe it.

That conversation was hard. That realization, and the silence afterwards, was an uncomfortable place to live in.

But he thanked me afterwards. Ben said, "Thank you. Now I know that it's coming up, and I can prepare for it during Elul."

No one else in that hospital, save for the other Jewish chaplain, could have been present for Ben in that capacity, in that moment. That's the *power* of what we do.

Atem Nitzavim, Ye are standing this day all of you before the LORD your God: your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in the midst of thy camp, from the hewer

of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water; that thou shouldest enter into the covenant of the LORD thy God.

For me, the traditional language fits the tone of this seminal passage found in this week's Torah portion. It is not just a speech. It is a calling. This May, I will enter a special covenant, rabbinic smicha, one that I make not just with God, but with every Jewish soul, those who are here, and those who are not here. I pledge to sit with and be present for each and every face. I pledge to stand with those who are marginalized, those who are disenfranchised, those who are lost.

I have some advice for you, and I speak now as if it's just you and me, my fellow HUC students. You are welcome to take or leave my advice from what I've learned here over the years, and my time in CPE.

Advice #1: It is almost impossible to be present and sit with other people's discomfort, pain and stress, unless you sit with your own. I'm not saying to go out and break a bone or get ill. I'm encouraging you, on this tail-end of Elul, to sit in your own deep, dark insecurities, reflect on your triggers and your fears. What scares you? What angers you? What do you need to deal with so that, when--not if-- when a congregant or patient brings that up inside of you, you can see it, name it, put it aside for later, and continue to give your best care possible? I encourage you to find a professional to help be your guide and advocate on that journey. Like Job's friends, the magnitude of our work can be too much to bear sometimes, and it's too easy to therefore slip into unhealthy habits and burnout. Therapy is not required at HUC, but I think it is required for our line of work, and for our own mental wellbeing.

Advice #2: Find a group on the margins - *thy stranger that is in the midst of thy camp* - that resonates with you, and work with them. There are a multitude of avenues for this at HUC, such as the Beit Teshuva immersion and internship, CPE, Our House, and other opportunities during the year. But you could also ask your student pulpit or congregation to visit homebound congregants, a hospital, or a local jail. You could walk into a VA office, a homeless shelter, a Planned Parenthood, and offer to volunteer. This fall I am leading several Shabbat services at nursing homes, and it is among the most meaningful work I've done during my time at HUC.

(pause)

Advice #3: Claim your authority. This advice is as much for me as it is for you. This job is holy. It can really change people. And for a long time, that scared me. Honestly? It scared me so much that it originally drove me away from doing congregational work. I thought, I'm not worthy of that power. But I am, and every person sitting here is too. Sometimes we just have to push ourselves to lean into those uncomfortable spaces - to say words like "cancer" and "pain" and "death" - and to know that we do have a huge, weighty responsibility when we go there. But we're also human. What a blessing it is to be given the permission and the authority to be in that space with another person. Let's use it well.

There is one face we cannot see. The Divine face is shielded from us as it was shielded from Moses in parshat Ki Tisa, because human beings can't handle the full radiance of God. And yet, the final verse of Birkat Kohanim, the Priestly blessing, is *Yisa Adonai Panav Eleicha, V'Yasem Lecha Shalom*. May the Divine Presence lift Her face to you, and grant you peace.

My prayer and my blessing for us all here today is that we see the Divine Presence in each and every face of the Other - may we see it in the person next to us, in the sea of faces in our congregations this High Holy Days, on the religious school playgrounds, in our offices, in our hospital rooms, in our jail cells, on our streets. As we continue to heal the brokenness in ourselves and in our communities, may we also grant each other and ourselves true peace. *Tzorhorayim Tovim.*

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