"TALK TO ME":
Wisdom from the Book of Job
(When *More* Bad Things Happen to Good People)

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More than anyone else, Job (and through Job, others) walked beside me through my own trial of faith and reconciliation with a God whom I felt had betrayed me when I suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm at the age of 26. For his willingness to open his life and his wounded heart to me, I will be forever deeply grateful to Job.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The Book of Job raises more questions than it answers[1]. Many see it as a response to "why bad things happen to good people", or as a possible response to the problem of theodicy. As Clines points out,

> There are, however, two drawbacks to finding out what the Book of Job is all about. The first is that no one can say, and certainly not this commentator, what the Book of Job is all *about*, not even given unlimited space and time. For it is a part of the Book's greatness that whenever we think we have it mastered it, it surprises us with new angles that we realize that we haven't yet properly taken into consideration. The second drawback is that "what the book is *all* about" – which is to say, its meaning – varies from reader to reader (Clines, xxix).

My thesis is a four-part journey through Job, utilizing four important key words found in the text, each of which illuminates an essential message often overlooked by readers of the Book of Job. I do not presume to solve the many puzzles in the Book of Job; rather, I wish to highlight the questions themselves and provide a particular light with which to wash the entire Book, illuminating some aspects of the Book which were previously obscured.

The first key word I explore, "בָּרַךְ", literally means "to bless", but is often translated in the Book of Job (and this is the case in Job, alone) as its opposite, "to curse" (see Job 2:9). Translators assume that the author was using euphemistic language to

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[1] The following is a list of questions raised by the Book of Job, compiled by a group of Rabbinical students in a course, "Theologies of Pain, Suffering, and Loss" taught in the Fall of 2005 by Dr. Rachel Adler at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles: *How is it possible to find meaning in Job's suffering? How are we to understand God's choice to engage with HaSatan? Is there such a thing as emotional or spiritual complacency? Does God answer Job? How? Is there a reason to live a good life? What is the definition of "piety"? Why does God engage in a conversation with Job? Who is HaSatan? How do Job's friends "comfort"? What makes Job's friends wrong and Job right? Do the friends believe what they are saying? What does "בָּרַךְ" mean? What is the translation of Job's last speech? What does God's speech from the whirlwind mean? What do God's final words to Job's friends mean in the context of the Book of Job? What do they mean in the context of the Tanakh as a whole? How was this book allowed into the canon? Is Job an attack on Deuteronomy?*

couch the difficult relationship between Job and God in language which they believed best befits a person of God, a person of faith, a person of "patience", such as Job. A fully nuanced translation of the word בֵּרֵךְ , however, requires ***honesty*** about the ambiguous nature of Job's relationship to God throughout his existential crisis. In my reading (as I will show below) this word and the difficulties which arise from its translation and interpretation epitomize the need for honest communication with God, even when feelings may appear ambiguous and the line between "bless" and "curse" is most unclear.

The second key word in my investigation in the Book of Job is of the word, "רֹגֶז", commonly translated in Job 3:26 as "trouble", though it actually can be used to mean anger or rage. The use of "רֹגֶז" throughout the Book of Job provides a medium through which the reader might witness raw, honest, emotional expression, encouraged and lauded by God at the end of God's speech from out of the whirlwind, when God praises Job by chastising his friends for not "speaking right" the way Job had done.

Third, I will explore the specific name for God, "שַׁדַּי" , used by both Naomi (Ruth 1:20) and Job (Job 27:2) for the God who "embittered" their lives. It evokes a unique form of betrayal such as experienced by both Job and Naomi at the hands of "שַׁדַּי" from which must emerge a unique kind of healing when intimacy and fundamental expectations are violated.

Through these first three key words and the ideas they express in this context: "בֵּרֵךְ", "רֹגֶז" and "שַׁדַּי", it is possible to chart a journey through what happens "when bad things happen to good people". But it is truly the fourth and final key word that becomes the source of light, shining and quietly illuminating the entirety of the Book of

Job. This word, articulated twice in a sequence of two subsequent verses, is a crucial sentence not only in the Book of Job, but also for the entirety of the Tanakh, and has deep implications for the whole of Biblical theology. It is used in Job 42:7 and then repeated in Job 42:8, **which are also God's final spoken words in the entire Tanakh**[2]: it is God's twice-spoken chastisement of Job's friends and affirmation that, unlike his friends, Job has done right in God's eyes. Virtually all translations *do not* notice or appreciate a particular nuance of this chastisement; rather, they typically translate the verse as "because you have not spoken right *about me*, as has my servant Job."[3] The appropriate word choice for a precise translation, however, allows an even deeper appreciation of Job's distinction from the friends. Many commentators claim that Job's "apology" in Job 42:6 (translated as "recant" or "relent" in many cases) is Job's correct behavior which the friends ought to emulate. This interpretation, and all other such possibilities, are wrought with problems; it remains unclear precisely *what* Job's friends did wrong and Job did right in God's eyes.[4] The possibilities previously suggested by scholars include both the suggestion that Job was "right" in speaking his "recant" at the end of the book (if it is, in fact, a "recant") and also its opposite. The suggestion that the "recant" was Job's "right" behavior is problematic, however, because an "apology" *follows* the friends' advice and therefore does not indicate a break with the friends as would be suggested by God's rebuke of the friends in favor of Job. The alternative explanation is also problematic, as Job's frequent questioning of God's divine justice is explicitly chastised by God. How could *this* sentiment, then, be what Job did "right" and the friends did wrong? Scholars

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[2] This was noted by Jack Miles in God: A Biography

[3] A full list of translations is provided in the Appendix, on page 107.

[4] "When the Lord says that Job has spoken rightly of him, does he refer to the repentance or the speeches?" (Miles, 313)

have argued for centuries about the precise meaning of these words spoken by God out of the whirlwind. A recent Pulitzer prize-winning author, Jack Miles, writes that,

> When the Lord praises Job at the end of the book, he is praising both Job's earlier stubbornness with his human interlocutors and his final, utterly consistent, stiff-necked recalcitrance before the Lord himself. Job has won. The Lord has lost. But the loss, paradoxically, has preserved the Lord from demonization or irrelevance (Miles, 326).

I see an important alternative translation and interpretation of the decisive verses 42:7-8. The pervasive translation of God's words here is some version of, "You did not speak rightly about me, as did my servant, Job." But, when God says these words of admonition to Job's friends, God is *literally* saying: "because you have not spoken right *to me*, as has my servant Job" - "כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב". We ultimately learn here that God, like Job, craves relationship with human beings. Job's friends, unlike Job, speak **about** God, rather than **to God**. God wants us to speak to God: even when we are angry, even when we are tired of being alive, even when we are in pain, even when it is equally likely that we will spew curses or blessings in God's direction. God wants us to talk to God, not about God – God wants truth as we experience it, in all of its complicated forms, in all of its confusion and ambiguity. God does not want platitudes, or "wisdom" from the tradition: rather, God wants our words; God wants our hearts; God wants our relationship.

> Publicly, most are respectful of religion as the skeptic philosopher Voltaire who doffed his hat when passing a religious processional. Asked whether his gesture signified his return to the faith, Voltaire demurred: "When God and I pass each other, we solute. We do not speak" (Schulweis, 2)

The Book of Job stands as a protest against such distancing gestures.

In what follows, I will examine the four key words and expressions that stand as the focal point of this Introduction. To place them in a broader context it is necessary first to review briefly the Book's particular structure, genre, and setting (Sections II, III, and IV). Using such typical exegetical categories prepares us to have an overarching perspective on the Book as a whole before launching into an understanding of the Book's intention. In the Intention section of this thesis (Section V), I examine the four words and phrases that I view as keys to understanding the Book as a whole: Job 2:9; Job 3:26; Job 27:2; and Job 42:7-8.

In the next section (VI), I develop the theology that flows from re-translating and re-reading these passages. Such a theology is possible as a result of my re-translation of these verses and is supported by the messages found within the Book of Job as a whole. In Section VII, I look at Job in terms of its potential for healing. The importance of a renewed look at the Book of Job in terms of its potential for healing is highlighted by the millennia of writings about the subject of "bad things happening to good people".

To emphasize the ongoing dialogue with Job and with God, I include some of my own responses to the question encapsulated in the Book of Job (see section VIII). Speaking as one of the "daughters" of Job, I hope to show how the vitality of his quest can stretch across the barriers of time, space, gender, history, and culture. The last words belong to two other contemporary voices (see sections IX and X), each with a different perspective to share on the subject. Together, these writings and their reflections on the nature of the human condition exemplify the kind of journey that was charted first by the Book of Job.

II. STRUCTURE:

Throughout his discussion of the narrative plot in his introduction, Habel leans toward an organic interpretation of the Book of Job as a whole, not ignoring the possible literary incongruities in the composition of the Book, but rather preferring to place emphasis on the Book as a whole, as the form exists today. He poses that there are three movements in the Book: he names the first movement, "God Afflicts the Hero – The Hidden Conflict" found in 1:1-2:10; the second movement is "The Hero Challenges God – The Conflict Explored" in 2:11-31:40; and the third is "God Challenges the Hero – The Conflict Resolved" in 32:1-42:17. He asks, "what are the contours of the plot structure within the framework of these three movements?" (Habel, 25-35).

Likewise, Pope, too, highlights the shape of the Book, as seen through the exposition, complication, and resolution of the conflict. Inherent to this approach is a respect for the Book of Job as a complete book, not as a piecemeal of many different versions of the book (though these scholars agree that this may be Job's true literary history). Job, in all his complexity both in form and in content certainly has much to teach.

> That the book of Job experienced several stages of growth is no doubt true, but that fact does not exempt the interpreter from the responsibility of coming to grips with the book's final form (Whedbee, 222).

Like Whedbee, I prefer to look at Job as a single unit, rather than focus on its potentially divergent origins. I presume the following structure for the Book of Job, proposed by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, wherein there exist three rounds of poetic dialogue between Job and his friends, framed by prose narrative and interrupted by a fourth friend, Elihu, and God's speeches from the whirlwind:

I. ***Prologue***[5]***:*** *God's and HaSatan's Wager and Job's Fate (1-2)* (Prose narrative)

II. ***Dialogues in Response***[6] (3:1-42:6) (Poetry)

A. ***Job and His Three Friends*** (3-31)

1. **First Round** (3-14)
   a. *Job* (3:1-26)
   b. Eliphaz (4-5)
   c. *Job* (6-7)
   d. Bildad (8)
   e. *Job* (9-10)
   f. Zophar (11)
2. **Second Round** (15:1-21:34)
   a. *Job* (12-14)
   b. Eliphaz (15)
   c. *Job* (16-17)
   d. Bildad (18)
   e. *Job* (19)
   f. Zophar (20)
3. **Third Round** (21-31)
   a. *Job* (21)
   b. Eliphaz (22:1-30)
   c. *Job* (23-24)
   d. Bildad (25)
   e. *Job* (26-31)
      i. *Job's* soliloquy (27)
      ii. An Ode to Wisdom (28)
      iii. *Job's* final speech (29-31)

B. ***Elihu*** (32-37)

C. ***God's Response to Job*** (38:1-42:5)

1. **First Round** (38:1-40:5)
   a. God's first answer from the whirlwind (38:1-40:1)
   b. *Job's* response
2. **Second Round** (40:6-42:26)
   a. God's second answer from the whirlwind (40:6-41:25
   b. *Job's* response (42:1-6)

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[5] "The prologue contains presuppositions and questions that trigger the movement of the entire book. First, by taking a figure famed for his righteousness, the poet intensifies and authenticates the agony of the innocent sufferer. Moreover, by stating explicitly that Job's suffering is in no way due to sin, the poet puts his readers in a privileged position: we know what neither Job nor his counselors know -- that Job is afflicted by a chain of events that occurred in a mysterious divine council [which also] foreshadows the theme of God's ambiguous personality (Whedbee, 228).

[6] "Against this background, the substance of the book (3:1-42:6) written in poetic form, presents a different Job: not a submissive, saintly sufferer, but a rebel against the injustice rampant in the affairs of the world, against the reign of evil, against a creator who refuses to answer the creature's outraged address to Him" (Glatzer, 2).

III. ***Epilogue (Third Round?)***: The restoration of Job (42:7-17) (Prose narrative)

Though it shares many ideas and statements with Books such as Proverbs and Qohelet, unlike other Biblical wisdom texts, Job is contained within a cohesive structure with literary integrity: it flows from the introduction and holds a structure throughout the middle of the text until its conclusion; it is not a collection of loosely connected teachings.

III. GENRE: "Wisdom Literature"?

Job is often categorized as belonging to the genre of "Wisdom Literature", alongside the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Like Job, in many of these other books, the practical guide to life, couched in proverbs and parables and poetry, intended to lead the reader to a moral life and guide him or her away from sin and toward a life of piety. In The Voice of Wisdom: A Guide to the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, the authors describe wisdom literature as being concerned with everyday life: how to live well; how to respond to issues facing humanity in general; how to handle the typical and recurring aspects of life that face human beings on a daily basis. The goal, according to this literature, is to live in harmonious relationship with God, others, and the world. Generally, the focus of Wisdom Literature is on interpersonal relationships, as well as reflective questions about the meaning of life and how to live it. It does not address the human condition from the divine perspective, but rather from the perspective of human needs and concerns, and in terms of what human beings can and should do to address those concerns. Wisdom attempts to express a reality of the way things are, describing and defining the world and the existing social order. Tradition represents the wisdom of experience, both in individuals and in the collective experiences of the community; preference is usually given to age and to established and proven ways of doing things. Israelite Wisdom is rooted in reverence and commitment to God (Intrater and Spotts, 4-10).

However, in determining which, if any, genre befits the Book of Job, I found that many authors and commentators are also uncomfortable trying to categorize this text. A great scholar, J. William Whedbee, believes that,

> Its ambiguity continues both to challenge and frustrate interpreters in their ongoing quest for solutions to its enigmas. No part of the interpretation of Job is more clouded with uncertainty than the identification of genre. The parallels offered do not quite fit, and most scholars end up by concluding that Job belongs to no literary category: it simply is! (Whedbee, 221).

While most scholars concur that the Book of Job is best described within the genre of "wisdom literature", this seems ironic because the Book of Job takes an "anti-wisdom literature" stance. This is apparent as the rejected theories of Job's friends reflect many generally held beliefs articulated within the genre of Wisdom Literature, such as the assumption that good is rewarded and evil is punished, as well as that God is a Judge of supreme justice. These beliefs include the assumption that Job is certainly being punished for some unknown sin, which necessitates his repentance and prayer to God for forgiveness (Job 4:17). But Whedbee points out that, "at almost every crucial juncture Job takes up diverse parts of his traditional heritage only to twist them and make them ludicrous" (Whedbee, 237).

It seems that its identity as an anti-Wisdom Text[7] is confirmed at the end of the Book of Job, when God affirms that it is Job who spoke rightly and it is the friends (who are representatives of Wisdom Literature) who must repent for wrongdoing, for "not speaking rightly" (Job 42:7-8). "The would-be wise men become fools, the mockers become a mockery. The friends resemble the classical comic figure of the *alazon* – the

[7] Zachary Braiterman coined the term, "anti-theodicy" to refer to a trend which is, "the refusal to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering" (Kepnes, 37).

imposter, the offender, and finally the enemy of God" (Whedbee, 235). In his introduction to Job, Clines cites a quotation wherein John Calvin observes that, "some comforters have but one song to sing, and they have no regard to whom they sing it" (Clines, ix).

Still, according to N. Glatzer, "the key words [in the Book of Job] are knowledge, wisdom, and understanding" (Glatzer, 6).

> The key word 'knowledge' runs throughout the answer from the whirlwind. These speeches that review the grandeur and multi-fariousness of the created world take the form of questions addressed to Job, challenging his power to know and act.... throughout the dialogue Job speaks of a hostile God who has withdrawn from the world and become estranged from man. All this he asserts because he "knows". The voice from the whirlwind makes him aware of the root of this tension [between himself and God]: Job's affirmation of his own knowledge is an affront to the true possessor of knowledge: God. In claiming knowledge, Job has overstepped the boundary between God and man and provoked the wrath of divinity (Glatzer, 7).

Glatzer goes on to highlight the key word, "knowledge" in light of other biblical tales, such as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden eating fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, and thereby learning the realities of suffering and mortality as a consequence of their action. Like Adam and Eve, Job, too, eats from the Tree and so learns suffering and mortality as a result[8]. This, more than anything in my opinion, places the Book of Job a book in the genre of the "Wisdom Tradition" and also, at the same time, challenges it. The Book of Job is a text which discusses wisdom in all its complexity, in all its pain, in all its glory. Or, as Glatzer puts it: "man has attained comprehension of the human condition" (Glatzer, 8). Another scholar who might agree with Glatzer is Larrimore, who writes that,

[8] Glatzer writes here in the tradition of Moses Maimonides.

> The goal of ancient skepticism is *ataraxia*, 'an untroubled or tranquil condition of the soul'. For the skeptic, the point... is not that god is one way or the other – or not at all – but that in religious matters as in all others, it is best to avoid firmly maintaining anything (Larrimore, xxi).

As such, Larrimore might argue that the Book of Job is a "Wisdom" text and Job himself is a seeker and possessor of knowledge precisely when he admits to "not know". Like a true skeptic, Job is wise when he understands how vast and incomprehensible God and the universe truly are.

In the Book of Job, too, the subject of "wisdom" is raised again and again, sometimes directly and often indirectly. Whedbee notes that it is possible to find (in Job 12:17-25),

> An inversion of almost all the typical motifs of Yahweh's vaunted wisdom as the creator: instead of order, chaos; instead of justice, violence; instead of light, darkness. Job's reveals a world where God revels in destruction more than creation, and the parody of the hymn of praise dramatically features God's savagery in his orgy of violent acts. What kind of God rules the world? (Whedbee, 239).

Still, if we are to argue that the Book of Job remains an example (if perhaps unorthodox) of the genre of Wisdom Literature, we must concur that it, in fact, does deal with the difficult problem of reconciling the sufferings of just and innocent individuals with the justice and goodness of God.

Perhaps what most strongly influences the Book of Job's classification as wisdom literature is in looking at Job 28: an 'interlude' (according to Newsom[9]) on "Where Wisdom Can Be Found" within the Book of Job itself:

[9] Newsom, 329-333

> But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living... it is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds in the air. Destruction and Death say, 'only a rumor of it has reached our ears,' God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells (Job 28:12-23).

In this selection about wisdom (possibly inserted here in the Book of Job as an interlude in Job's speech), it is possible to learn what the Book desires to express about the illusive and invaluable nature of wisdom; it is hidden from those who might seek it, it is even largely mysterious to the characters mentioned in Job, "Death" and "Destruction". God alone possesses true wisdom: everyone else in the universe can only speculate about where wisdom dwells and where understanding might be found. Also, only God is capable of comprehending how truly priceless wisdom is: as, "man does not comprehend its worth". The ambiguity concerning the speeches complicates the reader's ability to integrate this section into the different points of view on this topic[10].

What does seem clear from the "wisdom" of the Book of Job is the valorization of voicing one's concerns, even when these concerns may be traditionally viewed as radical or unpopular. In their chapter on Job, Intrater and Spotts highlight the need for non-conformists, highlighting the Book of Job as a model from which teenagers, especially, might learn. In their text, they write that

> every group of people needs a few doubters who question the policies and operations of that group and the ideas its members accept.... in the same manner, the accepted teachings of the schools of wisdom needed the benefit of doubt and criticism. *Did prosperity and success always follow righteous conduct, as the Wise Men generally taught? Was a man who had wealth, honor, and success in life always happy?*" (Intrater and Spotts, 105).

[10] Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, in private communication

The Book of Job is not the only text of its time to search for meaning in suffering. The poetic dialogue in the Book of Job has been compared to a variety of ancient Near Eastern texts from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit, including the Mesopotamian liturgical texts from the second millennium BCE in which a sufferer praises his god for deliverance from suffering, as well as the text known as the Babylonian Theodicy, which is also categorized as a wisdom text. In her Introduction to the Book of Job, Carol Newsom writes,

> Although it is possible that the author of Job knew and drew upon the Babylonian Theodicy itself, it is more likely that the relationship is indirect and that there was a larger tradition of wisdom dialogues about the problem of the righteous sufferer and the general issue of moral disorder in a world supposedly governed by divine justice (Newsom, 328-333).

Like The Book of Job, the Babylonian Theodicy is a wisdom text (Gray, 267-268). A popular work written around 1000 BCE, it consists of a dialogue written in stanzas between a sufferer and his friend. Like the Book of Job, a strict formal design provides structure for the dialogue (though in Job the role of "friend" is divided among three separate characters: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar).

> In the Babylonian Theodicy, most of the stanzas begin with a compliment to the general intelligence of the other party. When the friend speaks, this general compliment is followed by a criticism that in this particular case the sufferer has said something irrational, erroneous, or blasphemous (Newsom, 330).

Newsom remarks that this striking similarity also exists in the Book of Job. Like the sufferer in the Babylonian Theodicy, Job asks that his words be heard. Job, too, complains about his personal misfortune, the perception that there is moral disorder in the world, and "bad things happening to good people" while criminals prosper undeservingly. The friend in the Babylonian Theodicy, like Job's friends, assures the

sufferer that retribution will come eventually to the wicked; the pious sufferer must be patient and wait for the return of his former prosperity.

In his commentary on the Book of Job, Norman C. Habel also writes of the links made between the thought world of the ancient Near East, and the wisdom tradition of Israel. He claims that "Eliphaz begins as a sympathetic wisdom counselor who invites Job to recall the past and humbly seek El's mercy. In his second speech he berates Job for presuming to claim a wisdom which is in conflict with the traditional wisdom of his fathers" (Habel, 21-31). The formal structuring of the dialogues, the rhetorical acknowledgement by speakers of one another, and the arguments for and against the moral order of the world mark both Job and the Babylonian Theodicy as wisdom literature.

Still, despite their many striking similarities, the Babylonian Theodicy ends very differently from the Book of Job:

> In the Babylonian Theodicy, when the sufferer complains that people praise the wicked and abuse the honest person, his friend not only agrees with him but also attributes this sad state of affairs to the gods, who "gave perverse speech to the human race; With lies, and not truth, they endowed them for ever" (ll. 279-280). Apparently satisfied that he has been heard, the sufferer thanks his friend, repeats his claim that he has suffered even though he has behaved properly, and concludes with an appeal of mercy to the gods (Newsom, 332).

Unlike his Babylonian counterpart and his friend, Job and his friends never reach a mutual understanding nor does Job clearly state that he seeks God's mercy at the end of the Book. Rather, he desires a trial: a legal confrontation with his divine Adversary. Again and again, Job desires connection and communication from the divine. This makes the Book of Job truly unique among its peers (and, I argue, makes the character of Job unique among his "friends"). The Babylonian Theodicy contains nothing like God's

speeches from the whirlwind, which create the climax of the Book of Job. In light of my translation of Job 42:7 and 42:8, this direct interaction between God and Job is even more significant; throughout the Book, we learn that Job craves connection and communication from God, and, at the end of the Book, we learn that this desire is reciprocated. God, too, wants a relationship with Job; Job is lauded for speaking *to God*, whereas the friends are chastised for neglecting to do so.

Many scholars have struggled to "summarize the contents of the Book of Job" since the question about the shift from prose to poetry, returning again to prose at the end "raises the question of its literary unity and integrity. The same issue is raised by the problem of classifying the work in its literary form because the whole suggests a sort of piecemeal composition" (Pope, xxi). Foremost is the problem of the differing styles, contents, and theologies of the prose Prologue/Epilogue (which present a traditionally pious saint who retains his composure and refuses to accuse God, continuing to bless the god who has afflicted him) and the poetic Dialogue of the Book (wherein Job is presented as one who complains bitterly of his fate and charges God with moral injustice). In addition, the names used for God are different in the prose than in the poetic sections; *HaSatan* never reappears after the first scene in which he tempts God and initiates the divine wager; Job's obsession with the sacrificial cult in the Prologue is never mentioned during the Dialogue; the emotional tone of the Prologue/Epilogue seems distant and detached compared to the highly charged emotions apparent throughout the Dialogue.

In The Art of Biblical Narrative, Alter writes that narration in the Bible often begins with (prose) narrative, then moves into dialogue, "drawing back momentarily or at length to narrate again, but always centering on sharply salient verbal intercourse of the

characters, who act upon each other, discover themselves, affirm or expose their relation to God, through force of language" (Alter, 75). These principles are illustrated even in the opening episodes of Job (Job 1:6-22 and Job 2:1-10). However, the dialogue almost entirely occupies chapters 3:1-42:6.

IV. SETTING

A. LITERARY SETTING:

As for the Literary placement of the Book of Job within the canon, four distinct versions of "the canon" must be considered what I call: 'Jewish 1'; 'Jewish 2'; 'Jewish 3' and 'Christian' placements of the Biblical Books.

> The Talmud[11] gives the order of the Writings as: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles. In the Codex Alexandrius, however, the order is: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, but Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Jerome, Rufinus, and the Apostolilc Canons attest to the order Job, Proverbs, Psalms (Pope, xxxviii-xxxix).

Alternately, according to the Leningrad Codex[12], the order is: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Shir HaShirim, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther. Still another order is that which is found in the modern Tanakh: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, which places Job third in the Writings, after Psalms and Proverbs, but before Song of Songs and Ruth. According to the Protestant Bible, the order is: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

Wherever it is found in the canon, it is clear that the Book of Job

> imagined Job not as an artificial construct of the conventional religious mentality but as a real person tormented by God for no reason... converting Job into Everyman, and Job's suffering into an extreme case of what is endured by all who are subject to death and capable of reflecting upon it (Scheindlin, 10).

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[11] Baba Batra 15
[12] 10th Century manuscript

B. HISTORICAL SETTING:

"Although Buber attempts to date the book of Job to the period of the Babylonian exile, it is quite obvious that he regards Job, as Elie Wiesel has put it, as 'our contemporary'" (Kepnes, 39)

Most scholars agree that an oral version of the narrative story of Job was probably told long before the Book of Job was written. A version of this story served as a means of religious instruction, illustrating a way in which one might respond when one faces terrible suffering, as did Job, and the theological difficulties which might be involved.

The first echo of the story of Job may be found in the prophecy of Ezekiel, written around 587 BCE, which speaks of three ancient legendary men revered for their piety: Noah, Dan-el, and Job, indicating that these figures were already known to Ezekiel's audience (Ezekiel 14:14). Because of its effectiveness as a tale of religious instruction, the oral tradition of Job continued and was recorded at some point in the fourth or fifth centuries BCE in the form of a conversation between Job and his friends.

The idea of a tale such as the Book of Job was hardly a new idea. As early as 2000 BCE, a Sumerian writer told a story of a pious man who faced terrible losses and disease but was able to create his own restoration through a passionate appeal to a god. Rabbinic opinions as to the date of the Book of Job range from the era of the patriarchs (ca. 2100-1550 BCE) down to the Persian period. The oldest rabbinic opinion (TB Baba Batra 14b) ascribes authorship to Moses. These early suggested dates are due to the patriarchal setting of the Prologue-Epilogue, which appears authentic to them as do the patriarchal narratives in Genesis: like Abraham, Job's wealth consisted of cattle and slaves; there is no priesthood or central shrine; religious belief and practice were simple; the Sabeans and Chaldeans are represented as nomadic raiders with no hint of their later

political and economic importance; and the unit of money mentioned in Job is met elsewhere only in Genesis and Joshua (Pope, xxx-xxxi).

The presence of *HaSatan* in the Prologue, however, may be evidence for a Persian influence, which might bring the dating of the Book to the fifth or fourth centuries, or later.

> The fact that the dates proposed by authorities, ancient and modern, span more than a millennium is eloquent testimony that the evidence is equivocal and inconclusive... parts of the book may have very early antecedents. We have noted the probability of the existence of an ancient Job legend among the western Semites. The treatment of the problem of theodicy and innocent suffering in poetic discourse and dialogue by the eastern Semites, and by the Sumerians, as early as the second millennium, BCE gives reason to suppose that the western Semites could have produces similar works at about the same time. The date of the Book of Job, then, is still an open question and will remain so until more convincing arguments can be given for assigning it to any given century. The seventh century BCE seems to be the best guess for a date of the Dialogue (Pope, xxxvii).

Many Judeans were deported from Jerusalem after the Babylonians conquered the city in 597 BCE. Approximately 10,000 people were forced to relocate to Babylonia. In 586 BCE, Judah itself ceased to be an independent kingdom, and deportees found themselves without a homeland, without a state, and without a nation (Clines, lvi-lviii). The exile was a challenge that needed an explanation; Biblical history was built on the promise of God to protect them and to use them for divine purposes in human history. Their defeat and the resulting loss of their land which was promised to them by God seemed to imply that their faith in this promise had been misplaced. This crisis, a form of cognitive dissonance, precipitated profound despair and required a reworking of their world view. The attack on the person of Job in the Book served as a model of what had

happened to wisdom ideology itself and to the people's theologies after the calamity of their losses had occurred without explanation or justification.

Still, not all scholars agree with this early post-exilic dating of the Book of Job, and many believe the book to be a compilation by different authors at different periods in history. Some scholars date the book later, since it attempts to account for Job's suffering as an individual, rather than connecting it to that of a whole community, which was more normative during the earlier, prophetic period. This shift from collective to individual responsibility occurred later in the post-exilic period, closer to the era under Hellenistic influences, the 4th Century BCE[13].

The great majority of scholars also regard the speeches of Elihu in chapters 32-37 to be an addition after the original Book was composed, as no mention is made of Elihu in the prologue, epilogue, or by God from out of the whirlwind. In addition, the aforementioned reflection on wisdom in Job 28 is also largely considered to be a later addition. As Clines points out in his "Orientation to the Book of Job", "there are a number of indications in the book that it was not all written at one time, but went through a history of composition" (Clines, lvii). For example, the prose sections - the prologue (chapters 1-2) and the epilogue (42:7-17) - may have existed in writing before the poetic speeches were composed, accounting for the stylistic and theological differences between two or more differing authors (Clines. lviii).

C. NARRATIVE SETTING:

Unlike many other Biblical texts which begin with some reference to the time and place in which the story take place, Job's context is left vague. Job is not located in any

[13] Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, in private communication

particular time, and is devoid of references to the people Israel: its covenant with God; its Torah; or its history of kingdom, exile, and restoration to the land of Judaea. Job is, therefore, often assumed to be a non-Israelite (though the opposite has also been argued), as names used for God are largely connected with pre-Israelite associations. At the beginning of the Book, too, Job offers a sacrifice to God at a family religious feast. All of these devises, according to Scheindlin, create the impression that the story takes place in a vague prehistoric age before Israel's specific traditions had taken shape, or when people had no scripture to which they might refer (Scheindlin, 12).

Additionally, the specific mention of Job's birthplace, the "Land of Uz", is also significant here. The precise location of the land of Uz is uncertain, although stories within the Bible itself provide some clues. The land may have originally been named after Uz, who was the son of Aram, and grandson of Shem (Genesis 10:23, 1 Chronicles 1:17). It had to have fertile pastures, since Job had many thousands of animals. It had at least one major city, since Job sat at the city gate. I think it is interesting that Uz is not a clearly identifiable place: it is neither obviously an Israelite area nor obviously a non-Israelite area. The ambiguous location, as well as the ambiguous time in which Job lived, allows Job to be "Everyman". He represents all of those whom might have identified with this story and with this man, Job.

V. INTENTION:

A. INTRODUCTION:

The Book of Job certainly raises a host of questions, many of which have been illuminated and discussed throughout the millennia. As such, the Book of Job is a contemporary story in each age in which it is read and examined. In his essay in the anthology, Suffering Religion, Kepnes writes,

> The suffering body necessarily entails a suffering mind, a mind full of questions. Why me? What is the meaning of my pain? What did I do to deserve this suffering? How can I understand this suffering in relation to the proclamations of goodness, caring, and power that are made for my God? Certainly, the most penetrating and profound thought which we have about suffering in the monotheistic traditions is found in the book of Job. With Job, abstract reflection on God, evil, justice, and human suffering receives a concrete case, an immediate human voice, and probing interpretations. Job emerges as the most subtle and complex of theodicies which accomplishes the ultimate goal of theodicy, to embrace justice and hope out of the situation of despair (Kepnes, 36).

My thesis is yet another attempt to highlight and address some of the questions raised in the Book of Job.

Each of the four verses which I will illuminate in this thesis is situated within a particular context in the Book of Job, thereby highlighting its significance for the Book in its entirety. Each also highlights and encapsulates an idea or message that helps to build a structure of meaning which can only be understood at the conclusion of the text.

B. בָּרַךְ - BETWEEN BLESSING AND CURSE: *JOB 2:9*

Job 2:9
בָּרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים וָמֻת
Bless/Curse God and/but die.

First, the word, "בָּרַךְ" as it is found in Job 2:9, is preceded by other uses of the same word in a similarly ambiguous way, in Job 1:11 as well as Job 2:5. "בָּרַךְ" literally means, to "kneel"; by implication to *bless*, as an act of adoration. Still, translators almost universally accept a distinctly different translation of this word both here and in several other parts of the Book of Job[14] to indicate that also, by euphemism, it can mean *to curse* (God or the king, as treason).

Job's wife's words in Job 2:9 highlight the difficulty of discerning the *truth* of a situation: does she mean to say, "bless" or "curse" God in this context? Her suggestion to her husband, that he: "בָּרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים וָמֻת" is hardly an accident of confusing the word for "bless" with "curse" ("Bless God and die", versus "Curse God and die"). The vast majority of translations indicate that Job's wife meant to say, "*curse* God and die". NRSV and the World English Bible translate this as "Renounce God and die", whereas the JPS Tanakh states that this verse means, "Blaspheme God and die." The Darby Bible, King James, Websters Bible, all translate it as, "Curse God and die." The Bible in Basic English says this verse means, "Say a curse against God, and put an end to yourself." None of these translations even hint at the problem and this unusual treatment of the word they elsewhere translate as, "bless".

[14] בָּרַךְ is also used in this manner in Job 1:11, 2:5, perhaps also in 1:21

Only Young's Literal Translation cites Job 2:9 as, "Bless God and die." Despite the translators' clear almost universal insistence that "בָּרַךְ" means "curse", there is *no* mention of "curse" as a possible euphemistic translation of "בָּרַךְ" in the source book most often utilized to discover alternative meanings and citations of a given Biblical word: the BDB. Rather, the BDB *ignores* the possibility that "בָּרַךְ" means anything other than "bless". If one follows this literal meaning, it is possible to see a completely different picture; when she says in 2:9, literally, "*Bless* God, and Die" – Job's wife is essentially highlighting for her husband and for the reader the absurdity of her own demand: *how* might praising God cause him to die? Conversely, how might *cursing* God cause him to die? It might be necessary to look more closely at the other words surrounding "בָּרַךְ" in Job's wife's advice. Specifically, what does she mean by "and die"?

> By not denying God and, at the same time, by trying to speak the truth, one is easily drawn into heresy (from the Greek, 'to take to oneself'). Heresy is the arrogation of critical judgment to oneself, the assertion of the right to dissent. But dissent is always from something, from some order (Blumenthal, 239).

If we read the wife's advice as "bless", how are we to understand it resulting in death? One way to look at the wife's advice is to consider the fact that from Job's words, we know that Job is clearly angry and upset about the unfairness of his fate. He is often remembered as the archetype for "when bad things happen to good people" and lauded (incorrectly, in my opinion) for his unending patience in the face of hardship. The Book of Job is *filled* with Job's sadness and anger. Some believe that Job's words constitute heresy, that his words reflect an obsession with his own perception of his suffering.

One of the ways to grasp the meaning of Job's wife's words includes a particular understanding of the word, "die" in this context. According to Zimmerman, who writes about the role of honest self expression in the healing process after suffering a major trauma,

> After the initial shock, we have to move from surviving to thriving. That can only be done when we acknowledge, and ultimately embrace, the full extent of the loss; when we go through our grief. If we don't, we die, or something in us dies (Zimmermann, 25).

For Job to bless God while repressing his honest feelings of rage and despair would be to maintain a lie that might destroy him. The true strength of Job is his willingness, his daring to speak honestly about his fate, his anger, his grief, and his sense of divine injustice. Job has the courage to *not* deny his feelings and his experience; he has the courage to *not die*, even in the face of grave suffering. If Job were to follow his wife's advice, as literally translated above as "*bless* God and die" (Job 2:9), though he might avoid accusations of heresy, he would not be speaking from the truth of his experience, but rather repeating the apologetics found in the traditional folk-wisdom of the time and the Tanakh, much like Job's friends (who are told that they did not speak the truth, as did God's "servant, Job", and must repent for this sin). To do so is to die in some sense, or to be liable to a kind of death, either literally or spiritually. To "bless" God when angry and in pain is, essentially, lying to God and to oneself about the reality of the emotional and spiritual reality of one's painful life situation. To lie to God and to oneself is, in essence, to die.

Ilana Pardes, in her article, "Contradictions in the Bible", points to the contribution of Job's wife, with a one liner, to the anti-dogmatic bent of the text. She

distinguishes the prose frame-story from the poetic dialogues that comprise the central part of the Book. The prose story is a seemingly naïve tale about the "righteous" Job, who has a good life which is taken from him. Job does not curse God, but blesses God with resignation. In the poetic dialogue Job has no patience and protests against the divine injustice, and blame God for his unbearable suffering with no reason. Pardes cites the discrepancies between the prose story and the poetic dialogue as examples of the diversity of languages, which intersect in the Hebrew Bible. Job's wife appears at the end of the prologue and initiates the impatience within the dialogues with her words "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die" (2:9). Following the conventional translation, Pardes accepts the wife's advice as a charge to Job to challenge the God who has afflicted him, even if the consequence be death. Job has not been able to be angry with God. Job's response is: "You speak as one of the foolish women speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil[15]" (Job 2:10). This angry retort points to a tension between patience and impatience, between blessing and curse which distinguishes Job as a unique and complicated text (Pardes, 148-149). It also opens the flood gate that allows Job to release his true feelings, beginning with Chapter 3.

Whedbee highlights the presence of incongruity within the text as a key to understanding the Book of Job as comedy, laced with elements of tragedy,

> As I read comedy, it seems that a major point is its perception of the incongruities of existence in which celebration and festivity occur side-by-side with evil and death. Thus the comic vision does not necessarily

[15] "*Unde malum?* (whence evil?) was a common refrain in classical writings, but evils only become a *problem* – give rise to an argument – when there are beliefs in the world with which they seem to conflict. The existence of a benevolent, omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful) God is one such belief" (Larrimore, xviii).

> eliminate evil and death; it is not incorrigibly and naively optimistic; it does not shut its eyes to the dark, jagged edges of life in this world. In fact, many would argue that it is precisely because humans have experienced suffering that they have a sharpened awareness of comic incongruity. Comedy therefore may incorporate rather than ignore the haunting riddles of life (Whedbee, 260-261).

The real value of Job and the Book of Job is its unflinching honesty: Job is angry; Job feels disempowered and betrayed; Job tells us about his pain. In this way, "bless" and "curse" are easily confused, (as are tragedy and comedy in Whedbee's vision of the Book as a whole) and, I believe, intentionally confounded throughout the text in order to highlight the absurdity of such notions when confronted with true tragedy, as was Job.

> There is the paradox that sometimes we laugh so hard we cry. It is also possible to cry so hard we laugh. As the great humorists know, there is a fine line between comedy and tragedy. It is the intense life experiences – both joyful and wretched – that move us the most.... There are certain things in life that cannot be separated. As much as we would like to shield ourselves from suffering and expand our ability to experience joy, the fact is that heartache leads to joy and joy to heartache (Zimmermann, 69-70).

If Job were to "*bless* God" in the face of his own heartache and agony, he would be no more interesting to us as modern readers as are his robotic friends who simply regurgitated traditions they had been taught, regardless of their truth or their applicability in real life situations.

Job's wife's demand that Job "*curse bless* God, and die" actually brings to focus a main struggle for Job throughout the text. In essence, Job's wife's words hold the key to unlocking one clear message of the Book of Job. Only the inclusion of both the literal translation of "bless" alongside its antithesis, "curse" truly captures the ambiguity of the command issued to Job by his wife here. His lengthy response beginning with Chapter 3

avoids blessing or cursing God, and ultimately leads Job to a new life. "I will not speak with restraint," (Job 7:11) Job declares.

> Indeed, Job's power and the strength of the book as a resource to address human suffering lies in Job's decision to throw off restraint and give voice to his suffering... this Job gives voice to his pain, his despair, and his anger in speech after speech (Kepnes, 45-46).

Once both the "blessing" and the "curse" are acknowledged, is it possible to understand the result, "and/but die". The issue of translation arises again in this short phrase with the specific translation of the connecting *"vav"* which precedes the word, "die". This "vav" can mean "and" or "but". This, too, is a critical distinction in the phrase, for it indicates the precise connection between the verb, "curse/bless" and its result, "die". As such, "and die", which is the almost universally assumed translation of this tiny "vav", implies that dying is causally related to the action taken "curse/bless". On the other hand, "but die" reveals a more nuanced relationship between the action and the result: here, dying is an opposing force which happens *in spite* of the action, not *because* of the action. Here, I believe the best translation allows the ambiguity to remain in the verse, allowing for both possibilities. To bless God in certain circumstances is as fatal as cursing God in other circumstances.

I believe that an ultimate message for Job is the importance of speaking one's truth, even if it means expressing unpopular or unpleasant things about God, human life, and one's perception of the world. Expressing one's truth is crucial to existence, even if it admits ambiguity and doubt where one might expect steadfast faith, even when the consequences may, in some sense, be fatal.

C. רֹגֶז - STAY TUNED – RAGE IS COMING: *JOB 3:26*

Job 3:26
וַיָּבֹא רֹגֶז
And anger will come.

Second, the appropriate translation and subsequent understanding of the phrase, "וַיָּבֹא רֹגֶז" also illuminates a critical point often missed when reading the Book of Job. This verse is the last verse in Chapter 3, which is Job's first speech. Like a good attorney pleading his case before the jury of his friends and his God, Job's final words linger in the reader's mind and truly set the stage for the remainder of the Book of Job, for the remainder of the trial. His final words of his "opening statement" are a warning, a prediction: "וַיָּבֹא רֹגֶז" – "and anger will come".

The word, "רֹגֶז" has many possible translations, though in this context most agree that it means "trouble" (NRSV, King James, Darby Bible, JPS Tanakh, and Websters Bible). Only The Bible in Basic English translates "רֹגֶז" as "pain". Other translations of the word, "רֹגֶז" include: commotion, restlessness (of a horse), crash (of thunder), disquiet, anger -- fear, noise, rage, trouble(-ing), wrath; *"ragaz"*, an alternate form of the same verb means, to quiver (with any violent emotion, especially anger or fear) -- be afraid, stand in awe, disquiet, fall out, fret, move, provoke, quake, rage, shake, tremble, trouble, be wroth (BDB, 919).

> When one is in real trouble, one's emotions swing, sometimes rather wildly. One feels confidence and panic, hope and hurt. One calls to mind the good times, evokes the covenant, pleads, boasts, makes vows, ponders one's enemies, confronts one's own helplessness, fantasizes about victory

> over the enemies, worries about one's moral integrity, and contemplates the future and ultimacy of the stakes (Blumenthal, 174-175).

This description seems fitting for Job, and is clearly connected to the variety of translations available for "רָגַז".

In terms of its context within the Book of Job as a whole, "רָגַז" is also utilized in a wide variety of settings with an even wider array of translations and implications for the word's meaning throughout the Book. For example, the JPS Tanakh translates Job 12:6 as "provoke", whereas the NRSV translates it as "shakes from out of its place" in Job 9:6. On the other hand, NRSV translates the word "רָגַז" in Job 37:2 as "thunder" (referring to the thunder of God's voice), whereas the JPS Tanakh translates this same verse as "noise of his rumbling" and 39:24 as "trembling with excitement". In a strikingly different translation of this verse, NRSV says "רָגַז" means "fierceness and rage" in 39:24. I believe this is a more accurate translation, because "anger" (or "rage") better accounts or the semantic range in Job and for what one would expect Job to feel.

> The melancholy is difficult enough to hear, but added to it is Job's rage. First toward the day of his birth, then toward his friends, then toward God, Job expresses the 'bitterness of his soul' (Job 10:1). But it is obvious that this expression has a cathartic and curative dimension to it. Where the friends believe that Job's anger will 'tear him to pieces' (Job 18:4) and seek to silence it, the expression of Job's anger is actually a key to allowing him to cope with his suffering. It contributes to his ability to preserve his integrity despite his appearance, his pain, his shame, and the universal disgust he provokes in the world (Kepnes, 46).

Still, in opposition to this translation, both the JPS and NRSV translate Job 14:1 as "of trouble", and in Job 3:17 as "from troubling". The violent, negative emotion is hardly

captured in the word, "trouble", which (like these latter examples) is the normative way in which "רֶגֶז" is translated. But Job is *mad*. Job says what he feels; he makes radical claims about the nature of God and his perception of God's injustices.

> Though the Job-writer stops short of espousing the view that God is a fiend, he is certainly able to entertain an equivalent view. The world in which he imagines Job to be suffering is one ruled by a God who plays games with a fiend and is manipulated and controlled by a fiend (Miles, 309).

The first half of this particular verse, Job 3:26, is also significant; it sets the stage for the proclamation that "רֶגֶז" will come, possibly explaining why "רֶגֶז" might be so important to understand in its full force: "לֹא שָׁלַוְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי וְלֹא־נָחְתִי". This phrase is translated in the JPS Tanakh as, "I had no repose, no quiet, no rest" and NRSV translates it as, "I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest". The most striking difference between these two translations is their difference in tense: JPS is in past tense, whereas NRSV is present. This, too, has important implications for the translation of the second half of the verse, "וַיַּעֲבֹר רֶגֶז".

Another interesting variable in this verse is found in the variant possibilities in translating the verb, "וַיַּעֲבֹר" which indicates the timeframe in which "רֶגֶז" will take place. The normative translation of "וַיַּעֲבֹר" is some version of the past tense of the verb, "came" (King James, Darby Bible, JPS Tanakh, Websters Bible). These translations assume that the "*vav*" is a "*vav ha-hipuch*", thereby changing the seemingly future tense verb, "to come" into a past tense construction, "came". The Bible in Basic English states that "וַיַּעֲבֹר" means, "comes on me", and both the World English Bible and Young's

Literal Translation both indicate that the verb is meant to be in the present tense, "comes". This distinction is critical, as it indicates whether the "רֹגֶז" has already come (past tense), or whether it has yet to surface. I argue that reading the *"vav"* as a *"vav ha-hipuch"* is not entirely accurate or necessary; rather, it assumes that the problematic "רֹגֶז" is now over. This does not explain, then, why the majority of the conflict in the Book of Job has yet to arrive, or why so much anger and unrest is yet to come. I prefer to read "וַיָּבֹא רֹגֶז" as a warning: *"and anger will come"*.

I also believe that this sensitivity to timing is implicitly Jewish:

> 'For everything there is a moment, and a time for every need under the heavens. There is a time to... and a time to...' (Ecclesiastes 3:1). We start with enthusiasm, we waver, and then we reaffirm – in all things: in marriage, in parenting, in career, in faith, even in theology. In matters of belief, there is a time for unyielding protest and there is a time for submission. There is a time for an absolutely omnipotent God and there is a time for a fragile YHVH. There is time to repress the dissonance and a time to cultivate it. There is a time to demythologize and a time to live the myth fully (Blumenthal, 52).

There also is precedent in Jewish history for the creation of a theology which includes the possibility of "a time" in which it would be appropriate to express anger at God,

> '*YHVH is my light and my deliverance, of whom am I afraid? YHVH is the fortress of my life, whom do I fear?*' (Psalm 27): The psalmist is frightened and perhaps angry, yet he will not allow us to compartmentalize our anger and fear into an inner space devoid of God's presence. Rather, the psalmist teaches that we must bring fear and anger into dialogue/confrontation with God. The result of this dialogue/confrontation is a reaffirmation of the vision of relatedness between humanity and God that is the core of biblical theology, even when that relatedness seems fractured, unjustified (Blumenthal, 165).

Some writers and thinkers see suffering as an opportunity for self-reflection and for spiritual growth,

> Part of going through grief involves entering fully into the tragedy, acknowledging the enormity of what has happened, and understanding that something profound has been taken away forever.... We discover unexpected particles of truth that light our path; we move through our grief mindfully, in a way that allows us to comprehend and integrate the experience into our lives, not just rush frantically on as the avalanche thunders around us. By going deep within to a place of honesty unattained by society's 'shoulds', our vision is enlarged. We gain perspective on our lives (Zimmermann, 26).

Zimmermann is suggesting that the act of going through and honestly expressing our experiences of pain and grief can potentially make us stronger human beings, capable of better understanding our lives and the world in which we live. According to Rita Nakashima Brock, in the Forward she wrote to Blumenthal's book, Facing the Abusing God, there is also often a trend toward rethinking theology and God after suffering. In some cases, like Job's, the experience of tragedy necessitates a reconsideration of God and the nature of the divine in the universe.

A similar kind of reconsideration of God and theodicy occurred after the Babylonian exile, and after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans (Blumenthal, xi). In more recent history, in the years following the Holocaust, theologians have struggled with anger to understand God in the face of such horrific slaughter:

> If we believe in providence, that is, in God's active participation in human history, how can we account for God's activity in the holocaust? Was God active, inactive, indirectly active? Present, absent? Silent? Angry? Powerless? Punitive?" (Blumenthal, xvi).

Certainly if there is a place for the question, "how can God allow bad things to happen to good people?" the Holocaust has renewed and expanded the importance of such a question. It is truly nearly impossible, today, to examine the Book of Job and to inquire

of God's goodness and justice without invoking the horrors endured by Jews and others during those years. Blumenthal continues,

> Truth is the knowledge of limits. The limit is the moral question that pierces the heart of the moral structure of the human and of divine personality. The limit is the demand for engagement, for moral action. To transgress is to ask the question, 'Where are you? What have you done? – no matter how hurtful. The discourse of transgression is making the moral demand, as strongly as one can – no matter how preposterous, no matter how offensive. Truth is knowing what moral question to ask, and then asking it – no matter how risky the answer (Blumenthal, 106-107).

In Blumenthal's book, Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest, I found a companion on my path in search of a theology which allows space for anger; for questioning God's morality; for exploring God and evil in the world. Truly, it is an understanding of Job's fury, a deeper appreciation for the nuances of "וַיִּבָּא רֻגְזוֹ" in the context of a larger theology which can embrace an extreme and unpleasant human emotion like anger, even if it is directed toward God.

Still, we are hardly the first generation of scholars to shy away from the desire to curse God or to ask that Job cease his demands for justice and simply bless God. We inherit this legacy from a wide range of spiritual and philosophical forefathers. The French philosopher, Voltaire, wrote in his *Philosophical Dictionary* in 1764 that he preferred to worship a limited God than a wicked one (Larrimore, 204). In contrast, Rousseau stated, "man, seek the author of evil no longer. It is yourself. No evil exists other than that which you do or suffer, and both come to you from yourself" (Larrimore, 210). Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* rendered the world of "things in themselves" inaccessible to experience, and radically redefined the status of our knowledge of God. All *a priori* arguments for the existence of God were demolished, along with arguments from the seemingly purposive design of the world. In their place, Kant offered a religion

of hope like Rousseau's, yet based not on 'theoretical', but on 'practical reason'. It is the needs of our moral lives, especially when the moral arbitrariness of the world of our experience makes us wonder whether moral effort is meaningful, that permit us to believe that there is a God to coordinate the moral and natural worlds (Larrimore, 224).

In "The Problem of Job" (1898), the philosopher, Josiah Royce argues that only his brand of idealism consoles, because only it accepts the sufferer's *experience* of evil; other views either deny the reality of evil, or make it the sufferer's fault. Further, it seems that with the rise of the twentieth century, William James typified the trend in theodicy, "to defend...'experience' against 'philosophy' as being the real backbone of the world's religious life" (Larrimore, 293, 301).

Still, we are the inheritors of a tradition which includes the Book of Job in the canon, and appropriates its potentially blasphemous poetry within the genre of "Wisdom Literature". Clearly, anger is not something to be avoided at all costs, in all situations:

> Job's anger begins to emerge with the dialogues. He now comes closer to adopting the advice of his "foolish" wife. He is now ready to "curse and die". Living with a merciless God is now unbearable for him. Job responds to his friends, who espouse the doctrine of retribution, with the belief that calamities fall indiscriminately both on the righteous and the wicked. In the prose epilogue God makes clear that God prefers Job's protest against divine injustice to the dogmatic thoughtless faith of the friends (Pardes, 150).

D. שַׁדַּי - THE GOD OF MY BREAST: *JOB 27:2*

Job 27:2
חַי־אֵל הֵסִיר מִשְׁפָּטִי וְשַׁדַּי הֵמַר נַפְשִׁי׃
Living-God deprived me of justice
And Shaddai embittered my self.

Next, the third important verse to be investigated is Job 27:2, in which God is called "חַי־אֵל" and also "שַׁדַּי", both names which contain a sense of intimate connection and a close, positive relationship between God and Job[16]. The actions taken by this God, however, decry a sense of disappointment and abandonment of this intimate connection, as Job claims that God has "deprived me of justice" and "embittered my self", as he says, "חַי־אֵל הֵסִיר מִשְׁפָּטִי וְשַׁדַּי הֵמַר נַפְשִׁי׃".

This proclamation comes at the beginning of Job's soliloquy, just before the passage on the "nature of wisdom". It seems to mark 'the beginning of the end' of the Book of Job, as the conflict reaches a new climax and Job truly articulates his sense of having been the victim of a great divine injustice.

Most translations try to translate the name of God, "שַׁדַּי", to the English word, "Almighty" (NRSV, Darby Bible, King James Version, JPS Tanakh, Websters Bible, and the World English Bible), or to "Ruler of All" (Bible in Basic English). "שַׁדַּי" is also used in Ruth 1:20, combined with the same verb, "embittered" to describe the way Naomi feels. Both she and Job feel as though the Almighty had acted so as to cause pain and

[16] "The several names for God found in the original have been reflected in the translation so as to give the reader a sense of the diversity of ancient titles associated with God and to highlight the contrast between the covenant name Yahweh found in the prose segments of the book and the more archaic names El, Eloah, and Shaddai employed by the speakers in the poetic dialogue" (Habel, 22).

bitterness in their lives. I suggest that the specific name used for God, "שַׁדַּי", (which literally means "my breasts") in both of these situations is highly significant,

> There are many ways to love. There is erotic love – passionate, searing, erratic. There is virtuous love – ongoing, nurturing, morally rooted. There is parental love – protective, demanding, guiding even in its anger. Sometimes love is unilateral; sometimes it is dialogic. Sometimes love is sacrificial; sometimes it is commanding, imperial. Sometimes love is open, articulated clearly; sometimes it is veiled, hidden. **Love is a breast** – warm, comforting... (Blumenthal, 16).

If God is, indeed, the divine name connected to "my breasts", there are revealing implications for the understanding of the phrase spoken here as a lament or accusation, "Shaddai embittered my self!" The use of the name, "שַׁדַּי", might very well indicate a claim for abuse or neglect by God, as one whose role and expectation was to care for God's intimate, Job. Speaking of abuse in general, Blumenthal writes:

> What is at stake, here, is intimate combat, deeply personal attack and counterattack... the language here bespeaks abuse – abuse by an intimate or intimates. To be abused means to be battered, to be beaten, to be assaulted bodily. To be abused means to have the boundary that separates you from the other violated. Sometimes the suffering is senseless, without purpose or meaning; always it is undeserved. Sometimes to be abused means to be tortured, systematically. To be abused is to have control of your body taken from you, by force... abuse comes from the outside; it is to your very person, against your body, your mind, and your heart (Blumenthal, 124-125).

Using a very different definition of the word, "שַׁדַּי", Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, or "Rashi", a great scholar and Biblical commentator in the Middle Ages stated that "שַׁדַּי" should be read as "שֶׁ־דַּי", or "the one for whom it is enough" . Both this explanation and also those which cite the plethora of sources wherein "שַׁדַּי" is translated as

"Almighty" seem to ignore completely the alternate meaning of the word, "שַׁדַּי" in Hebrew, both within the Bible and elsewhere in Jewish tradition.

The Hebrew word "שַׁדַּי" literally means "my breasts". Throughout the Bible, "שַׁדַּי" refers to women's breasts: both maternal breasts which provide food, comfort and nurturance to the suckling young and to the breasts of a more sexualized woman. Examples abound in Scripture: Ezekiel 23:21, Ezekiel 16:7, Hosea 9:14, Isaiah 28:9, Lamentations 4:3, Genesis 49:25, Isaiah 60:16 and throughout the Song of Songs. This use of the word "שַׁדַּי" to refer to literal breasts is found even within the Book of Job in Job 3:12, Job 2:16, Job 24:9 (BDB, 994-995).

As such, this God, "שַׁדַּי" is an intimate, nurturing God, not only a powerful God (as evidenced in the translation, "Almighty"). In Job's cries for justice and for connection with the divine is a cry for the Great Mother, or the Lover. This is Job's wail of the betrayal he experiences in the bitterness of his reality, complicated and multiplied by the very fact that an intimacy and trust have been violated.

Those who translate "שַׁדַּי" as "Almighty" claim that this name claims God's power and God's greatness as God's legacy here. Elsewhere in the Tanakh, "שַׁדַּי" is also translated as "Almighty", and the BDB concordance makes reference to the fact that "שַׁדַּי" can imply "to deal violently", not only "mightily": Numbers 24:4, 16, Isaiah 13:6, Ezekiel 1:24, Genesis 49:25 and also cites this as the appropriate translation in Job 5:17, 30, 19:29. I choose to leave "שַׁדַּי" translated simply as "Shaddai", because it envelops

both possibilities and realities. "Shaddai" holds the references to "my breast" and also to mighty and perhaps violent power (BDB, 994-995).

In Job 6:4, this name, *Shaddai*, is used to describe "the arrows of *Shaddai*" that were within him, "the poison whereof drinks up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array" against Job (Job 6:4). In Job 31:2, *Shaddai* is also the name of God called to trial for the injustices inflicted upon him. Blumenthal states that this sense of betrayal by an Intimate God, *Shaddai*, is truly a form of abuse, claiming on behalf of the victim,

> If I am abused, then He is the abuser. If I am violated, then He is the Perpetrator. If I must do intimate battle, then He is the Adversary. If I must engage in life-and-death combat in the innermost world of the self, then He is the One Who Threatens. God is the abuser and we are the abused" (Blumenthal, 154-155).

The precise translation of the whole phrase, "וְשַׁדַּי הֵמַר נַפְשִׁי" is essential to a complete understanding of Job and his claim against God: if understood according to my translation, Job is not only angry about *what* was done to his self, but also *Who* has done such terrible and unexpected horrors to him. The relationship between "שַׁדַּי" the name of the One inflicting these terrible realities upon Job and the betrayal of their relationship is just as important as "הֵמַר נַפְשִׁי", or what precisely was done to him.

As for the word, "הֵמַר", the NRSV and King James Version both translate this as "vexed", whereas NRSV, Darby Bible, the Bible in Basic English state that it means, "embittered" or "made my soul bitter". The JPS Tanakh translates it as "who has dealt bitterly with me", and Websters says, "who has afflicted my soul". Both the World English Bible and Young's Literal Translation say that this means, "who has made my

soul bitter". In modern Hebrew, too, the word, "מַר" literally means, "bitter". As such, it seems important to indicate this in the translation of the word for what God did to Job (and Naomi) in their own words: they became *embittered* because of God's actions.

Both the words, "הִמַּר" and "נַפְשִׁי" are essential to understand, as they describe precisely *what* was done to Job, and the resulting effect this action had on him. Some see this statement as a kind of oath, wherein Job reaffirms his commitment and allegiance to God, even in the face of his agony. These translations rely on a slightly different but highly significant understanding of the phrase, "חַי־אֵל" as a kind of proclamation, "Long Live Shaddai!" In this reading, Job is announcing his intention clearly and out loud to remain faithful to his God. I prefer to see "חַי־אֵל" as a full name for God, mirroring the name "שַׁדַּי" in the second half of the verse.

In "embittering" Job's "self", God, (known here as both "חַי־אֵל" and "שַׁדַּי"), has been involved in creating not a *di*lemma for the readers of the Book of Job, but a "*tri*lemma",

> The problem with evils is more commonly treated as a *trilemma*, the apparently inconsistent set of propositions which asserts (a) God's goodness, (b) God's omnipotence, and (c) the existence of evil (Larrimore, xix).

It is our sense of being children of שַׁדַּי, experiencing the "bitterness" of suffering and of a disappointing end to an intimate connection with the divine which press us to become true theologians, prepared to explore and understand the many nuances of a relationship with a God who can co-exist with great suffering in the world. We are left to make sense

of this "trilemma", then: to seek to understand how God can possibly be good, powerful, and allow great suffering to exist. A relationship with this multi-faceted, complex God requires a true commitment to honest communication, and even confrontation:

> We cannot be the loving children of the abusing God, nor can we worship Him, without confronting Him, without some resolution to His treatment of us in our common history. As Jews, as theologians, as co-victims, we must speak, we must seek a new relatedness – bearing in mind the inadequacy of earlier answers while acknowledging the desire and obligation to be what we are: children of our Father" (Blumenthal, 170).

In order to maintain a relationship with a God who "embitters", Job teaches us that we must demand communication, even when the divine response is not what we want or desire; we must learn from Job that it is the connection itself that we crave. There can be no doubt that God's concluding words carry a heavy weight of grave significance.

> In the end, Job is exonerated and God is redeemed. God's judgment is that Job is the only one who has spoken 'rightly' about God. Perdue points out that it is Job's language about God – not Job's integrity – that is the significant and important basis for judgment. The meaning of the book moves away from the moral theory of retribution to a vindication of Job's stringent questioning of divine justice and deconstruction of the friends' false theology of retribution and unquestionable sovereignty (Purdue, 239-240).

E. אֵלַי - TALK TO ME: *JOB 42:7-8*

Job 42:7

כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב

Because you have not spoken right ***to me***, as has my servant Job.

Job 42:8

כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב

Because you have not spoken right ***to me***, as did my servant, Job.

Finally, and most essentially, the verses 42:7 and 42:8 highlight what is perhaps the most important contribution provided by the Book of Job to the subjects of theodicy and theology. Ironically, all biblical translations into English overlook this crucial point. Not one Biblical translation indicates that "אֵלַי" here means (as it usually means throughout the Bible) "to me.", Instead, they render these verses as not "of me", "concerning me", or "about me" in the context of either verse.

Throughout the Tanakh and throughout Hebrew literature, "אֵלַי" means, "to me" (BDB, 39-40). The word is found even within the Book of Job and used to indicate "of direction toward" something in Job 5:26, Job 15:22, and Job 29:19. It is essential to recognize that the meaning of the book changes dramatically when translated correctly; that the repetition of God's words signals the double affirmation of these words as God's view; and that as God's concluding message – not only in the Book of Job but in the Tanakh as a whole – these words become particularly weighty.

There is a great history of non-conformists in the Biblical tradition. Job stands with other revered ancestors when he demands more from the almighty. The religious

audacity in the character of Hannah, Elijah, and Moses, who 'spoke insolently against heaven' (Talmud Berakhot 31b-32a)... is praised in the tradition for their courageous moral dissent. Far from being considered acts of insubordination, these acts of dissent testify to the high status accorded to human conscience. As such, "the acts and motives of spiritual heroes point to an intuitive moral sensibility that on occasion transcends the law or even the lawgiver" (Schulweis, 82-85).

When God says, "כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב", God is asking, God is demanding, God is requesting, ***"talk to me!"*** This means that God craves our words, our honest self-expression, even when we might think God would prefer platitudes or apologetics. This goes beyond prayer: talking to God means committing to staying in communication, staying connected, even when it might be easier to walk away. This is a revolutionary revelation, as Job is praised for the *direction* of his speech (towards God), not the *content* of what he says when he speaks to God.

> The theology of image, a personalist theology proposes, in humility and embarrassment, that there is no choice but to retrieve the hermeneutic of personal and of holy language; that one must speak, as best one can, always aware of the silence that haunts one's speech, of God and of humankind as holy person, in dialogue. The theology that understands God's essential attributes as personality and holiness teaches that there is no alternative to forming a vision of God and humankind that is rooted in personality and holiness; that one must do this, as clearly as possible, even as one must remain aware of the darkness that encompasses and threatens humanity (Blumenthal, 30-31).

The Book of Job takes Blumenthal's insights even further. It has God insist repeatedly of the need to do this "speaking" with Job. It teaches us, too, that God can handle our rage: Job remains God's faithful servant, even as he blasts God with fury and grief, because he continues to speak to God.

Unlike many readers of the Book of Job, I love the way in which God appears to Job from out of a whirlwind. This revelation teaches us that anger is sanctioned, even lauded. The expression of anger, in God's case, reveals God's vulnerability, as it exposes God's unpleasant feelings of disappointment and rage to his mortal partner in dialogue.

> Those who want the Book of Job to offer a theodicy have missed the point as badly as his comforters, who offer several. It is true that God never provides Job with an intellectually satisfying justification of his suffering. But in the book as we now have it, he does finally end his silence and, more to the point, he ends Job's suffering as well, restoring Job to his former blessed status. What the sufferer wants is not an explanation but a prescription, something he can *do* to reactivate God after this painful quiescence (Levenson, xviii).

Though God never directly addresses any of Job's claims of injustice[17], or consoles him in his great suffering, God gives Job exactly what he most desires: God's presence, God's communication. God essentially matches Job's fury. God bursts forth in just the manner Job fears and expects: in chaos, in anger, in self-defense. God, in revealing God's own divine anger, is revealing Godself to Job. God, like Job, is angry, hurt, and does not hold back in communicating these reactions to Job. Job throws forth fury, pain, and betrayal; God does the same. In acknowledging the pain and fury, God reveals the depth of feeling and connection which exists between them. Had God responded to Job's fury with anything but fury, the relationship would be uneven; Job would be wrong to expect intimacy from a Force which feels nothing like the reciprocity in the speeches in the whirlwind.

> Far from alien to our tradition, the voice of conscience is rooted in the moral covenant between God and Israel. That covenant is reciprocal. It applies to God as to the people... Despite the apparent contradictions to

[17] "Why does [God] not claim that his justice is beyond Job's understanding rather than that there is no such thing as justice? Job would be, after all, equally rebuked" (Miles, 315).

> God's word, conscience appeals to the God within God... God recognizes in the holy dissent of the prophetic heroes His own truth (Schulweis, 86).

This reciprocity is epitomized even within God's introductory challenge – "I will ask you, and you tell me" (Job 38:3) – which is later repeated. But the issue under debate is now more clearly stated in 40:8: "would you annul my order, condemn me that you may be justified?"[18] Even in reproach, God is asking for Job's participation in the dialogue, in the creation and definition of their unique relationship.

Scholars and other interpreters have suggested that Job's "comfort" at the end of the Book results from God's readiness to appear, not from the content of his speeches. What has escaped notice, however, is the question of whether, similarly, it might be Job's presence – Job's willingness to appear before God and cry out his truth to God that touches God enough to appear in reciprocity.

According to this tradition of reciprocity and dialogue with a God who Hears and Speaks to humanity, ***we have the sacred obligation to cry out in our pain, to express even our rage and disappointment to the divine.*** We must commit ourselves to reveal ourselves as much as to behold God's revelation. Essentially, what we learn is that Revelation is reciprocal: we are bound through covenant to remain in relationship with God, to express our reality as we experience it, and to listen to God's response to the best of our ability,

> The status and role of conscience in religion cast a different complexion on revelation. Revelation is not a one-way directive from above or a human projection from below. Revelation is the dialogue of reciprocal covenant, an ongoing process of listening and interpreting, of receiving and giving. Awareness of having entered the covenant makes it impossible to separate the divine and human element in the encounter of

[18] Whedbee, 253

> revelation. To paraphrase the philosopher William James, does the river make the banks or do the banks make the river? (Schulweis, 87).

What troubles me is the lack of divine communication with anyone else in the Tanakh after Job. Miles expresses this problem aptly,

> As we move past the Book of Job into the rest of the Tanakh, it is all but impossible to say who has the last word. If we infer from God's silence from the end of the Book of Job through to the end of the Tanakh that Job has reduced God to silence, is that a victory for Job? Perhaps, but Job has always wanted God to speak, after all; particularly after his fortunes are restored, would he not continue in this wish? Certainly Israel does not want God to remain silent (Miles, 330-331).

Does this covenant of reciprocity end with God and Job? Job, too, is silent after his interaction with God. After the first speech from the whirlwind, Job replies, "Behold, I am light; what shall I answer you? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: twice; but I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4-5). What precisely silences Job? Does he not truly want reciprocity with God? Does he long for his previous, innocent connection with God before his ordeals and disappointment and disruption?

In thinking about this phenomenon of a severe trial of faith followed by silence, we are reminded of the trial of Abraham in which he is asked to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Again, a phrase is repeated twice (in this case, it is "you did not withhold your son from me") and again an active and intimate relationship between a mortal and God ends in silence. This pattern is troubling; it remains unclear whether God or the human subjects of the trial emerges the victor, and it is unclear precisely what causes the silence.

A key to understanding the unnerving end to the Book of Job in which both parties are reduced to silence might come from the fact that,

> Job never addresses the voice from the whirlwind by name... Job never addresses his interlocutor as God or Lord or anything in particular and never otherwise speaks of him as divine. The voice from the whirlwind declines to identify itself. Job declines to supply what the voice has omitted (Miles, 321).

The reciprocity in the dialogue between God and Job, too, might have been more than God had planned for[19] when he engaged in the wager with *HaSatan*,

> The Lord's fantasy was that by wantonly inflicting suffering on Job, he would provoke only a greater, more glorious demonstration of Job's adoring, selfless devotion. Job is pure and innocent; he will do anything, the Lord thinks. But to the Lord's horror, Job turns out to be a more perfect self-image of the Lord than the Lord had planned on. The Lord wants to see what Job is made of. Very well, Job will show him, but Job will also see what the Lord is made of. Job is the supreme image of God's desire to know God, for he accepts suffering, but he does not accept it silently; he is not resigned to having no explanation for it (Miles, 404).

Blumenthal, too, asks,

> What became of the relationship of Job and God after this tirade? Did Job trust and worship God again? Does the enigmatic last sentence mean that Job was so terrified that he repressed his question completely? Or does it mean that Job had a religious, or mystical, experience which transformed his question and his spiritual being to a higher plane? Does the ending signify that Job was somehow satisfied with having attracted God's direct attention and that that was enough? Do these closing verses indicate that Job resolved his suffering by ultimately accepting his inferior status and hence God's judgment?" (Blumenthal, 255).

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[19] "Job may, therefore, have saved the Lord from himself, yet God can never seem to Job after this episode quite what he seemed before it. More to the point, the Lord can never seem quite the same to himself. The devil is now a permanent part of his reality; and though at the eleventh hour he has broken free of the Adversary, he has done so through a deeper humiliation at the hands of a terrestrial adversary, Job himself. To be sure, Job has brought his own all too simpleminded trust in God into accord with a far more nuanced and mature Jewish wisdom – into accord, in other words, with a realistic vision of the world in which justice is both guaranteed by the good God and occasionally threatened by the bad God" (Miles, 327).

Other scholars have noted the similarities between Genesis 22 (in which Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son) and the Book of Job, as the word, "test" appears in both texts. In both stories, silence marks the end of the dialogue between two committed parties, one human and one divine. At the end of the Book of Job, unlike the story of the Binding of Isaac, the silence is not the implicit last word. Rather, God speaks to Job's friends in praise of Job, letting them know that Job's actions won divine approval. This informs the reader that the precedent set by Job is one to follow; it educates us to follow Job's example in speaking our truth, in expressing our inner-most feelings (however unpleasant) to God.

At the end of the Book, there are certainly more questions than answers about the nature of the connection between God and evil in the world. Still, like Job, I try to maintain hope in creating a theology which is inclusive both of the realities of suffering and the respect for and embrace of God, amidst all kinds of contrasting emotions. I believe the main ingredient in this theology is dialogue and relationship.

VI. DEVELOPING A (RE)NEWED THEOLOGY:

"Singing the blues means evil doesn't get the last word." (Wynton Marsalis[20])

The section of *Ketuvim*, the Writings of the Tanakh, is the record of a human response to God and about God, as well as the disclosure of the human condition. God's last words are an invitation for the human side of the dialogue to continue. A quality that unites nearly all "survivors" of tragedy is their resilience and their ability to recreate themselves in the face of deep loss. These individuals "found the courage to reinvent themselves. They live[d] in this holy instant. They recognized that when there was a 'death', they had to awaken something new" (Zimmermann, 145). In essence, they recreated their relationship to life, to themselves, and to God as the situation of their lives required a shift to adapt to their changing reality.

In many ways, Clarissa Pinkola Estes is referring to a deep, internal relationship with the divine, whom she calls, "Wild Woman" when she writes,

> Wild Woman will hold us while we grieve. She is the instinctual Self. She can bear our screaming, our wailing, our wishing to die without dying. She will put the best medicine in the worst places. She will whisper and murmur in our ears. She will feel pain for our pain. She will bear it. She will not run away. Although there will be scars and plenty of them, it is good to remember that in tensile strength and ability to absorb pressure, the scar is stronger than skin (Estes, ??).

What does it mean to be a theologian? Blumenthal essentially begins his book investigating God with this question. He then begins to answer,

> It is to have a personal rapport with God, to have a sense of responsibility for God and for how God is understood and related to by our fellow human beings. It is to mediate between God, as one understands God, and those who listen. It is to create an echo of God in the other. To be a

[20] This quotation was overheard in a physical therapy office where patients are mainly working to rehabilitate after a severe injury or illness.

> theologian is to defend God, to put back together the pieces of broken awareness and shattered relationship. Great is the suffering of our fellow human beings, and deep is the estrangement between them and God. The theologian must be a healer of that relationship, a binder of wounds, one who comforts... To be a theologian is also *to speak for one's fellow human beings*, for we are infinite in our complexity, suffering, and ecstasy. It is to have listened to joy, confusion, and despair. It is to have heard praise, rage, and helplessness. To be a theologian is to be in solidarity with one's fellow human beings before God. It is to take the heart of the other to God. To bless and to share blessing, to be angry and share rage, to talk the despair of the other to God... to be angry with God, for them. It is to praise God, with them (Blumenthal, 3- 4).

Martin Buber is rumored to have said that, "If to believe in God means to talk about him in the third person, then I do not believe in God. If to believe in God means to be able to talk to God, then I do believe in God". In essence, Buber is pointing out a truism running throughout the Book of Job: God *wants us* to speak, to rail, to share, even to curse, if it means a continuation of the relationship between God and humanity. "The discourse of transgression takes seriously the fragmenting of relatedness and *demands* the restoration of wholeness of relationship rooted in mutuality and morality" (Blumenthal, 107).

> Evil is a *practical* problem. Even the person who is a witness to evils finds her sense of agency challenged. In explaining or consoling, narrating or exorcising, praying or raging, we reassert human agency in the face of apparent malevolence or indifference to the cosmos – or our human fellows. A religious studies approach to the 'problem of evil' does not prejudge what responses to evils should look like, or what should count as an adequate response (Larrimore, xiv).

Speech gives humans agency where there seems to be helplessness. We are partners in relationship with God. This means God wants our prayers *and* our pleas, our frustrations *and* our blessings.

In his book, For Those Who Can't Believe, Rabbi Harold Schulweis reminds us that the critique of God's role in history is found within the Bible itself.

> Most people have never heard the protesting voice of prophets such as Habakuk: 'How long O YHVH shall I cry out and You will not hear? I cry out to You of violence and You will not save. Why do you show me iniquity and behold mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me?...Yours are eyes too pure to behold evil and cannot look on mischief, where do you look when they deal treacherously and You hold Your piece when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than he? (Habakuk 1:2-3, 13) (Schulweis, 70-71).

Schulweis reminds us that it is unnecessary to defend each and every act of the biblical heroes; it is not Job whom God rebukes at the end of the Book, but the apologists for God who are denounced as 'plasterers of lies' (ibid.). Job, too, should serve as a reminder, asking us,

> Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for Him? Will you show partiality towards Him, will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when He searches you out? Can you deceive Him, as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you, if in secret you show partiality" (Job 13:7-10).

I think it is interesting that what both Job and God most want from one another, communication, is precisely what they deny each other at the end of the Book. God is ultimately silenced at the end of the Book of Job; God never speaks again in the Tanakh. Job, too, previously overflowing with words, speeches, and voice, is also silent at the end of the Book.

> After action yields to speech in the Hebrew Bible, however, speech yields in its turn to silence. God's last words are those he speaks to Job[21], the human being who dares challenge not his physical power but his moral authority. Within the Book of Job itself, God's climactic and overwhelming reply seems to silence Job. But reading from the Book of Job onward, we see that it is Job who has somehow silenced God. God never speaks again, and he is decreasingly spoken of. In the Book of Esther – a book in which, as in the Book of Exodus, his chosen people faces a genocidal enemy – he is never so much as mentioned. In effect, the Jews surmount the threat without his help" (Miles, 11).

[21] More accurately, God's last words are *about* Job, not *to* Job. God's final speech is to Job's friends.

In the beginning of his final response to God, Job says, "therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:3-5). His very last sentence, though, is ambiguous[22].

Many scholars view Job's next words as an act of repentance for some wrongdoing: a confession of his insignificance, his mortality, his lack of credibility to speak so brashly to God, saying, עַל־כֵּן אֶמְאַס וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־עָפָר וָאֵפֶר:[23].

According to Whedbee,

> His confession is authentic but paradoxical: his new wisdom is that he does not know all[24], his new perception is that he does not see all; but he now knows enough and sees enough (Whedbee, 256).

What is ambiguous, however, is that still, even in these final verses of the Book, Job cries, echoing words he had heard spoken previously by God, "Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak: I will demand of you, and you declare unto me" (Job 42:4). The ultimate goal

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[22] Whatever the reason for Job's concluding statement, and whatever its meaning, one thing is clear: in the dialogue and disputation between God and Job, Job has the last word!

[23] JPS translates this phrase as, "Therefore I recant and relent, Being but dust and ashes"; RSV and NRSV translate it as, "Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" [i.e., in humiliation]; N. Habel, in The Book of Job, utilizes the translation "Therefore I retract my words and repent of dust and ashes" [i.e., symbols of mourning]. Yet another translation, "Therefore I reject and forswear dust and ashes" [i.e., symbols of mourning], is found in Patrick, "The Translation of Job," (369-70); and "Therefore I retract my words and have changed my mind concerning dust and ashes" [i.e., the human condition] in Janzen, Job. Still another possibility: "Therefore I retract my words, and I am comforted concerning dust and ashes" [i.e., the human condition] is presented by L. Perdue, in Wisdom in Revolt, 232 and "Therefore I despise and repent of dust and ashes" by E. M. Good, 171. A different nuance is found in the translation, "Therefore I melt in reverence before you, and I have received my comfort, even while sitting in dust and ashes" in D. A. J. Clines, Job, xlvi and also, "Therefore I will be quiet, comforted that I am dust and ashes" in S. Mitchell, 88.

[24] "Job, now initiated into Jewish wisdom, knows a God who does not play by the rules that human beings can understand, who truly does defy understanding" (Miles, 310).

still seems to be in relationship, to be in communication with the divine. Why, then, the silence? What *do* Job's words mean in 42:6? Was it God's massive presence from out of the Whirlwind which so frightened Job into submission? Wasn't Job begging for God's response to his claims of injustice, to his speeches?

N. Glatzer offers an alternate way to understand Job's words in 42:6. He writes,

> With his new knowledge, Job is reconciled to his mortality. Death is not removed, but it is no longer an issue. Job does not become immortal, he does not return to the Garden of innocence, but – and this is the meaning of the epilogue – he can taste the sweetness of life, undisturbed by the prospect of its end. Life, no longer focused on itself, becomes acceptable, even worthwhile. Family and friends come and "eat with him in his house" and bring gifts of money and rings of gold[25] (Glatzer, 10-11).

Other scholars[26] believe that a key to answering some of the questions about the ending of the Book of Job can be found in the prominence of the feminine (as evidenced by the naming of the beautiful daughters of Job, gifted to him after the ordeals have ended) in the narrative epilogue of the text. According to Steven Mitchell,

> There is something enormously satisfying about this prominence of the feminine at the end of Job. The whole yin side of humanity, denigrated in the figure of Job's wife, and in Job's great oath looked upon as a seductive danger, has finally been acknowledged and honored... it is as if, once Job has learned to surrender, his world, too, gives up the male compulsion to control. The daughters have almost the last word. They appear with the luminous power of figures in a dream: we can't quite figure out why they are so important, but we know that they are (Mitchell, xxx).

Eskenazi suggests that the Song of Songs, in some ways, provides "an answer", since it follows Job in the modern version of the Tanakh[27].

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[25] Job 42:11

[26] Whedbee, p. 259 and Pardes, pp. 145-156

[27] See T. C. Eskenazi, "song of Songs as an Answer to Clines' "Book of Job,"" in Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J.A. Clines, ed. J. C. Exum and H. G. M. Williamson. JSOTSupp 373. (Sheffield: Sheffiild Academic Press [2004]). 128- 140.]

When I read the prose epilogue of the Book, I imagine the absurdity of its claim of resolution to the major conflict of the Book. Might Job have surrendered his previously-held reward-and-punishment theology, thereby making the restoration of his losses a mute point? Because he receives new wealth and new children, are his claims of injustice silenced or answered?

Larrimore[28] states that,

> all of [Job's] friends also agreed that everyone who does good obtains a reward and that everyone who does evil is punished... This, however, is not the purpose of the story as a whole; for this purpose is rather to show the peculiarity of each of them and to make known each one's opinion concerning this story: namely, that the greatest and heaviest misfortunes befall the most perfect individual, who was the most unblemished of them in righteousness. Job's opinion on this is that this happening proves that the righteous man and the wicked are regarded as equal by [God]...because of [God's] contempt for the human species and abandonment of it" (Larrimore, 90).

Some sages seem to think that Job's perceptions were blasphemy, trying to "upset the plate", cursing him by saying, "may there be dust on Job's mouth". God, however, validates Job's opinions, saying that his friends in contrast "did not speak rightly... as did My servant, Job". Was God being permissive with Job, giving him rights to curse God because of his suffering? Or were the sages more uncomfortable with Job's observations of and conclusions about theodicy than God, Godself? In contrast to their discomfort with Job's role of protesting the ethics and justice of God, Blumenthal writes that,

> The theology of protest goes back to the Bible and is present most forcefully in the Book of Job. The central figure in that text, Job, never questions God's existence, nor God's power to do what God is doing. Rather, Job questions God's justification, God's morality, God's justice. Throughout, Job rejects the moral panaceas and theological rationalizations of his friends, as does God in the end. No pat answers; rather, the repeated assertion of his innocence and the recurring questioning of God's justice. No easy resolutions; rather, the repeated

[28] Quoting Moses Maimonides in "Guide to the Perplexed"

> assertion of loyalty to God and the recurrent accusation of injustice (Blumenthal, 250-251).

Like Job, all characters at the beginning of the Book seem to accept the reward-and-punishment theology of Deuteronomy; Job was exceptionally pious and so was rewarded with exceptional wealth and good fortune. When Job's fortune abruptly changes, however, Job and his friends are forced to choose between accepting Job's misfortune as a result of some misdeed, or whether the dogma (read: wisdom) of their belief system was corrupt. "Generally... when we are treated justly, we accept punishment but, when we are treated unjustly, we experience anger, righteous anger. It is righteous because we know we have done no wrong; we know we are right and the other is wrong" (Blumenthal, 132).

Miles seems to think that the restoration of Job's fortune is God's way of indicating repentance for having exploited Job,

> Does the Lord regret what he did? If the Lord has nothing to apologize for, and that is certainly his contention when he rebukes Job from the whirlwind, he would also have no reason to give Job 'twice what he had before' (Job 2:10)... The Lord's action here, if not explicit repentance, is unmistakable atonement and implicit repentance (Miles[29], 312).

Still, to acknowledge this restoration is to imply that the reward-and-punishment theology of the beginning of the Book still holds; does this imply that God seeks to reward Job for having done right (and, in a logical extension of this theology, *was*, in fact, punishing Job previously for some unknown wrongdoing)?

Robert Gordis, in his essay, "The Temptation of Job – Tradition Versus Experience in Religion" found in N. Glatzer's anthology, The Dimensions of Job,

[29] Carl Jung, writing before Miles, made a similar observation, but went farther, suggesting that Jesus's incarnation and death were meant to represent God's atonement for what God did to Job.

highlights for the reader the explicit tension between "the conflict between the accepted tradition of the group [i.e., the biblical doctrine of retribution and divine justice] and the personal experience of the individual, [i.e., Job's innocent suffering]" (Glatzer, 74).

Other scholars also note the existence of this clear tension in the Book,

> Up to this moment Job himself has believed in retribution, but now, unshakably convinced that has done nothing to deserve his misery, he is launched on a quest for another moral order. The doctrine has failed the test of reality – reality, that is, as he experiences it (Clines, xxxix-xl).

Job's friends, on the other hand, (whom God chastises at the end of the Book for *not* speaking rightly) ultimately cling to the dogma, turning away from Job and his protests of his righteousness and God's injustice. The Book, then, is a struggle of a work of "wisdom literature" to understand itself, and the very nature of wisdom.

> Through his questioning of divine conduct, Job realizes that the world defies comfortable moral categorizings and that God (like most Biblical characters for that matter) does not yield to fixed epithets such as "just" and "perfect"... he discovers a far more intricate mode of faith, a faith which relies on an ongoing quest" (Ilana Pardes, Contradictions in the Bible 151).

Therefore, the only readers of the Book of Job who might consider the prose epilogue to be an ample resolution to the conflict raised in the Book are those theologians whom God would likely chastise for "not speaking rightly", people much like Job's friends!

> After speaking his last words, Job is restored to his fortunes, and, mysteriously indeed, the Lord says that Job has spoken rightly of him, while Job's friends, who insisted on God's justice, have not done so. In so saying, the Lord seems to admit that he has indeed not been as just as Job's friends claimed he was; and strikingly enough, in his furious speech to Job, the Lord never directly claims to be just, only to be almighty (Miles, 310).

A real resolution to the Book of Job does not come in the restoration of Job's fortunes at the end of the Book; it comes only in seeking and studying the transformations which happen (or, in the case of Job's friends, fail to happen) to each of the characters throughout the unfolding of the drama. It is possible to witness how God, too, is transformed through God's interactions with Job,

> But how does God repent? How does God do *teshuva*? If the echoes of the book of Lamentations and the book of Job are heard seriously, God repents by talking to us, by seeing us, by taking notice of us, by acknowledging us in some concrete way (Blumenthal, 263).

And, Glatzer goes on to explicate precisely how it is possible to chart Job's spiritual growth throughout the Book when he compares Job to Adam and Eve after being tempted to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Glatzer writes that it is only after they "bear the consequences of this step – suffering, expulsion – that [they become] truly human" (Glatzer, 8). In these readings of Job, the real resolution happens in the transformation of Job from his description as "תָּם וְיָשָׁר" in the prologue to his identity throughout the poem and manifested in his changed life apparent in the epilogue.

I have come to wonder whether the description of Job in the prose introduction of the Book as "תָּם וְיָשָׁר", usually translated as "pure", "straightforward", or "perfect", might actually not be a compliment. Perhaps Job's faith was innocent, unadulterated, uncomplicated by suffering and therefore "תָּם וְיָשָׁר". Perhaps the trials made Job a more thoughtful theologian, capable of truly *knowing God*, in all God's complexity, by the end of the Book of Job. Job might have been faithful, might have offered sacrifices and praises to the almighty, his perceived Intimate, "שַׁדַּי", but God wanted a relationship

with Job which surpassed the niceties of a polite, proper interaction between Godself and most of humanity, as evidenced in the simplistic theologies of Job's friends, which ultimately did not hold water even in God's eyes. Rather than accept injustice or provide apologetics to explain it away,

> The religious person is bound, obligated – for him or herself as well as the good of the relationship with God – to state injustice, fully, forcefully, and clearly. The religious person, confronted with God's unjust action is not only justified but required to speak up to God, to express moral outrage and righteous anger; that is the meaning of covenant. Job puts it well: *'Rather, I will speak to the Powerful God; I need to argue with God... Indeed, He would slay me; I will look to Him, but I shall argue my ways to His Face'* (Job 13:3, 15). But a theology of protest is not enough, religiously; even placing one's anger within the Source of Justice is not enough. One must seek spiritual reintegration with God, renewed relatedness and presence (Blumenthal, 178).

Committing to this kind of spiritual reintegration is a great risk to take. Job might well have chosen to "curse God" in light of his newfound awareness of God's injustice and his own meaningless suffering. Job, too, might have chosen to *curse* God (Job 2:9) and thus accept passively, without protest, an unjust God. Job chose something else: something radical and transformative. From Job's spiritual transformation in the Book, it is also possible to generalize this educative process to the field of theology as a whole. Quoting Max Weber in "Politics as a Vocation", Larrimore states in his introduction to the anthology The Problem of Evil, saying that "through the work of religious intellectuals, 'the experience of the irrationality of the world' has been 'the driving force of all religious evolution" (Larrimore, xv). In essence, it is possible for religious thought to

evolve as a result of its confrontation with real causeless suffering, just as it was possible to witness Job's evolution in the face of his own suffering[30].

> It is not *obvious* that these phenomena [sin, suffering and death] belong together. As practical systems for making sense of the world, religions in fact invest less in lumping 'evils' together than in distinguishing among them – between merited and unmerited suffering, between evils which are sent by good or by bad agencies, between those which must be borne and those which must be struggled against... (Larrimore, xvii-xix)

I believe that real religious transformation in the Book of Job is due, to a large degree, to the Book's ability to hold the tension of opposite translations, opposite realities, opposite theologies. It does so sometimes even within the same verse or sometimes the same word. In addition, it attempts to distinguish between and, in the same breath, complicate these distinctions between "good" and "evil", "blessing" and "curse".

At the end of the Book, Job has learned the thin line which exists between what previously seemed like complete opposites: "blessing" and "curse". He understands his God, "שַׁדַּי" in a much more profound and real way, despite his own sense of having been betrayed and victimized by an Intimate. In Job 31:35, Job cries, "Oh that one would hear me! Behold, my desire is, that Shaddai would answer me!"[31] Here, Job is calling out to the name of God he desires to answer his pleas for connection, communication, and justice: "שַׁדַּי". Again, in the next chapter, Elihu confirms Job's desire for "שַׁדַּי", in his testament that, "the breath of Shaddai gives insight[32]" (Job 32:8).

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[30] "Weber reminds us, for instance, that the common complaint about the suffering of the just and the prosperity of the wicked records social and political, not just existential realities. Those who suffer, suffer *more* for knowing that others – apparently not more deserving than they – do not suffer. The fortunate, too, seem to be troubled by the apparent arbitrariness of the distribution of fortune" (Larrimore, xvi).

[31] Translation here is from the King James Bible.

[32] Translation of this verse is by Whedbee, 243.

Most importantly, though, Job has also remained painfully honest about his reality and has stayed in communication and in relationship with God, which is what both parties ultimately crave. "Although it may be true that suffering has no good meaning there certainly are meaningful responses to suffering" (Kepnes, 39).

> 'Reading' (Hebrew *qeri 'ah*) is 'calling' (Hebrew *qeri 'ah*). To read is to call to the text, to attend to the voice, to listen to the word. To read is also to be called by the text, to be spoken to by the voice, to be addressed by the word. 'Reading' (Hebrew *qeri 'ah*) is also 'proclaiming' (Hebrew *qeri 'ah*). To read is to speak, to address, to communicate. Hence, to read is to receive and to give; simultaneously. It is also to give and to receive, simultaneously. Text is voice, and voice is text (Blumenthal, 57).

Job persists in asking for justice and proclaiming his anger, his sadness, his suffering to God, directly. Job is an active and tenacious participant in his covenantal relationship with God. ***This is what makes Job special; this is what distinguishes Job from his friends.*** Job talks to God.

VII. JOB & THE HEALING POWER OF SELF EXPRESSION

> Then when the others had gone, each man about his business, Robin turned once more to the youth. "Now, lad," said he, "tell us thy troubles, and speak freely. A flow of words doth ever ease the heart of sorrows; it is like opening the waste weir when the mill dam is overfull. Come, sit thou beside me and speak at thine ease"
> - Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1911)

We know from Job and also from our own subjective experiences in the world that it is possible to actualize great catharses by expressing long concealed feelings and experiences to a trusted friend or confidant. But research has repeatedly proven that talking and writing about such experiences and feelings can actually *improve* our physical and mental well-being in the long term, making us *healthier* than we were before. Not only do we "feel" better, we actually *get* better.

> Apparently, talking about trauma is a natural human response. When this response is blocked or inhibited, stress and illness result. Beyond the potential dangers of long-term inhibition, there is something positive about confronting upsetting experiences.... Specifically, the act of talking can change the ways we think and feel about traumatic events and about ourselves (Pennebaker, 27).

Like the survivors studied in Pennebaker's research on trauma[33], Job intrinsically seems to have understood that talking about his experience was critical to his sustenance in the world. Job talked to his friends, trying to find a trusted listener in them, but found none among his fellows. Still, Job continued to speak about his trauma; Job talked to God. Job seems to be in good company among other sufferers: in the research with survivors of significant trauma, Pennebaker found that, "the more people prayed... the healthier they

[33] It is important to note that much of this research is rooted in Freud's recognition of the efficacy of "the talking cure".

were. Prayer, in fact, worked the same way as talking to friends.... It is easy to see why this is true: Prayer is a form of disclosure or confiding" (Pennebaker, 24).

After conducting a plethora of interviews and experiments, health practitioners of many different persuasions have proven empirically that talking can heal; talking can repair internal damage, even years after the occurrence of a trauma. Pennebaker and his associates conducted studies on survivors of childhood violence and sexual terror, with victims of the Holocaust, and family members mourning the loss of intimate loved ones. They found that the losses were not merely physical or tangible:

> After an unexpected car accident, the surviving spouses were faced with the realization that the world was more unpredictable and dangerous than they ever imagined. Faced with a powerful feeling of no control over life's events, many of the surviving spouses' fundamental beliefs about justice and predictability in the world were shaken (Pennebaker, 24-25).

It is possible to witness this loss in Job, too. Whereas his previous understanding of God and justice did not account for random tragedy and undeserved suffering, Job at the end of the Book must accommodate an entirely new understanding of the world and its morality. Job's physical losses are inarguably many: his fortune, his children, his health, and his reputation are all gone. Still, it is perhaps his loss of faith, his loss of meaning in the universe, which is most difficult to integrate. It is this subject of divine justice and his own insistence on his innocence which occupies the vast majority of his speeches throughout the Book.

> When we confront loss, we experience the full range of emotions – hatred, anger, disgust, disdain, despair, helplessness. That is okay.... [by committing yourself to the self-expression of these difficult emotions] you will honor and embrace your sorrows, grow from them, and arrive at a place where life is more full and more joyful than you ever thought possible (Zimmermann, 19).

Job must have intuited that talking about his feelings had the power to bring healing. At the end of the Book of Job it seems that Job is not only restored to his previous wealth and success, but his bounty is doubly abundant and his perseverance rewarded. The book suggests (and many readers accent) that the source of this abundance is God. But Pennebaker found that these kinds of rewarding results might come more directly from self revelation itself, and are not uncommon among those who freely express their deepest feelings,

> When disclosing deeply personal experiences, there are immediate changes in brain-wave patterns, skin conductance levels, and overt behavioral correlates of the letting-go experience. After confessions, significant drops in blood pressure and heart rate, as well as improvements in immune function, occur. In the weeks and months afterward, people's physical and psychological health is improved (Pennebaker, 56).

Other writers and researchers concur with these findings, expanding the benefits of self-expression to include not only speaking about one's pain aloud, but also writing about it; putting words to these difficult emotions on paper. DeSalvo writes about those individuals who freely express their painful feelings and experiences,

> They stand taller, they inhabit their bodies in a more comfortable way, their voices are stronger, they smile more, they seem more serene. They're physically healthier, too. And they will tell you, should you ask them, that their work has entailed living with and through painful, often troubling, feelings, they *are* much better (DeSalvo, 12).

Ray Bradbury, in *Zen in the Art of Writing*, puts it this way, "while our art cannot, as we wish it could, save us from wars, privation, envy, greed, old age, or death, it can revitalize us amidst it all... writing is survival... not to write, for many of us, is to die" (Bradbury, ??) DeSalvo explains how telling our stories can transform our lives, she says the purpose of self-expression is essentially "to discover and fulfill your deepest desire.

To accept pain, fear, uncertainty, strife. But to find, too, a place of safety, security, serenity, and joyfulness" (DeSalvo, 9).

In her book, Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss Through Writing, Susan Zimmermann shares her own experiences with the potential for transformation through self-expression on the page,

> There is now extensive research that shows that writing – the simple act of putting down your deepest thoughts and feelings on paper – is one of the most powerful and effective means to ease and ultimately to heal sorrow. The act of writing brings a structure and order to the chaos of grief. It taps into the healing power of your own unconscious. By giving voice to fears, anger, and despair, by letting go of old dreams and hopes, our self-healing powers come into play. The soul knows what it needs to heal. Through writing, it will lead you where you need to go (Zimmermann, 18).

In her book, DeSalvo quotes writers such as Virginia Woolf, Arthur Miller, William Shakespeare, May Sarton, Marcel Proust, Audre Lorde, Dorothy Allison, and Isabel Allende to illustrate the way in which the freedom of self expression has transformed their lives. Lorde writes in *The Cancer Journals*, "What is important... must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (Lorde, cited in DeSalvo, 206). Likewise, Isak Dinesen once said, "any sorrow can be borne, if you can turn it into a story" (Dinesen, cited in Zimmerman, 26). The writer H.D. in *Hermetic Definition*, phrased it most succinctly, "Write, write, or die" (H.D., cited in DeSalvo, 4).

DeSalvo writes about the universal experience of loss as expressed by writers of diverse backgrounds and genres, sharing how self expression enabled them to cope with the traumas and disappointments in their lives,

> We receive a shock or a blow or experience a trauma in our lives. In exploring it, examining it, and putting it into words, we stop seeing it as a random, unexplained event. We begin to understand the order behind

> appearances. Expressing it in language robs the event of its power to hurt us; it also expresses our pain.... We understand that our greatest shocks do not separate us from humankind. Instead, through expressing ourselves, we establish our connection with others and with the world (DeSalvo, 43).

I. Following in this example, I, too, have found great healing and solace in self-expression, especially through writing. Like Job, I experienced a sudden and tragic loss of health, hope, and faith in the midst of plentitude – I was a thriving Rabbinical student learning at last in a context that seemed ideal – I suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm in my cerebellum at the age of 26 and very nearly died. After much rehabilitative therapy, I found that my body and mind healed slowly; my spirit and my relationship with God were still severely damaged. Like Job, I wailed, I railed, and I ultimately found God – and a new self – again through self-expression, through writing.

VIII. A DAUGHTER OF JOB SPEAKS (Julie Pelc, 2005)

After their dialogue which concludes in Job 42:6, neither Job nor God speak to each other again. Still, Job sets a precedent approved of and praised by God of an honest dialogue with the divine. In essence, Job illustrates for all those who follow *how* to maintain a personal connection with God; it is possible only if the conversation is maintained and continued by both parties.

I first encountered the Book of Job alongside my friend, my teacher, my mentor, Dr. Tamara Eskenazi after suffering and surviving a ruptured brain aneurysm in my cerebellum at the age of 26. Job and I became companions, compatriots on a journey through the Tradition - with God and in opposition to God – to find meaning in our suffering. I was reading and thinking and writing about the intellectual pursuit of creating a theology of pain, suffering, and loss.

Job inspires and challenges his spiritual descendents to insist on dialogue; reading the Book of Job touches the emotionally astute reader both intellectually and intimately. Reflecting on the way that seeing God as abusive might personally affect the reader, Blumenthal suggests that the reader take time and space to reflect and express those difficult emotions stirred by the text.

> It has become clear that, because the material touches on matters that run deep in our understanding of ourselves and the people around us, the reader needs an opportunity to participate in this part, a way to keep track of his or her feelings and thoughts... reading this part, then, is a voyage – not only into the world of Jewishly structured texts but also into the inner world of anger and rage (Blumenthal, 66).

Like Job, many of his descendents (myself included) have undergone severe crises of faith and have come through the trials because of their insistence on honest self-expression. Job inspired me to write, to talk, to communicate with God when I felt most sure that I had been abandoned or betrayed by God. Much of my writing (my exploration of Job in this thesis and my personal reflections in my "Writing the Healing Story" non-fiction creative writing classes at UCLA Extension) relates to (re)constructing a theology I can live with after acknowledging the reality of tragedy. In many ways, these classes and contexts gave me permission to rage, to address my doubt and loss and grief to the Universe, to God, in the format of writing and sharing short personal narratives. They were, in many ways, letters to the God I used to believe in. I had believed in God since my childhood, I still carry a clear memory of my initiation into faith when I was nine years old, sitting on a bus, riding to school:

I was stuck to
The ridged green vinyl
Of the school bus
Watching
As rain droplets
Slithered down the window pane
Beside me
Playing a game with God
To see if He was there
(because He was a "He" then)
If He could guess what thought
Had just washed across my brain
Behind my eyes
Invisible to Everyone Else
But me.
I felt Him there, holding me,
Playing
"Yes," He said, "I see you."

Job 1:1

אִישׁ הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ־עוּץ אִיּוֹב שְׁמוֹ וְהָיָה ׀ הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָּם
וְיָשָׁר וִירֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע׃

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was simple and straightforward, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

What I Believe In:

I believe in a world where people want to do good. I believe in a world where people have choices, where we are not all just puppets acting on a stage, set and designed and directed by Somebody-Else. I believe in a God who loves me, even when I can't feel it, or believe it's there. I believe in a God who does not have Power or Control to save me, even from myself – and wouldn't want to.

I believe my parents love me, and are doing the best they can. I believe in democracy, in generosity, in liberal politics, in a woman's right to choose, in freedom of speech, but I'm not sure about capital punishment.

I believe we have the right not to believe, but that Life is more joyous, less painful, less tragic, more generous, more hopeful if we do.

I believe I am one of the lost sheep I am training to shepherd. I believe the shepherds in my life have tried their best to gather me back in, but I believe that for the most part, they've done a terrible job.

Job 1:7-12

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן מֵאַיִן תָּבֹא וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת־יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמַר מִשּׁוֹט בָּאָרֶץ וּמֵהִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ׃[8] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן
הֲשַׂמְתָּ לִבְּךָ עַל־עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ תָּם
וְיָשָׁר יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע׃
[9] וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲחִנָּם יָרֵא אִיּוֹב אֱלֹהִים׃
[10] הֲלֹא־(אַתָּה) [אַתָּה] שַׂכְתָּ בַּעֲדוֹ וּבְעַד־בֵּיתוֹ וּבְעַד
כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ מִסָּבִיב מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו בֵּרַכְתָּ וּמִקְנֵהוּ פָּרַץ בָּאָרֶץ׃
[11] וְאוּלָם שְׁלַח־נָא יָדְךָ וְנַע בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אִם־לֹא עַל־פָּנֶיךָ
יְבָרֲכֶךָּ׃
[12] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן הִנֵּה כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּיָדֶךָ רַק אֵלָיו
אַל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדֶךָ וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂטָן מֵעִם פְּנֵי יְהוָה׃

And YHVH said to the Satan, "from where do you come?" Then the Satan answered YHVH, and said, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." [8] And YHVH said to the Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?" [9] Then the Satan answered YHVH, and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? [10] Have you not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. [11] But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." [12] And YHVH said to the Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand." So the Satan went forth from the presence of YHVH.

"There's been a mistake..."

"There's been a mistake," God says to me, apologetically. I think about the song, "The Wrong Man Was Convicted[34]", though off hand, I can't remember any of the lyrics. Sometimes I just choose music for the song titles, the lyrics to which I might write with that title. I imagine God's Big Book of Life turned, accidentally, to the wrong page.

But was the mistake my *life*, or my *death* on January 13, 2003? "There's been a mistake," implies that only one error was made, not two. "Oops. Sorry about that aneurysm... but at least you survived!" My parents would like that version of the song.

Or, was it, "after that burst blood vessel, you were supposed to die. Sorry, there's been a mistake." Sometimes, this is the song in *my* mind, running through *my* ears. Or, perhaps, "oops! That whole awful experience was meant for someone else – not *you*." Not me.

Who shall live and who shall die?

Who by fire and who by earthquake?

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[34] This is a song by the Barenaked Ladies including the lyrics,
"Who's lonely now?/ Which one of us is suffering?/ Who's in his cups? / Which one of us recovering?/ Who likes to look at pictures and cries, but way too late?/ Who doesn't want to change a thing, accepting it was fate? / The wrong man was convicted..."

I remember the Yom Kippur after 9-11, thinking, "how the hell can we read the liturgy out loud *this* year? But the autumn after the aneurysm, I can't even remember.

Who by burst blood vessel and who by suicide?

There's been a mistake.

Job 1:20-21

וַיָּקָם אִיּוֹב וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־מְעִלּוֹ וַיָּגָז אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּפֹּל אַרְצָה
וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ׃[21] וַיֹּאמַר עָרֹם (יָצָתִי) [יָצָאתִי] מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי וְעָרֹם
אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה יְהוָה נָתַן וַיהוָה לָקָח יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ׃

[20] Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, [21] And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: YHVH gave, and YHVH has taken away; blessed be the name of YHVH.

My parents were God. They gave me everything in abundance: especially those things they themselves had lacked as children: love, money, education, support, and (accidentally, I think) faith.

Neither of my parents grew up with any meaningful Jewish education. In my early childhood, I knew we were culturally Jewish but understood very little about Jewish traditions or history. I dressed up as Queen Esther for Purim and lit Hanukkah candles with my family, but I attended a public elementary school and resented having to go to Hebrew school two afternoons each week.

I used to believe in a God who was like my mom; all-good, loving, powerful. My mom was soft; she told me she'd protect me from the world, and I believed she could, she would. I liked that she was physically large: I became frightened every time she tried to lose weight. I believed that, like Samson, she would lose her power if her secret source of might were discovered and diminished. Once, in fifth grade, some kid threw the words, *"your mom is fat!"* in my direction, words intended as an insult. I'm not sure I

ever believed that anyone noticed my mom's size but me; I certainly did not imagine that someone might believe that this was something *bad*. Her being large, in my mind, meant more love, more lap, more comfort, more force. She was a wall: enveloping me, promising to protect me from the world, from all harm.

It's not a mystery where my reverence for and belief in the Almighty originated. My mom once mused aloud, *"I don't know where you got your belief in God from?!"* implicating her own agnosticism following the early death of her own father.

I no longer believe in the God of my childhood; the God to whom I whispered prayers of petition and thanksgiving from under my covers at bedtime, though no one had ever taught me to do so. *"Please, God,"* I used to pray with such devotion, *"let every child in the world know the blessing of having parents like mine. I wish every child could be as lucky as me."*

My mom would tuck me in at night, helping me to believe in a world where I was safe, protected, loved. She created a world for me where the Almighty God was real, was powerful, and loved me. She created it for me because she knew it was not true for her.

In fifth grade, the kids started picking on me at school. It started innocently enough, but I was intensely sensitive and they seemed to intuit that they had real power to hurt me. I was tripped in the halls, pushed into snow banks during recess. I wanted to die. The school counselor and principal suggested that perhaps something was wrong with *me*, not the other kids.

My parents, desperate for an alternative, switched me to a tiny private Jewish Community Day School near our house because they'd heard that there were small classes (I was to join a sixth grade class of only twelve students) and much personal

attention. I fell in love with my new teacher, Geveret Bylan, who believed I was a gifted writer; I fell in love with the Hebrew language (and flew from the lowest to the highest Hebrew language level possible in less than a year); I fell in love with the young person I became. I started preparing for my Bat Mitzvah. The cantor, too, seemed to acknowledge my gifts with Hebrew and with chanting from the Torah, as I practiced with him week after week behind a veil of smoke from his pipe, which swirled through his office as we rehearsed for my sacred moment. Each of us celebrating our B'nai Mitzvah that year was asked to write an essay on any particular current issue in the Jewish world. It was 1989; I wrote an essay called, "Why Women Should Be Allowed to Become Rabbis and Cantors". It seemed so obvious to me; I had a female pediatrician, a female psychotherapist; I knew female lawyers and teachers and businesswomen.

My Bat Mitzvah launched this desire in me: I knew as I stood on the *bimah*, chanting from the Torah that I did not choose this path. I was chosen *for* this path. I *knew* I could do this: that I *needed* to do this, that God *wanted me* to do this. I was born a rabbi; I was preordained to be a rabbi. The identity was seared in my skin, it coursed through my fingers when I wrote, it flowed in my voice when I sang. It was the metaphor of my soul, the language of my deepest dreams and *it had chosen me*.

Job 2:11-12

[11] וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת רֵעֵי אִיּוֹב אֵת כָּל־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה
עָלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְּקֹמוֹ אֱלִיפַז הַתֵּימָנִי וּבִלְדַּד הַשּׁוּחִי
וְצוֹפַר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיִּוָּעֲדוּ יַחְדָּיו לָבוֹא לָנוּד־לוֹ וְלִנַחֲמוֹ׃
[12] וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם מֵרָחוֹק וְלֹא הִכִּירֻהוּ

[11] Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. [12] And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not,

Support Group

I'm sitting at a long, wooden table in a chair that swivels from side to side , participating in a support group. Each of us has suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm and, despite the odds, survived. I am clearly the youngest person in the room. There are several men seated around the table and only one other woman: she is seated directly across from me. Some of us have brought our family and friends along to the meeting; my younger sister, Sari, is sitting beside me. All of us are wearing name-tags, labeling ourselves so we might feign intimacy with one another by calling each other by our first names. Some of us have more physical challenges than others. Some of these challenges are clearly visible to any observer. Others, like my own, are not.

We eye one another nervously, waiting for someone else to break the silence after the facilitator has turned off the VCR which just played the informational video, "Your Un-Ruptured Aneurysm". We just learned about the various treatment options that are available, so as to avoid a possible rupture.

"You look *really* great," the other woman in the group says to me, shaking her head. She continues, almost with surprise in her voice, "I expected everyone here to have *real* disabilities!" I smile, return the compliment, and offer my gratitude. She repeats her compliment five or six times during the next thirty minutes. I have stopped smiling.

I think about the disabled parking plates fastened to the front and back of my car; permanently branding me with preferred parking wherever I drive. I remember the months riding in the passenger seat with my wheelchair nestled in the trunk, my mother driving me from physical therapy to occupational therapy, from vision therapy to

hypnotherapy. I remember mornings when I needed her to pull the car to the side of the road so I could vomit. I think of my elderly compatriots in therapy, walking up and down imaginary stairs to practice lifting our weakened legs high enough to reach the step.

"Can I be honest with you, Pat?" I ask, careful to use the name printed in magic-marker on the name-tag fastened to the blouse of the woman seated opposite me at the long, hard table.

"Yes, of course," she replied, looking thoroughly confused.

"I have a lot of resistance to being told how good I look. It makes me feel not-seen – almost like you're not acknowledging how hard this is – how hard I have to work everyday at this..." I feel my voice crack and the emotion rise inside my body at this confession. Sari reaches out for my hand. This may be the first truly honest thing I have shared about my emotions in this support group.

"Huh..." she answers, "interesting..." She does not apologize.

General conversation shifts again to the video. Nobody complained that it had essentially been created for an invisible crowd of people whose aneurysms exist in the un-ruptured world of potentiality – of "what if?" What if I had known about the aneurysm *before* its rupture? If I'd had a CAT scan or an MRI for no reason at all, and they had detected the tiny cluster of narrowed blood vessels – waiting, weakening, pushing against their ever-thinning walls, closer to bursting with each heartbeat, pressure rising with every pump, to coil or to clip? Was one to elect open-cranial surgery, despite a symptom-less existence "just in case" the aneurysm were to burst someday?

The facilitator, a young, athletic nurse planning to run a marathon next month, asks whether we'd like to discuss the first video, or move immediately to the next. We

discover that the second video will be about ruptured aneurysms, though much of the preliminary information about the origin, nature, and behavior of aneurysms will be the same. My sister speaks aloud for the first time, indicating that she – we – would like to see the second video. I blink, waiting for a response from the others in the group. Silence. The Registered Nurse moves toward the VCR, with a new video tape in hand.

I swivel my chair back to face the VCR, preparing to watch, "Your Ruptured Aneurysm". I wonder whether I will see myself reflected a bit more this time.

Job 3:1

אַחֲרֵי־כֵן פָּתַח אִיּוֹב אֶת־פִּיהוּ וַיְקַלֵּל אֶת־יוֹמוֹ׃

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.

Still Time

I feel like I'm drowning in "still time"
STILL TIME FOR WHAT?
"You're young, there's still time..."
for love?
for happiness?
for health?
for hope?
In "still time", I lose hope.
I get tired of waiting
alone.
I no longer wish for death
the way a school girl
wishes for summer vacation.
But sometimes I wish
"still time"
would go away
as though the neurosurgeon
took years out with his scalpel
along with blood clots
and clogged arteries
and hope
and love
and faith.

Job 3:23

לְגֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר־דַּרְכּוֹ נִסְתָּרָה וַיָּסֶךְ אֱלוֹהַּ בַּעֲדוֹ׃ [23]

Why [is light given] to a man whose way is hidden,
and whom God hath hedged in?

Housework

I don't ever plan to be a woman who pays attention to disorder in her house; but somehow, piling papers neatly folded, like hands clasped and waiting, brings me a perverse kind of joy.

I swirl in chaos everyday; filthy with not-knowing, with uncertainty, with God's fucking plan (if I even believe in that, anymore). And yet I make my bed every morning, as I climb out of the tangled sheets, press them smooth against the decorated throw pillows.

"Ha," I am saying to God, "I win."

Job 3:25

כִּי פַחַד פָּחַדְתִּי וַיְיֶאֱתֵנִי וַאֲשֶׁר יָגֹרְתִּי יָבֹא לִי׃

[25] For the thing which I greatly feared is coming upon me, and that which I was afraid of is coming unto me.

While writing this thesis, I took a class for credit called "The Theologies of Pain, Suffering, and Loss" with Dr. Rachel Adler. As I thought about writing a final paper for this class, I was struck by the song, "Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard" by Paul Simon (1971). With a slight substitution of "Job" for "Julio", the song takes on new meanings. The annotations to the song, below, explicate the "code" for a new application of the song as an imagined commentary on Job.

The mama pajama rolled out of bed, and she ran to the police station[35]
When the papa found out, he began to shout, and he started the investigation[36]
It's against the law, it was against the law[37]
What the mama saw, it was against the law.

The mama looked down and spit on the ground ev'ry time my name gets mentioned[38]
The papa say "Oy, if I get that boy
I'm gonna stick him in the house of detention."
I'm on my way, I don't know where I'm goin',
I'm on my way, I'm takin' my time, but I don't know where[39].

Goodbye to Rosie[40], the Queen of Corona[41]
See you[42], me and Julio[43] down by the schoolyard[44]
See you, me and Julio down by the schoolyard

In a couple of days they come and take me away[45]
But the press let the story leak[46]
And when the radical priest come to get me released[47]
We's all on the cover of Newsweek[48]

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[35] The "police station" indicates a clear search for justice, as in "how can bad things happen to good people"?

[36] "The investigation" here could refer to a trial, like the one in the Book of Job, wherein God is placed on trial.

[37] "The Law" here refers to our expectations of reward and punishment, blessings and curses, as promised in Deuteronomy (or, perhaps, the Torah, as a whole).

[38] Seeing that "justice, justice but there is no justice" (as in שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם וְאֵין שָׁלוֹם"), the mama takes matters into her own hands, thereby spitting on the ground to indicate her disgust and her dissatisfaction with the manner with which justice was carried out.

[39] In terms of my ability to create a theology of meaning in the face of great personal and global suffering, I think it's fair to say that I AM on my way... though I don't know precisely where I'm going.

[40] "Rosie" here, means to indicate "Rosenszweig"; about whom Robert Gibbs, in his opening chapter of the book Suffering Religion, writes commentaries on "texts by Jewish philosophers that criticize philosophy's own failure to take suffering seriously enough" (2).

[41] Corona is a real place -- a neighborhood in Queens, New York, one of the five boroughs of NYCOHN Corona is known for being the long-time home of Louis Armstrong, the famous jazz musician. The name Corona means "crown" in Spanish and Italian, which makes Rosie (or, here, "Rosenzweig") the "Queen of the Crown," or *the ruler of rulers, the philosopher of philosophers.*

[42] "You" should be understood in the plural (as in, 'you all') indicating all those engaged in dialogue with God, in the style modeled by Job.

[43] Substitute "Job" for Julio (NO DOUBT "Julio" is simply his pen name)

[44] "School yard" is the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles.

[45] Being "taken away" to life again, after the trauma passes.

[46] It is becoming more publicly accepted now, in the 21st Century, that bad things do, in fact, happen to good people and that it is possible to become a rabbi with a difficult, if not tenuous relationship with God.

[47] This is Rabbi Harold Kushner, who, in When Bad Things Happen to Good People, writes that he believes that God is *not all powerful*, as was previously accepted to be true.

[48] According to a 1997 Newsweek survey, 54 percent of adults said they pray every day (29 percent more than once a day). Eighty-seven percent said they believe God answers their prayers at least some of the

Well, I'm on my way, I don't know where I'm goin'
I'm on my way, I'm takin' my time, but I don't know where

Goodbye to Rosie, the Queen of Corona
See you, me and Julio down by the schoolyard (3X)

My most constant companion "in the school yard" of the class, was, in fact, Job. As a result of my coursework and my preparation for this thesis, I acquired two full book shelves of Job literature: critical scholarship, religious responses, theological ideas about Job, God and evil, and books on theodicy in general. That class was the "school yard" wherein I was to read, think, analyze, and discuss ideas about the scholarship of pain, suffering, and loss as related to God and theology, especially as it related to the rest of my day and, really, my whole life.

Job 3:26

לֹא שָׁלַוְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי וְלֹא נָחְתִּי וַיָּבֹא רִגְזֹ׃ [26]

[26] I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; and anger is coming.

Like Job, I became intimately connected to my rage, my sense of betrayal from the God in whom I had believed, and my insistence on honest self expression. Some of my short written pieces took the form of prayers, or letters to God, or "To Whom it May Concern":

Please, God, *be there*.
Be 'To Whom it Must Concern'.
I used to be bold,
But now I am afraid.
I used to be confident that I would not be alone forever,
But now I have doubts.
I used to feel God in my body, in my being,
But now I feel empty, I worry that I am alone already.
I used to be afraid of dying,

time. An astounding 86 percent said they accept God's failure to grant their prayers. And only 15 percent said they have lost faith - at any time - because their prayers went unanswered. And their prayers keep coming: for health, safety, love and, to a remarkable degree, for others.

But now I am alive.
I used to feel in control,
But now I understand that there is only surrendering to "what is".
I used to think that God was a noun,
But now I know that God is a verb, an adverb, an adjective.
I used to think that friends are important,
But now I know that they are essential, they are my life-blood.
I used to think my parents were flawed,
But now I see that they are perfectly themselves.
I used to pretend that I loved myself, had faith in myself,
But now I understand that I am frightened of the future.
I used to think that I would have my life together by age 30,
But now I know that I have hardly begun.
I used to imagine that I would attain immortality through children and grandchildren,
But now I believe I will do it with my students and my writing and my teaching.
I used to be afraid that I would have to choose, to make choices,
But now I know that the choices made me.

Is it even possible to regain faith and hope and love, now? After the fall? Maybe if they'd met outside the garden, Adam and Eve would never have fallen in love, never recognized each other – the human race would never have continued.
"Ayekha?" "Where ARE you?" God asks me.
Where are you?
I really don't know.

Job 6:1-3

וַיַּעַן אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמַר:2 לוּ שָׁקוֹל יִשָּׁקֵל כַּעְשִׁי (וְהַיְתִי) [וְהַוּתִי]
בְּמאֹזְנַיִם יִשָּׂאוּ יָחַד:
3 כִּי־עַתָּה מֵחוֹל יַמִּים יִכְבָּד עַל־כֵּן דְּבָרַי לָעוּ:

But Job answered and said, Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up.

Fortune is "What Remains"

I was about thirty pages into Carole Radziwill's memoir about "fate, friendship, and love", reading about the tragic plane crash that killed her cousins, John and Carolyn Kennedy, when the captain came on the mike to announce that we were having engine trouble. It was forty-five minutes into our flight; 30,000 feet above ground; and we were turning around mid-air, going back to our city of origin, Milwaukee. Once on the

ground, we were herded off the plane but asked to remain in the gate area to await further announcements. I called my dad on my cell phone; when he picked up, his voice was concerned even before I spoke,

"*Where are you? Are you back on the ground in Milwaukee already, at gate 47?*" he asked. He told me he had been watching the tiny pixel of my airplane blip, blip, blip across the screen of his computer on the Midwest Airlines webpage, smoothly toward Los Angeles, its final destination, when it had suddenly and inexplicably changed course, seemingly to return to Mitchell General International Airport in Milwaukee.

In the forty-five minutes of back-tracking through the sky, I continued turning pages in my book, calmly reading about loss and love, about a plane crash that shattered lives and hearts and a nation. I did not think about the engine failure on my own airplane, and I tried not to wonder why the pilot hadn't just abruptly landed the aircraft *where we were*, in Indianapolis or Missouri or Iowa.

Being on an airplane is as close as we get to God. This is true not because of the immediate proximity to fluffy clouds, blue skies, or serene sunsets. It is not because we are suspended in space, high above the ground and not because everything below appears tiny and perfect. It is because we have been forced to surrender control, or any illusion of control, to the elements: to Nature, to Fortune (as Carole Radziwill names it in the book I was reading):

> Most people think Fortune is something good – to have *fortune*, to be *fortunate* – a word that implies advantage, like "luck". We use prefixes for bad fortune: misfortune, ill-fortune, unfortunate, but Fortune goes both ways. The Romans personified it in the form of a clever but dispassionate woman who coolly disperses both the good and bad with a flick of her wrist. The goddess Fortuna. Good fortune from her left hand out of a cornucopia filled with gifts – things like straight teeth, a good job, a two-car garage in the suburbs. Bad fortune from her right hand holding a

> ship's rudder that changes direction, triggering car crashes and untimely deaths. A gesture from her, and the place you thought you were going is no longer in front of you (Radziwill, 17).

When we fly, we cannot control the pilot, or the flight attendant, or the other passengers, or the plane itself. We cannot control the mechanics of the airplane, or the people who load and unload our luggage, or the gate agents, or even the beverage cart to have what we want or need. We try to maintain or regain the illusion of control despite, or perhaps because of these undeniable facts.

My grandmother is infamous for peeking her head into the cockpit as she boards an airplane to remind the pilot and co-pilot to, "fly safe". People are often described as "nervous flyers", speak of being unable to sleep, or eat, or read, or relax on an airplane. We look shiftily at the other passengers, trying to size them up as potential terror threats. We are X-rayed and screened; our IDs have been checked and re-checked, our loved ones can no longer meet us at our arrival gates without a boarding pass in hand.

Some of us pack an extra pair of underwear, and all prescription medications in the carry-on bag. We are warned never, ever, to leave our bags unattended. In the Southwest terminal in LAX, a woman's voice with a British accent sternly admonishes us to remove all "sharp items" from our carry-on bags. Over the years, they have confiscated plastic butter knives, fingernail scissors, tweezers, and the key-chain pepper-mace spray my mother bought me in college for self protection when walking alone at night. I smirk as I think of the collective cheers at sporting events, "Defense, Defense!" and wonder if these defensive sports-players travel on planes anymore, or whether they will be mistaken for "offense" and removed from the airport.

The agent comes on the mike, back at gate 47, and announces that there will be an update about the status of the mechanical problems of our plane in thirty minutes, then she says the update will come in an hour, and then with certainty, in thirty more minutes. It is now the estimated time of our arrival in Los Angeles and I am becoming impatient. I find that I am unwilling to surrender my fate to Fortune; I decide, instead, to try to outsmart her by canceling my reservation on this flight and cast my hopes on another, later flight scheduled to leave in an hour with a plane change and two hour delay in Kansas City.

I get in line to change my ticket. I do this, I muse, because I have no faith; because I choose to believe I still have some control over what happens; because I am tired of waiting. I continue reading Carole Radziwill's thoughts on Fortune: "I knew misfortune was simply a stumble from a curb, a distracted turn on a highway, one careless doctor away" (Radziwill, 47). She contrasts her own understanding of Fortune as not personal with that of her sister, "she thought misfortune happened to bad people, that if she smiled and made her bed she'd be spared. My little sister thought Fortune picked favorites" (Radziwill, 47).

I read Radziwill's book, What Remains, page after page, consuming every word until the captain announces our descent into Los Angeles. He points out that it is possible to see the tiny city directly below us, but I don't peer out my window to see. I turn the last page and read the acknowledgments as the wheels touch ground. I smile. I reach my final destination – just for today – because I understand What Remains better than I'd ever imagined possible.

Job 6:15

15 אַחַי בָּגְדוּ כְמוֹ־נָחַל כַּאֲפִיק נְחָלִים יַעֲבֹרוּ׃

My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,
as the stream of brooks they pass away;

"Leaving Los Angeles"

It is more than two years after I survived a ruptured brain aneurysm. I am in the airport, clutching the blue pre-boarding sleeve for my plane ticket in an unsteady grip in my left hand. To most people, I appear young, healthy, and able-bodied, in my jeans and T-shirt, looking around the gate area for an unoccupied chair. I see one: black, faux-leather bucket seat, holding a woman's purse but no human occupant.

"Excuse me, is this seat taken?" I ask her.

"Yes, I'm coming right back," she replies, placing her hand possessively on the back of the chair.

I make my way to the floor, setting down my backpack and trying to lower myself to the ground only somewhat haphazardly. I am on all fours now, supporting my weight with my hands in order to try to maintain my center of gravity with my butt in the air. I shift my weight to one side, curl my knees toward my chest, and allow myself to literally roll over into a seated position on the floor, near my bags. I wait for a cue from the boarding agent that it is time for those of us with sacred "blue sleeves[49]" hugging our plane tickets to begin our descent down the ramp, towards the waiting airplane. I know I could have told the woman that I am handicapped, that I have "special needs", or that I *need* to sit down. But I am tired of explaining myself.

[49] A "blue sleeve" is given to those wishing to pre-board a Southwest Airlines flight due to a need for extra time or assistance walking down the jet-way. The boarding pass slides into the "sleeve", so as to assure that pre-boarders are easily identifiable by the gate agents.

For me, this blue sleeve is hard won. I must defend my rights every time I want extra time down the jet-way: 'No, I do not have small children, nor a stroller to push, nor a wheelchair to sit in.' In Los Angeles, the gods silently worshipped are Youth and Health, both assumed normative, and taken for granted based on visual appearance.

"Not everyone with special needs is 90 years old, in a wheelchair!" I had just cried, in an exasperated, high-pitched voice I did not recognize to the woman posted outside the elevator doors. Her job is to check for handicaps, looking us up and down before allowing us through the shortened security line outside the elevator doors in Terminal One of LAX.

I remember the last time I tried to "pass"; tried to use the escalator like everyone else, rather than facing that guard at the elevator and needing to explain myself to her yet again. I pushed my special rolling suitcase which I use as a kind of walker on wheels, to steady myself as I maneuvered through the airport. My wheels had stopped at the edge of the escalator, refusing to exit, but the stairs propelled my feet and my body forward, forward, and I toppled over the suitcase, face first, lying on top of the large black bag, trying not to cry. I had tried to push the suitcase over the bump at the end of the escalator with my weak left hand, while grasping the side of the escalator with my right. To push the bag over the bump, I apparently needed the combined strength of both hands, which was impossible if I needed to hold on to the sides for my own balance and support. I assured all the concerned airport dwellers that I am OK. I am really OK. Yes, I'm sure that I'm OK. I decide that next time I will face the woman posted near the elevator, instead.

The security line – even the shortened one after the elevator – presents its own challenges, of course. Remove shoes, coat, lift heavy suitcase onto moving conveyor belt, stand in slippery socks, waiting for my turn to shuffle through the metal detector. Do not bump the sides of the metal detector, nor swerve accidentally into its sensitive walls, as this sets off the loud stream of beeping – the alarm – danger. I quickly try to grab the side of the conveyor belt on the other side, to stabilize myself as I retrieve my shoes and try to balance on one foot, then the other, putting them firmly back on my feet.

I recall the alternative: waiting in the long line, not to check my bag, but to call for a wheelchair; waiting for someone to arrive to push the wheelchair – to treat me as though I do not speak or understand English, asking them to pause as we roll past the Ladies' Room, or Starbucks, handing them a few dollars to pay for my coffee because I cannot reach the counter from my seat in the wheelchair; giving them a modest tip when they leave me seated near the gate, as I wait to pre-board the airplane. At least in a wheelchair, nobody challenges my use of an elevator, or my right to a blue sleeve, or my freedom to pre-board an airplane.

The first time after suffering the brain aneurysm that I made it through the airport without a wheelchair was cause for celebration. I told everyone in my family, and many of my friends, about my proud accomplishment. Since then, getting through the airport hardly causes me to celebrate. I want to wear a sign around my neck, or carry a note-card saying, "Yes, I have special needs - please don't ask questions" the way some deaf passengers must utilize visual cues to inform strangers of their limited or different abilities, or blind passengers signal their difference by carrying an easily identifiable red and white cane, pointing the way they plan to walk. Nobody seems to care as they

accidentally smash into me as they press through a crowded space; nobody notices how I must pause to regain my balance, to recover from the incident. Nobody shares my blurred vision or momentary dizziness after I bend down to replace my shoes at the end of the security line.

When many companies say that they make accommodations for those with "special needs", this is code for "those with easily identifiable handicaps or disabilities". The rest of us with 'special needs' must constantly, repeatedly, advocate for ourselves, since we look externally just like the rest of the population.

The 'pre-board' announcement is made in the gate area, and I roll from my seated position near my bags to all fours again, thrusting my butt back into the air as I straighten back into a vertical position. I stand in line behind the other pre-boarders. Together, we are a motley crew: wheelchair, cane, and me. We maneuver slowly down the jet-way, relieved that no one is behind us, pushing us forward with their eyes or the proximity of their bodies, or their sighs of impatience. I steady myself after each step against the wall of the jet-way, and as I approach the door to the plane, I prepare to hoist my bag into an over-head bin with just the strength of my right arm, since flight attendants are not allowed to assist passengers in stowing their luggage because of insurance liability. I lean the weight of my body against the edge of the seat opposite mine, to leverage the suitcase as I push it over my head, into the bin above my row. Then, I collapse into my seat, relieved that this first leg of my journey is over.

Job 6:25-26

מַה־נִּמְרְצוּ אִמְרֵי־יֹשֶׁר וּמַה־יּוֹכִיחַ הוֹכֵחַ מִכֶּם:[26] הַלְהוֹכֵחַ
מִלִּים תַּחְשֹׁבוּ וְלָרוּחַ אִמְרֵי נָאָשׁ:

How forcible are right words! but what does your arguing reprove? [26] Do you imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind?

The Colors of My Craziness

If I stopped fighting my mother, stopped blaming her, resisting her, reacting to her; who, what, where would I be?

Where else does that anger go?

When I finally decide to allow myself to grow up and be an adult: responsible for my health, my life, my death, my passions, could I survive?

If I looked at myself in the mirror of my own reflection, not the one which is "Not Her", could I face the eyes reflecting back at me?

Could I deal with all that rage, all that sadness, being so very existentially alone, and afraid, and angry all by myself?

What if there is no Mother?

What if there is no God?

I wonder if I really learned all that the aneurysm tried to teach me?

Fall out of my pose, fall into the depression ever-present on the horizon?

Cry out in all that pain, rather than bottling it up into nausea and deception and anxiety and blame?

Dive into that black pit, sell myself into servitude like Joseph and his Amazing Technicolored Dream Coat?

Own my own destiny.

Give up on God. For good, for real, this time.

I told my mother that she is not the messiah, that she cannot save me from falling.

But I feel so much safer, more steady when she is near.

And this is what makes me hate her, hate God.

For making me need them so desperately.

I'd rather stay in the wheelchair forever, from where it's impossible to fall down.

Job 7:6

יָמַי קַלּוּ מִנִּי־אָרֹג וַיִּכְלוּ בְּאֶפֶס תִּקְוָה׃

[6] My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

Hope

Hope is like a banana in my tight little apartment: no matter how green it is when I bring it home, it ripens so fast that it is brown by the time I am ready to eat it. It is impossible to buy more than three or four bananas at a time, because bananas are like time-bombs – I have a distinct, limited period of hours or days before the tiny fruit flies invade my kitchen, flitting around everything that lives, in their incessant, haphazard circles.

And sometimes I remember to place brown bananas in a Ziploc baggie in the freezer, so I might someday make smoothies, or banana bread, but usually I just throw them in the garbage, because nobody says, "when life gives you brown bananas, make banana bread."

Job 13:24

לָמָּה־פָנֶיךָ תַסְתִּיר וְתַחְשְׁבֵנִי לְאוֹיֵב לָךְ׃

Why do you hide your face, and hold me for your enemy?

To Whom It May Concern (*Ribbono Shel Olam)*:

Why is it that every time something truly tragic and inexplicable happens, I find myself telling jokes? Not to avoid the subject, per-say, but to highlight its absurdity. Why should I care about this tragedy, this tragedy, this tragedy? It's

all about the same locus of interest for me: why not any tragedy? Order, disorder, pain, suffering, misery, justice?

After the tsunami, after the hurricane, we talk about God and justice and politics and race and class and power, but really why do we expect "not-chaos" when over and over again the world we live in shouts, "Chaos! Chaos! Chaos! Meaninglessness! Meaninglessness! Meaninglessness!"?

Why do we human beings -- so frail and mortal and alive – crave meaning, crave justice, crave solace, crave God? We, tiny children, craving a great, powerful, loving Parent who abuses, and neglects, and ignores; and then we return, like faithful children, to the homes of our innocent acceptance of What Is.

Why me? Why Rabbinical school? Why not Social Work or Psychology or Sociology or Political Science? but Faith? Hope? God? Am I preaching, teaching a lie? Do *I* even believe my own words? Why am I ever searching for a book, a teacher, a rabbi, a text, to make me cry out, "yes! You hear me! You see me! You understand!?"

In this tragedy, I see faces on the TV screen, hear the words of critics and politicians, and police officers and victims and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, cut short so we can hear Wolf Blitzer's commentary on it all. Whose Words, whose Comfort, whose Meaning do we really crave?

Yours, God.

It's You we crave. "Ayekha?" "Where ARE you?"

Job 24:7

עָרֹם יָלִינוּ מִבְּלִי לְבוּשׁ וְאֵין כְּסוּת בַּקָּרָה׃

They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold.

"Your Body is a Wonderland"

"Your Body is a Wonderland..." John Mayer sings. I wonder what it would take for someone to feel this way about *my* body, *for me to feel this way about my own flesh*, again. On January 13, 2003, my body became the enemy. But really, the burst blood vessel had been stretching, straining, for 26 years, and on this day the inevitable simply happened. My sister recently explained that the wider blood vessels which pump more blood at a faster pace, usually flow into medium sized vessels and then gradually decrease in size to the tiny capillaries which carry miniscule amounts of blood to the outer regions of the body. I, apparently, had been missing these gradual transitions, these medium sized arteries, my whole life and the tiny capillaries were receiving large quantities of fast flowing blood, too much blood for their size. I try to have compassion for these "little guys" (as I start to call them), unappreciated for working over-time for nearly three decades. But then they broke: and so did my body.

I would like to blame my steady weight gain since then on my lessened ability to move about freely, on my decrease in exercise and disinterest in physical fitness. But it's also my disdain for the physical body in which I live; I am mad because this physical self betrayed me, abandoned me, fooled me into thinking that she could support me, support life, when she could not. She malfunctioned.

Before January, 2003, I had just lost a few pounds, bought all new underwear, black leather boots with zippers, and clothes which swished against my skin when I walked. I had just embraced my sensuality, my thighs, my curves in a way I'd never

done before. Since then, my belly has swelled, I cannot pull even my "fat pants" up over my butt, and I have not taken a single bath because it would require me looking at my outstretched naked form. I much prefer a brief, functional shower, like a swift drive-through car wash at a gas station which does not require me to get out of the front seat and watch my vehicle float by the window as it is meticulously lathered with soap and then rubbed dry by human hands and terry cloth towels.

In waves, though, I could feel improvement budding inside me: a lace tank top, a fragrant magnolia candle, an especially delicate chocolate. But the cargo pants and tennis shoes; the severe pony tails and acne infested skin always returned, like my monthly cycle of self hatred.

I have been to a day-spa three times since the aneurysm. The first time, several months afterwards, I hated every minute at Glen Ivy Hot Springs, as I was reminded with every step on slippery pavement with my walking cane in hand how utterly altered my body would now be. I had to look at slender bodies in bathing suits, confidently floating from pool to pool, like carefree flowers afloat in a clear pond. The second time, I used Glen Ivy as a way to "check out" of my life, of my reality. I closed my eyes, with my limbs and body and neck completely submerged in mineral water, and took the opportunity to forget. The third time, Masha and I talked all day about breathing love into our hearts and out into the world. I imagined all the other people at the spa, perfectly imperfect, too, falling in love with their thighs, with the unexpected bulges in their bathing suits. And then, on the long drive home, I imagined breathing love into the traffic on the clogged arteries of the Southern California freeway system.

Once I heard someone request the song "The Valley is a Wonderland", having mistaken the words of the song as a tribute to their San Fernando homeland. This made me smile: to me, as it was as inconceivable to imagine that my body was a wonderland as it was for city dwellers to believe that anyone might consider "The Valley" to be a wonderland.

It is November, but I am on the cusp of spring. I need to clean out my closets; I need to clean out my mind; I need to clean out my heart. My sisters often lament that my closet is the most full, the most crammed with clothing, I am in need of new acquisitions less than either one of them. But I want all of my former selves out. They are getting the boot: goodbye to the new Rabbinical student who let her hair grow long and full, who bought flowing skirts and oversized blouses from Santa Monica boutiques on Main Street; goodbye to the 26 year old who bought black silk lingerie, embroidered with ridged detail; goodbye to the 28 year old who hid in vests from the men's department of J. Crew and Eddie Bauer; goodbye to the older sister coerced by her stylish siblings to allow fitted pants and tight V-neck sweaters from Banana Republic infest her closet.

I've dressed to accentuate my breasts in silky, low-cut V-necks; I've covered them up in overalls and extra-large sweaters; I've worn pant-suits with pink blouses, strapless cocktail dresses, and long flowered skirts. My mom shops in sanitized malls with a plethora of fashionable shops and price tags; my friend, Masha, finds gems in thrift shops and Ross Dress for Less. I own clothing in every genre, color, and style ranging from size 8 to size 16; a number of my friends of varying heights and body shapes shop in my closet before hitting the stores.

But I never wear any of it. These identities hang, waiting for God-knows-what or when; for their owners to come back from the dead and re-take the form of their sorted pasts. It is not spring, when newness hangs on the branches of trees and whips through the air around us, pressing us to embrace her and the changes which accompany her; it is not January 2nd, when we promise ourselves we will adapt fierce new diets and finally lose those 10 or 15 or 20 pounds; it is not months before my sister's wedding. I simply give up. I am surrendering my fate to the unknown clothes yet to hang in my future closet, to the body I now own, to the thighs and breasts and skin that God gives me *today*.

I am the nearly thirty-year old who wants to believe that life gets better as age increases, that women improve with age, like fine wine. I want to spend an entire day at the spa with my mother, luxuriating in my skin alongside the body from which I emerged thirty years prior: both of us proud of our shapes, not pulling towels around our waists because we are embarrassed to walk about in our bathing suits. We will spread mineral-enriched mud with exfoliating agents against our arms and cheeks and legs; we will allow warm bubbles to wash us clean and steam rooms thick with eucalyptus to seep into our lungs, into our chests, into our bellies. We will sip fruit smoothies in Styrofoam cups and will rest on lounge chairs side by side, loving one another and loving ourselves. My closet will be half empty; I will feel full.

Job 31:2-6

2 וּמֶה־ חֵלֶק אֱלוֹהַּ מִמָּעַל וְנַחֲלַת שַׁדַּי מִמְּרֹמִים: 3 הֲלֹא־אֵיד
לְעַוָּל וְנֵכֶר לְפֹעֲלֵי אָוֶן:
4 הֲלֹא־הוּא יִרְאֶה דְרָכָי וְכָל־צְעָדַי יִסְפּוֹר:
5 אִם־הָלַכְתִּי עִם־שָׁוְא וַתַּחַשׁ עַל־מִרְמָה רַגְלִי:
6 יִשְׁקְלֵנִי בְמֹאזְנֵי־צֶדֶק וְיֵדַע אֱלוֹהַּ תֻּמָּתִי:

For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of *Shaddai* from on high? *Is* not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the

workers of iniquity? Does not God see my ways, and count all my steps? If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot has hurried to deceit, Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity.

They Never Predict Rain in Los Angeles

"I brought an umbrella so it wouldn't rain," I recently reported with pride to a dear friend as I unpacked my rental car outside her apartment. I knew with certainty that this ploy would work; common wisdom tells us that small actions such as these can actually alter the future; can actually *control* what will happen in our unpredictable and chaotic world.

In Joan Didion's book, A Year of Magical Thinking, she reflects that tragedy *always* seems to strike on a clear, blue-skied afternoon, when we least expect the extraordinary to occur. My decision to pack an umbrella would therefore surely protect me from getting caught unaware, as I now *expect* rain; I now *expect* tragedy to be waiting around every corner.

Didion begins her memoir with the words, "Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends. The question of self-pity" (Didion, 3). These were her first words written after tragedy caught her unaware. *My* first words, after almost five months of silence in my journal were: "Brain aneurysm. Fucking brain hemmorage. Took away my whole life. Lucky I can still write a little. My handwriting sucks." I left a blank page in between January and May of 2003 and later added the words, "insert HELL here".

The morning of the brain aneurysm, I had been at my student pulpit in Lubbock, Texas, where I was practicing being their student rabbi. That weekend, we had read from the Torah about the Ten Plagues, and I'd chosen to speak about the plague of

darkness, comparing the darkness which surrounded the people so completely that they could not move from their place to the darkness of clinical depression. I had even "outed" myself as one who struggled with depression, saying "*we*", rather than "*they*". When I exited the airport upon my return to Los Angeles, I could smell the exhaust from the shuttle busses outside LAX; the January air was warm and moist compared to the crisp chill of north-western Texas.

Less than two weeks before, at midnight, the moment the year 2002 turned to 2003, I had looked up at the night sky, my heart filling with hope and potential, and proclaimed, "this year has *got* to be better than last year!" I smile now, thinking of all that optimism, all that innocent expectation. Like Didion noted, my life, too, was turned upside-down in an instant.

Joan Didion repeats her first written words as a kind of mantra throughout her memoir. I imagine my first words, over and over again: "Brain aneurysm. Fucking brain hemmorage. Took away my whole life. Lucky I can still write a little. My handwriting sucks."

The rupture in my cerebellum was at the site of gross motor control – I was extremely ataxic, dizzy, nauseous, and had double vision. I became accustomed to the daily round of nurses and doctors, each asking me the same questions and requesting the same performance of my inabilities: touch your nose with your right hand; touch your nose with your left hand; who is the president?; count backwards from 100 by 7's. I liked to throw them off a bit, letting them know the absurdity of these questions,

"Well, we *elected* Gore, but I think, unfortunately, most people believe that Bush is our president." The nurses usually smiled. I think they liked me; I definitely

remember the ICU nurses liking me – I assumed this was because I was the most alive person they had seen in awhile.

When I finally was released after five weeks in the hospital, my mother came to live with me in my one bedroom apartment. She slept on the couch for the next five months: she did all of the cooking, shopping, and cleaning; she answered the phone and coordinated doctors' appointments and physical therapy; she helped me bathe, and did all the driving. She was on watch at all times: listening to make sure I didn't fall on my way to the bathroom in the middle of the night, sitting in the room with me during every doctor's appointment so she could be sure I asked the questions she'd prompted me to ask, making lists of the medications I needed to take at prescribed times, coordinating and usually supervising my schedule of visitors.

The first and only night my mom joined my father in the hotel room he rented every other weekend when he flew to Los Angeles from Milwaukee to be with us, she slipped and fell in the hotel bathtub, leaving a huge purple bruise along her thigh and a sore arm which had braced her fall.

"I could have cracked my head open!" She joked, trying to make light of the accident, hinting at her feeling of having been fortunate not to have been injured more seriously. I smiled. Cracking one's head open certainly was to be avoided, in my opinion. She never left me alone after that night. It is as though her presence in my apartment was like a soft blanket, protecting us both from any further harm.

"Brain aneurysm. Fucking brain hemmorage. Took away my whole life. Lucky I can still write a little. My handwriting sucks."

I used to think writing about my seemingly irrational fear of dying could control destiny, could keep it from happening. I used to pour over the pages of my journal frantically, desperately before getting on a plane, certain that if I only wrote, "please, God...*please* don't let anything bad happen to me or those I love" enough times, in enough different ways, this would magically keep me safe. I packed umbrellas every time I traveled, to *keep the rain away.*

I recall the days when my parents used to stand by the window of the airport gate where they had just said goodbye to their daughter, noses pressed against the glass, as they watched the plane back slowly away from the gate. I used to hate that they did this; did they actually think they could *save me*, that their presence in the gate area as my plane departed meant they could control the safety of my passage? With increased airport security, they are now not allowed this ritual.

I had an ongoing argument with a therapist I saw in Boston years before the aneurysm. My position was that the world *was* clearly, inarguably, unsafe. Hers was that I needed medication.

"This is not an issue of *psychology*," I insisted, "it's *sociology*". I pointed out the horrors and atrocities occurring every day, to women just like me. She insisted that it was unhealthy to live this way. I now understand that we were both right. I take the medication. And I know that the world is unsafe. I prefer to live with the umbrella in my suitcase, with the full knowledge that I might get wet, anyway.

Job 38:1

וַיַּעַן יְהוָה אֶת־אִיּוֹב מִן הַסְּעָרָה וַיֹּאמַר

Then YHVH answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

I have talked to more rabbis, ministers, scholars, therapists, teachers and loved ones about my feelings about God than I ever imagined possible. I listened to the entirety of When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner and also Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor E. Frankl on CD's because, at the time, my thirst for connection and meaning surpassed my physical ability to hold a book in my ataxic hands or focus on a line of words on a page without getting dizzy or my eyes searching the page aimlessly looking for the next sentence.

Job 40:7-8

אֶשְׁאָלְךָ וְהוֹדִיעֵנִי׃ 8 הַאַף תָּפֵר מִשְׁפָּטָי תַּרְשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן תִּצְדָּק׃

I will demand of you, and you declare to me. Will you also disannul my judgment? will you condemn me, that you may be righteous?

Searching for the Eternal Light Switch

In every Jewish sanctuary, above the holy ark cradling the velvety Torah scrolls, hangs an eternal light, a *ner tamid.* Shining above us, it symbolizes God, and is always lit. Once, when I entered a darkened synagogue with one of my bat mitzvah students on an ordinary weekday, we felt our way around, touching every wall in the sanctuary, looking for the light switch, worried that we might accidentally turn off that which is meant to shine eternally. "The eternal light switch -- it must exist," I mused.

A few months later, without warning, a brain aneurysm burst in my cerebellum. I had just returned from my student pulpit.

During the eight-hour procedure that followed, I can only imagine my parents' terror as they soared over the west coast of the United States, held aloft by the miracle of modern technology, while I was in neurosurgery, my cranium split open after a blood vessel had burst.

Later, I asked no one in particular, "Where the hell is the eternal light now?" Perhaps there is no light? No switch? I'm studying to be a rabbi; shouldn't I know why bad things happen to good people?

Now, nearly three years later, I imagine my ordination. Each future rabbi chooses a verse in the Hebrew Bible to which his or her particular Torah will be rolled. Even before the aneurysm, before I understood how prophetic my verse was, I knew it would be "Choose life!" It is the most difficult challenge in the Torah. Choosing life means trying to live life with a special kind of passion and commitment to all that is vibrant and absurd and painful and passionate, even when it makes us cry. To choose life presupposes that this choice is ours to make, that we do have some control over the quality and reality of our own lives.

I am hardly saying that my journey with God, my struggle with faith or my understanding of why bad things happen to good people are resolved. I am not saying that I don't still hurt, I am not still angry, that I don't still question. I am saying that today I can see a bigger picture, today I see that God has set before us life and prosperity, death and adversity. And, in the face of *all of it*, in the very midst of a crisis, in fact, we are commanded, we are asked, we are begged, "Choose Life."

Choosing life is about seeing life as it is in its fullness, seeing the blessing and the curse are constant presences in the realities of our own lives. It is about turning towards God again even when we are angry and hurt and betrayed, so that God might bring us back from the ends of the earth, in love. And, we are reminded that *this is not too hard for us*[50]. This difficult, long, winding road of healing is within our reach.

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[50] See Deuteronomy 29-30.

We received our collective name, Yisrael, precisely because we struggle, not despite our struggle. We, the Children of Israel, are God wrestlers. We question and fight, and while we may emerge bruised and limping, we also emerge blessed[51].

As I move toward the ark and the eternal light above it on the morning of my ordination ceremony this May, my thesis advisor will cradle my Torah scroll in her arms and I will walk beside her toward my future as a rabbi, knowing that I will be choosing in every moment.

Job 42:5-6

לְשֵׁמַע־אֹזֶן שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְעַתָּה עֵינִי רָאָתְךָ׃ 6 עַל־כֵּן אֶמְאַס
וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־עָפָר וָאֵפֶר׃

I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees you.
6 And I am comforted, upon dust and ashes.

"What if the hokey-pokey IS what it's all about?"

Was I trying to be funny? Sarcastic? Outrageous? Blasphemous? Ironic? Somehow, though, I wound up with profundity, almost against my will.

"*You put your whole self in, you put your whole self out, you put your whole self in, and you shake it all about:*" isn't that what I'm doing? What I've always done? What's written on my heart, you ask? "Everything changes: the only thing that's constant is change". *I do the hokey-pokey and I turn myself around.* This was my answer to my friend, Elizabeth, when she asked more than four years ago. *That's what it's all about.*

I've spent the last five years of Rabbinical school – at the UJ, at HUC, in Lubbock, at the Jewish Home for the Aging, in the hospital, in Physical Therapy, on JDate – putting my whole self in, out, in, and shaking it all about.

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[51] See Genesis 32.

Then I change. And change. And change.

I turn myself around. T'shuva. It's Elul – the month of letting go, of forgiveness, of making amends, of Change. Day by day, we put our whole selves into moving from where we stand.

To be honest, I'm getting tired of hearing my own voice. Blah, blah, blah, poor me. Time to change. Again.

Job 42:15-17

וְלֹא נִמְצְאָה נָשִׁים יָפוֹת כִּבְנוֹת אִיּוֹב בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם
אֲבִיהֶם נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחֵיהֶם: וַיְחִי אִיּוֹב אַחֲרֵי־זֹאת מֵאָה
וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה (וַיַּרְא) [וַיִּרְאֶה] אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בְּנֵי בָנָיו
אַרְבָּעָה דֹרוֹת:
וַיָּמָת אִיּוֹב זָקֵן וּשְׂבַע יָמִים:

And in all the land were no women found as fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, *even* four generations. So Job died, old and full of days.

Gratitude:

I am grateful for the love of my parents, my sisters, my rabbis, teachers, and friends. When I think about Job, I feel sad for him not because of the pain he endured at the hands of Fate, but because he was alone: even his friends failed him.

I believe that my community, the warmth of arms enfolding me after the nightmare began, is what saved my life, not only (or even mostly) the skilled hands of the surgeon or the physical therapy or the rounds of medications.

I finally understand why we say the *Misheberach* when the Torah is unrolled and a community must be gathered to hear it read aloud. *Misheberach* literally means, "one who *blesses*" – it is a prayer for the community there praying – the pray-ers, not for God and not for the one needing healing. We say *Misheberach* to ourselves,

gathered in community, to remind ourselves that we are the ones capable of healing the ones we love who are sick. We are the ones whose arms and hands and words and love can gift the life of the person in our thoughts. *Misheberach* is also for us.

IX. ANOTHER DESCENDENT OF JOB SPEAKS

Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk said, "All my life I have struggled in vain to know what man is. Now I know. Man is the language of God" (quotation cited in Schulweis, 143). I owned a copy of the book, For Those Who Can't Believe by Rabbi Harold Schulweis for years before I finally opened the text and pressed a crease into its pages. I found in Schulweis's words and expression a spiritual friend, an ally with whom to walk through my struggle back towards faith. He includes in his book a poem written about his conception of the divine after the earthquake in Northridge, California which ruptured the solidity of the ground upon which he walked and also the spiritual foundation of many Jews' faith in God. He writes,

"ELOHIM – ADONAI"

Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, whose strength and might fill the world.
Elohim creates day and night,
Light and darkness.
Lion and lamb,
Bacteria and penicillin.
Gives power to the fowl above the earth,
To the great sea monsters below,
To every living creature that creeps on the earth.
And Elohim said,
It is very good.
All existence is good in the eyes of
Elohim, the God of the first chapter of Genesis,
Elohim who spoke to Job
Out of the whirlwind.
Who laid the cornerstones of earth?
Who shut up the sea with doors
When it broke forth and issued out of the womb?
Who caused it to rain on a land where no man is?
On the wilderness, wherein there is no man?
Elohim the God of Omnipotence before whom
We recognize our own impotence,
"Canst Thou bind the chain of the Pleiades
Or loose the bands of Orion?"

Elohim the God of Omniscience before whom
We recognize our ignorance,
"Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you number the clouds by wisdom?"
Elohim before whom we bow our heads
And bend our knees,
The sovereign God whose power and reality we accept.
But Elohim is not the whole of divinity.
Alongside Elohim is Adonai.
This is our affirmation of oneness.
Hear Israel, Adonai our Elohim is One.
Alongside Elohim the God of all that is stands
Adonai the Lord of all that ought to be.
Adonai revealed in the yearning of His human creation for justice,
For fairness,
For peace,
For harmony.
Adonai in the vision of a compassionate society
Adonai in the transformation of chaos and violence and
The void of the universe
Into order, sanity, and love.
Adonai in the mending of the universe,
The repair of the world,
The binding of bruises,
Gathering up the fragmented sparks buried
In the husks of the world.
Adonai in the discovery of the self created in the image of
Adonai-Elohim, the Lord God, who breathed into our
Nostrils and made us a living soul.
Elohim / Adonai,
Acceptance and transformation,
The reality of what is, the reality of what ought to be,
The reality yet to be.
(Schulweis, 126-128).

X. EPILOGUE:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day... "Does it all happen at once, or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't all happen at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

- Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit

XI. APPENDIX:

List of English Translations of Job 42:7

Revised Standard Version
Now therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I deal not with you after your folly; for ***ye have not spoken of me*** the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.

The Bible in Basic English
And now, take seven oxen and seven sheep, and go to my servant Job, and give a burned offering for yourselves, and my servant Job will make prayer for you, that I may not send punishment on you; because ***you have not said what is right about me***, as my servant Job has.

Darby Bible
And now, take for yourselves seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, for ***ye have not spoken of me*** rightly, like my servant Job.

King James Version
Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ***ye have not spoken of me*** the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
Now therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I do not unto you aught unseemly; for ***ye have not spoken of Me*** the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.'

Webster's Bible
Therefore take to you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ***ye have not spoken of me*** the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

World English Bible
Now therefore, take to yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept him, that I not deal with you according to your folly. For ***you have not spoken of me*** the thing that is right, as my servant Job has."

Young's Literal Translation

And now, take to you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go ye unto My servant Job, and ye have caused a burnt-offering to ascend for you; and Job My servant doth pray for you, for surely his face I accept, so as not to do with you folly, because ***ye have not spoken concerning Me*** rightly, like My servant Job.

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