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A Reading of Job 38-42:6 – Responding to Eternal Questions

by
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Advisor: Dr. Beatrice Lawrence

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for Rabbinic ordination at
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
February 29, 2008 – אדר א כג תשס"ח

With abundant gratitude this thesis is dedicated to my grandparents

Madeline and Robert Steinman

who make all of my learning possible

Their memory is forever a blessing

Introduction

I have always been interested in the concept of suffering. I came of age at a time when the liberal American Jewish community reframed their relationship to the holocaust and the experience of communal suffering. The genocides in Rwanda, Serbia-Croatia, and Darfur have challenged the Jewish community's holocaust focused attitudes. In turn, this forced me to also seek out historical, societal, and theological claims concerning suffering.

In the fall of 2006 I took a course on the book of Job which piqued my interest in the individual experience of suffering. As I began to look at this text with an eye towards the possible historical and literary intent of the author I knew I had found a text with which to wrestle. God is in some fashion present to the experience of the sufferer. I sought to know more about this and why it was part of the Job tale.

When selecting a topic for my rabbinic thesis I knew that I wanted to look at a text from the Bible, translate it, and use the exegetical methods I learned. Throughout my coursework at HUC my teachers; Drs. Rachel Adler, Lewis Barth, William Cutter, Tamara Eskenazi, Eitan Fishbane, Beatrice Lawrence, Stephen Passamaneck, and Dvora Weisberg each taught me to look at the texts of the Jewish Tradition with sensitivity, careful insight, and skill. I would be unable to do much of this without their knowledge and capacity to transmit that information to their students.

My time as a student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles was not only spent in the classroom. I did one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. As I participated in the clinical and reflective model of pastoral education, I spent time with patients and their families in the grips of terminal illness and devastating accidents. Those summer days were filled with learning opportunities: how to leave

work at work, speak without words when the language barrier was too great, find holiness in the hospital room, and honor life's final moments. I am grateful to all of those patients and families who I hope and pray I comforted, who are truly some of my life's greatest teachers.

The story of Job became a story of tremendous potential for me, particularly when working with people of faith. Almost everyone knows Job's story. Therefore, Job's story provided entry into a deep level of conversation about the nature of God in the world and how to find the holiness, the godliness in moments when suffering feels suffocating.

Job gives voice to a common human experience, thus Job's story becomes the story of any human being living life. Each person who approaches the text brings his/her own experience up to that moment. The writer(s) of Job brought the themes of their day into the text. This is why the story of Job is known throughout the Ancient Near East.

As I moved into congregational life serving congregations in Visalia, CA, Missoula, MT, and West Hollywood, CA I found that people know the story of the prologue and epilogue of Job. In so many ways people seek out their tradition in times of need and look to find a way to find meaning in their suffering. I quickly came to see that Job would also be a useful text to study with them to think about and discuss where God might be in the experience of suffering and how God might also be present for them. This is why I have selected an element of the speeches within Job to focus upon. I think there is much to be learned from still here and this text is as rich and exciting as the prologue/epilogue.

It is with all of this in mind that I began work on my thesis. After initial conversations with Beatrice Lawrence who would then become my advisor, we quickly realized that my interest truly centered on the YHWH speeches contained in chapters 38-39 and 40-41. Together we decided that the most productive thing for me to do first would be to translate chapters 38-

42:6. While this task may seem like it should be a simple one for a fifth year rabbinic student, in fact it took much more time and energy than I could have anticipated. This section of Job contains more hapax legomena than any other biblical text and demonstrates the poetic nature which a careful translation must try to preserve.

Following a careful translation I have included some discussion on the dating and genre of the entire text of Job. There is much more that could be written here, as a plethora of others have attempted to accurately date Job. My hope was to simply provide a brief overview in order to make a best guess at the historical framework and genre(s) within which the author(s) composed the text.

I begin the next chapter with a critical look at the questions that the characters ask throughout the book and how they might be answered in the whirlwind speeches. Here is where I begin to try to see how YHWH's words answer Job's cries and perhaps most importantly, how Job's response in 42:1-6 informs the reader as to what he heard.

Chapter 3 is a critical evaluation of Harold Kushner's, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* which is one of the most popularized readings of Job available. This book has brought comfort to many but I find it to be wrought with significant theological problems which prevent it from being a useful tool. The problematic theology that Kushner presents allows me to transition to a Buberian reading of Job which directly influences what I think the reader in the twenty-first century can learn from this text.

Job's cries of anguish can be heard throughout the world around us. As a Jewish leader it is my duty to make myself as present as possible for the individual in crisis, to listen. It is only when that sufferer is heard that they can begin to be comforted because ultimately, we are all nothing more than ashes and dust.

Translation

Chapter 38

1. YHWH[1] answered Job from a whirlwind[2] and said:
2. Who is it who causes darkness, counsels[3] in words without knowledge?
3. Gird your loins like a man[4], for I will ask you and you will inform Me!
4. Where were you when I established the earth? Tell, if you have understanding!
5. Who put measurements upon it[5]? Surely you will know! Who stretched a line upon it?
6. On what are the pedestals planted? Who casts its cornerstone?
7. When morning stars sang out as one and all children of God[6] shouted out
8. Who closed in the sea with doors in a blocking position[7] when it burst forth[8] from the womb?
9. I set my cloud on it as a garment[9] to adorn it - thick darkness[10] as its swaddling-bands[11]
10. I broke [the sea] up into boundaries and set bars and doors,

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[1]This is only the nineteenth occurrence for this name of God in all of Job. Edwin Good states, "The Divine name JHVH appears in the heading here, as well as in 40:1 and 6. Otherwise it occurs only in the Prose Tale, but not in the Dialogue with the Friends or in the Elihu speeches. The only exception is in 12:9...". Edwin Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a translation.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) 442.

[2]Other options for this word are: tempest, storm, whirlwind, or high wind. This is without question some type of natural phenomeonon.

New Interpreter's Bible: A commentary in twelve volumes, proposes, "A storm often accompanies a divine appearance in biblical tradition (Pss 18:7-15[8-16]; 50:3; 68:8[9]; Ezek 1:4; Nah 1:3; Zech 9:14). The particular term used here ... can refer specifically to a whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:11), although in other instances it seems to refer more generally to a violent storm (e.g., Ps 107:29; Ezek 13:11,13). The same term is used to describe the theophany in Ezek 1:4." (600).

[3]Habel suggests, "presenting arguments." Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: a commentary*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985) 517.

[4]Citing Targum and Syriac, Habel suggests reading this word as warrior or hero. Habel, 520.

[5]I have chosen not to preserve masculine and feminine language for natural phenomena in my translation.

[6]This can refer to angels, or God's attendants.

[7]"Who hedged in the sea with doors..." Habel, 517.

[8]This verb is translated from the root, שׁכך. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1328.

[9]This noun also occurs in Ezek 15:7

[10]This word also appears in: Deut 4:11; 2Sa 22:10; Psa 18:10, 97:2; Isa 60:2; Ezek 34:12; Joel 2:2; and Zeph 1:15.

[11]Francis Brown, S. Driver, C. Brings, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 791. "The meaning of the *hapax* חתולה, 'swaddling cloth,' is evident from the use of the verb חתל in Ezek. 16:4, where the infant Jerusalem is rubbed down with salt and swaddled." Habel, 521.

11. and said, 'Until here may you come but not further; here your majestic waves will stop.'

12. Have you ever commanded morning, assigned the dawn its place,

13. Taking possession of the corners of the earth and shaking the wicked out of it?

14. It is turned as clay of the seal and is arranged out like as a garment

15. Their light withheld from the wicked and the arm[12] on high is broken.

16. Did you trod on the springs of the sea? Did you walk its depths?

17. Were the gates of death revealed to you? Did you see the gates of death's shadow?

18. Have you discerned the expanses of the land? Tell, if you know it all!

19. Where is the path where light dwells? And where is the place of darkness,[13]

20. That you would take the path to its boundaries, and know the path to its' home?

21. You know, because you were born then, the number of your days is great.

22. Did you enter into treasures of snow, did you see treasures of hail,

23. Which I have withheld for times of trouble, for a day of battle and war?

24. Where is the path in which light parted, scattering the east wind upon the earth?

25. Who cut a trench for flooding, the path for the lightening flash of thunder

26. To rain upon the earth without mortals, on the wilderness where there is no human,

27. To water the ruin and desolation, and cause grass to issue from dry land?

28. Does the rain have a father? Who gave birth to the dew drops?

29. From whose belly did the ice come forth? And the hoarfrost of heaven, who bore it?

30. The water congeals as a stone and the face of the deep compacts.[14]

31. Can you bind the bands of the Pleiades[15] or untie the cords of Orion?[16]

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[12] The arm is a source of strength. BDB. 283
[13] Habel suggests a Divine light. Habel. 518.
[14] BDB suggests compact as freezing. 539.
[15] Pleiades always appears with the word I translate as Orion.

32. Can you bring forth constellations Mazzarot[17] in its time? Or lead Ursa Major and her sons?[18]
33. Do you know the laws of heaven, that you could put its authority on the earth?
34. Can you lift up your voice to the cloud-mass so an abundance of water covers you?
35. Can you send out lightening-flashes, that they go forth and say to you, 'Here we are'?
36. Who put wisdom in the ibis, and who gave understanding to the rooster?[19]
37. Who can count the clouds in wisdom, and who lays down the harps of heaven,
38. Casts dust as metal[20] and clods of earth are joined closely together?[21]
39. Can you hunt prey for the lion or satisfy their young?
40. They crouch in their dens and remain in the thicket lying in wait.
41. Who provides provisions for the raven, when the young ones cry out to God, wandering about without food?

Chapter 39

1. Have you knowledge of the time when the mountain goats birth? Have you watched over their writhing as they calve?
2. Have you counted the complete months and thus know birthing time?
3. When they bow down to deliver, they cleave open for their offspring, they cast out their pains[22]

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[16] This term means stupid or insolent and refers to Orion as "an insolent and outrageous hunter." Koehler and Baumgartner, 489.

[17] Good offers the following as potential meanings for this unknown word: "planets, Arabic name for Milky Way, from the Akkadian for guard or keeper, equal to an Arabic name for Venus," 450. Without question this is a reference to something astronomical.

[18] נחה according to Koehler and Baumgartner in the הפעיל specifically means "to lead" as a term for the guidance in the wilderness, 685.

[19] BDB, 967. Robert Gordis, "The Lord out of the whirlwind: the climax and meaning of Job," *Judaism* 13 Winter (1964): 438, suggests, "Who has placed wisdom in the ibis or given understanding to the cock?" which preserves the idea that it is God who grants these skills to the natural world.

[20] Koehler and Baumgartner, 559.

[21] Koehler and Baumgartner, 209.

4. Their young ones dream as numerous as corn, they go out, and do not come back.
5. Who lets the wild ass free?[23] Or opens the restraining bands of the wild ass?
6. I put its home in the wilderness, its dwellings[24] in the salt plain[25].
7. It laughs at the great number in the city, it doesn't hear the foreign oppressor,
8. Exploring the mountains for pasture - searching after all green things.
9. Will the wild ox[26] serve you; will it spend the night in your feeding trough?
10. Who can bind the wild ox with twisted furrow ropes while it harrows the valleys after you?
11. Will you trust its strength, or leave your toil to it?
12. Will you believe in it to harvest your grain and gather it on your threshing floor?
13. [27]Ostrich wings flap joyously as do the wings and plumage of the stork,
14. It leaves its eggs on the earth for the dust warms them.
15. Forgetting that legs may crush them and the field animals graze upon it and may crush them.
16. The ostrich is stubborn against its young as though they do not belong; not caring its labor is in vain,

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[22] BDB suggests that this is specifically regarding the offspring of goats and hinds. 286.
[23]BDB offers that this term can be a metaphor for Israel's love of idolatry. 825.
[24]This Hebrew term is only used in poetry. See: Job 18:21, 21:28; Psa 87:2, 132:5; Hab 1:6; Song 1:8.
[25]This is the particular place where the wild ass gives birth. BDB. 572.
[26]An alternate translation for this word is unicorn. Koehler and Baumgartner. 1164. However. Habel rejects this stating that this is not unicorn or rhinoceros. Habel. 524. The Vulgate suggests rhinoceros.
[27]Verses 13-18 "are missing in the LXX and the passage is considered an interpolation by many scholars since it *(a)* breaks the series of rhetorical questions of the speech; *(b)* refers to God in the first person; *(c)* disrupts the sequence of quadrupeds in the catalog of creatures; and *(d)* presents the ostrich in a negative light while all other creatures are admired. We would argue that portraying the ostrich in this way is a deliberate feature of the poet's plan; the surprise appearance of a bizarre bird devoid of natural wisdom throws the characteristics of the other creatures into bold relief. It is much easier to see why the LXX would omit this awkward verse than to understand why someone would insert it later. The shock value of this section is enhanced by presenting it as a description of facts known to Job, not as a challenge in rhetorical form. Why challenge Job to match the folly of the ostrich? They are both fools!" Habel. 524.

17. Because God caused the ostrich to forget wisdom, and did not share understanding with it.
18. The time for rebelliousness against God on high, laughing at the horse and its' mount
19. Who gives the horse strength? Who dresses its neck with quivering mane?[28]
20. Who causes the horse to tremble at locust swarms? Its nostrils snort with terror?
21. It searches in the valley, rejoicing strength goes out to encounter the armory,
22. It laughs at fear, is not dismayed, and does not turn back from the face of the sword.
23. Upon it the quiver rattles, the flaming[29] spear and short sword[30]
24. The rushing sound rages as it swallows the ground, it doesn't believe the sound of the horn,[31]
25. The horn sounds. It says, "A ha!" from a distance he smells battle, the thunderous voice of the captains shout,
26. Is it from your wisdom the hawk flies and spreads out its wings to the south?
27. Does the eagle fly high upon your lips [upon your word] making its nest on high?
28. It dwells and spends the night upon the rock, the tooth of the rock, a stronghold.
29. From there it searches for food for from afar its eyes see,
30. Its young ones[32] suck up blood in the place where the profaned are, it is there.

Chapter 40

1. YHWH answered Job, saying,
2. "Shall he that quarrels with Shaddai turn away? The one who reproves his God,[33] let him answer!"

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[28]BDB, 947.
[29]This word also appears in Joel 2:5. I selected this translation based upon Koehler and Baumgartner, 520.
[30]Koehler and Baumgartner, 472.
[31]This specific instrument is used in war. BDB, 1051.
[32]This word appears only in this place within the Tanakh.

3. Job answered YHWH, saying,
4. "Behold! I am insignificant. How can I answer You? I lay my hand upon my mouth.
5. Once I spoke, but I will not answer. But twice, and I will go no further."
6. YHWH answered Job from a tempest and said:[34]
7. "May you gird up your loins like a man, for I will ask of you and you will say to Me,
8. How much more will you frustrate My judgment? Will you condemn Me as guilty for the sake of your righteousness?
9. Do you have an Arm like El? Can you cause thunder with your voice like God[35]?
10. May you ornament yourself with grandeur and exultation; clothe yourself in glory and splendor.
11. Scatter the fury of your anger, see everyone that is proud and set him in a lower place.
12. Look on everyone that is proud and humble him, and cast down the wicked in their place.
13. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces buried as a hidden snare.[36]
14. Then I will praise you, for your right hand can save you.
15. Behold Behemoth, which I made as well as you. He, like cattle, eats grass.
16. How! His strength is in his loins; his vigor is in the muscles of his belly.
17. His tail moves like a cedar tree, the sinews of his thigh intertwine.
18. His bones are hollow filled with copper his bones are like wrought iron.
19. He is the beginning of the ways[37] of El, he that made him can bring his sword near.
20. For the mountain block lift to you, all the beasts of the field play there.

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[33] BDB, 406.
[34] This is the same introduction to a Divine speech as in 38:1.
[35] Lit. "Him".
[36] This word only appears in Job: 3:16, 18:10, and 20:26 and with a prefix only in this case.
[37] Pope, Marvin H. *The Anchor Bible: Job.* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1973) suggests, "Primordial production," 266.

21. He lays under the lotus tree, hidden in the swampy reeds.

22. The lotus tree covers him with its shadow, the willow of the brook surround him.

23. He oppresses a river, does not hurry to trust for he draws up the Jordan river in his mouth.

24. His eyes taken in, snares[38] pierce nostrils.

25. Can you draw out Leviathan[39] with a fish hook? Or sink down his tongue with a chord?

26. Can you put a bulrush[40] in his nose? Or pierce his jaw with a hook?

27. Will he make supplications in delicate speech to you?

28. Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as an eternal servant?

29. Will you play with him like a bird? Or will you bind him for your girls?

30. Will companions plot against him, divide his parts amongst merchants?

31. Will you fill his skin with barbs or his head with fish spears?

32. Put your hand upon him, remember the battle, don't do it again.

Chapter 41

1. Behold! The hope for him is in vain; shall the sight of him [Leviathan] cast him downward?
2. Is he not fierce[41] when one rouses him? Thus who can station him/herself before him?
3. Who comes before him that I should compensate? All underneath the heavens, who?
4. Did I not silence his tongue by the powerful word for his power and station?
5. Who might uncover the face of his garment or who can come to him with his double jaw (like a crocodile?)?
6. Who might open the doors of his face, his rounded teeth are dreaded ?

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[38]Without the preposition, this word is found in the plural form in Psalm 64:5.
[39]This creature appears earlier in Job 3:8 and elsewhere in the Bible: Psalm: 74:14, Psalm 104:26, and Isaiah 27:1
[40]This word only appears in this place in the Bible. BDB defines this as, "used as a chord or line," (110).
[41]This form also appears in Deut. 32:33

7. His majestic crocodile scales[42] are his pride, sealed together tightly,
8. One is near to another, and the wind cannot come between them [the scales],
9. They are joined one to the other, grasping each other, and cannot be divided.
10. His sneezes flash light, his eyes are like the eyelids of dawn.
11. From his mouth go torches, as sparks of a fire slip away.
12. From his nostrils smoke comes forth, as out of a pot.
13. His breath kindles coal, and a flame comes out from his mouth.
14. In his neck lodges strength, power leaps before him.
15. Parts of his flesh cleave, infused into him, unmoving.
16. His heart is cast as a stone and as hard as the deepest millstone.
17. At his uprisings the mighty are in dread,[43] breaking their purification.
18. No sword that overtakes him can prevail, nor spear, dart, or body armor.
19. He reckons iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.
20. The arrow[44] does not make him flee, the shaft turning into a sling stone.
21. Darts are counted as splinters[45], he laughs at the shaking of the javelin.
22. Sharpened shards are under him, he spreads sharp things upon mud.
23. The deep boils as in a pot, the sea is like an ointment pot.
24. A path of light after him, one would think the deep is old.
25. On earth there is nothing like him, one without fear.
26. He sees all things on high, he is king over all the children of pride.

Chapter 42

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[42]This is the suggestion from BDB, 67. In other locations this term means bone. I am relating these two terms as they are the exterior protection and makeup the skeleton.
[43]BDB, 673.
[44]Of the thirty-five uses of this word in the Bible, none appear with the prefix בְּ.
[45]Pope, 281.

1. Job answered YHWH, saying:
2. "I know all that You can do and no evil thought can be made inaccessible from You.
3. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge[46], tell me! I did not understand the wonders before me, I did not know.
4. Listen! I will speak; I will ask of You and You will tell me.
5. I heard You with my ears and now my eyes have seen You;
6. Thus I reject my own words[47] and conclude my mourning[48] [for I am but] ashes and dust[49].

[46] Job quotes God in 38:2.
[47] KB suggests "to reject what one has said previously, revoke" in specific reference to this passage with the root if מאס. In other places within Job this verb is used to reject, as in Job 19:18; or in connotation of rejecting someone's right as in Job 31:13. (540)
[48] KB notes that the subject of this verb is most often God with the exception of thirteen uses, once being this verse. I understand this verb to be the end of Job's formal mourning period, similar to Genesis 38:12 when the verb is used in the נפעל. (688).
[49] עפר ואפר appear together only three times in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 18:27, Job 30:19 and Job 42:6. In Genesis, Abraham is acknowledging his own place before God as he pleads for Sodom and Gemorrah. Job 30:19 is Job's final argument against God as he describes his sense of being reduced to nothing.

Structure

I. Prologue (Chs 1-2)
   a. Ch. 1:1-5 Setting the scene
   b. Ch. 1:6-12 YHWH and the Adversary make a deal
   c. Ch. 1:13-19 Lots of bad things happen to Job
   d. Ch. 1:20-22 Job mourns
   e. Ch. 2:1-8 YHWH and the Adversary talk again and Job suffers
   f. Ch. 2:9 Job's wife speaks
   g. Ch. 2:10 Job refuses to curse YHWH
   h. Ch. 2:11-13 The friends arrive and sit with Job in mourning

II. Cycle 1
   a. Ch. 3 Job
      i. V.3 "Perish the day on which I was born, the night that said, 'A man is conceived!'" (Good, 55)
      ii. V. 4-7 Curse of darkness
      iii. V. 8-10 Charge to the one who can rouse Leviathan
      iv. V. 11-19 Expresses desire never to have been born
      v. V. 20-26 Cries out for death and an end to turmoil
   b. Ch. 4-5 Eliphaz and the first mention of justice
   c. Ch. 6-7 Job
   d. Ch. 8 Bildad and the parable of the two plants
   e. Ch. 9-10 Job
   f. Ch. 11 Zophar

III. Cycle 2
   a. Ch. 12-14 Job
   b. Ch. 15 Eliphaz
   c. Ch. 16-17 Job
   d. Ch. 18 Bildad
   e. Ch. 19 Job
   f. Ch. 20 Zophar

IV. Cycle 3

a. Ch. 21 Job
b. Ch. 22 Eliphaz
c. Ch. 23-24 Job
d. Ch. 25 Bildad
e. Ch. 26-31 Job

V. The mysterious Elihu
   a. Ch. 32-37

VI. The first whirlwind speech
   a. Ch 38-40:2 YHWH
      i. 38:2-18 knowledge of Creation of the natural world
      ii. 38:19-24 descriptions of light
      iii. 38:25-30 descriptions of water
      iv. 38:31-35 constellations and other atronomy
      v. 38:36 ibis and rooster
      vi. 38:37-38 ores and metals
      vii. 38:39-39:17 animals
      viii. 39:18-25 horses preparing for battle
      ix. 39:26-30 birds of prey
      x. 40:1-2 YHWH calls upon Job to answer
   b. Ch. 40:3-5 Job speaks of his own insignificance

VII. The second whirlwind speech
   a. Ch. 40:6-41 YHWH
      i. Ch. 40:6-8 Job, who do you think you are?
      ii. 40:9-14 YHWH's description of the divine tasks
      iii. 40:15-24 Behemoth
      iv. 40:25-41:26 Leviathan
   b. Ch. 42:1-6 Job

VIII. Epilogue
   a. Ch 42:7-8 YHWH speaks to Eliphaz
   b. 42:9 The three friends do as YHWH told them

c. 42:10 YHWH reverses Job's fortune

d. 42:11 Job is comforted by his extended family and community

e. 42:12-16 YHWH blesses Job

Chapter 1 – Dating and Genre

Dating the book of Job is a daunting task; there is no evident date, unlike other books of the Hebrew Bible which have historical clues within them. Upon reading numerous books and articles attempting to date Job, what I present here is a summary of some of the possibilities. Similarly there are many genres operating within the book of Job. I seek to outline some of the possibilities and come to my own conclusions based upon the information I found, knowing full well that we do not know anything about the author(s).

Two Bible scholars attempt to date the parts of the book of Job. Jeremy Pfeffer finds it is possible and maybe even probable that the book of Job was redacted by an author or authors who took the poetry and constructed a prologue and epilogue in lucid prose around it. Pfeffer describes the poetic text as:

> a tortured language for the debate in which the bewildered protagonists try to make some sense of Job's torment. Alternatively, perhaps the book's author chose this cryptic and difficult language for the debate in order to obscure some of the unorthodox ideas expressed in it and to protect himself from criticism and even accusations of heresy.[50]

Virtually all scholars agree that the text of Job has been put together by an author or redactor who intentionally selected different genres to craft the story. Pfeffer makes numerous assumptions. One is that a Job story existed before the version we know in the Hebrew Bible emerged. The most detrimental assumption is that we can know authors' intent when we do not know anything about the author. This will be discussed further in this chapter.

"The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered," by Avi Hurvitz, provides a very conclusive study of the language of chapters 1, 2, and 42:7-17 of Job by comparing and contrasting the language of the prose tale with other biblical books. Hurvitz

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[50] Jeremy Pfeffer, *Providence in the Book of Job: The Search for God's mind* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 12.

states, "The author of the Prose tale could not avoid certain phrases which are unmistakably characteristic of post-exilic Hebrew, thus betraying his actual late date."[51] Thus the prose sections of Job can be attributed to the community of Israel that lived after the Babylonian exile.

The rabbinic period provides a different date for the text. The rabbis argue the dating of Job in Baba Batra 15a-16b. As is common in the Talmudic discussion, there are not extensive sources that indicate to the student the rationale for the decisions of rabbis. The dates the sages suggest range from the time of the patriarchs to the Persian period when the book of Esther was penned. In general, the rabbis are as inconclusive as to the dating as are the biblical scholars who use their methods to use inter-textual issues to date sections of biblical books.

In addition to Israelite and Jewish sources about the Job story, there are also other Near Eastern and Mesopotamian traditions that weave a similar tale. The prophet Ezekiel says in 14:14, "Even if these three men—Noah, Dan'el, and Job—should be in it [famine], they would by their righteousness save only themselves..."[52] The Dan'el mentioned here is an "ancient Dan'el we now know in a long epic poem from Ugarit dating about a millennium earlier than the Babylonian Exile."[53] This Ezekiel reference is a reference to "primeval times...the far off adventures of those whom are well-known to us from the Mesopotamian literature (*Ut Napishtim* the hero of the flood story) and the Ugaritic epos (*Dan'il* the righteous judge)."[54]

The cuneiform document known as the Babylonian Job (I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom) has been dated to 1600-1150 BCE.[55] This story is a parallel to the Job story. It is possible that the Job story in the Hebrew Bible was written at a similar time or afterwards. The

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[51] ibid
[52] JPS, 1179
[53] Pope, XXXIII
[54] Hurvitz, Avi. "The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered," *Harvard Theological Review 67*. (1974), 30.
[55] ibid

name of Job is also something that is known "among the West Semites throughout the second Millenium B.C.E. – from Egyptian Execration Texts, via the Alalakh Letters to the Amarna Tablets."[56]

These texts indicate that the Job of the *Tanakh* is not the only story of a man who endures tragic loss in the Ancient Near East. The Ugaritic epic of Keret demonstrates many similarities with our biblical text:

> [It] tells of a king whose entire family was wiped out in a series of catastrophes. He fell victim to disease and was confronted with the prospect of death, but restored to health and resumed his rule. And with the aid and favor of the god El, Keret acquired a new wife and begot a second series of children. The poem is incomplete and we do not know exactly what was its central concern, but the motifs of loss and restoration of family and health are similar to central motifs of the Job story.[57]

This tells the learned reader that the story is an ancient one. However, it does not necessarily enable the exact dating of the story we read in the *Tanakh*. This Ugaritic tale and those from the other Near Eastern traditions tell about a man who endures loss but does not explicitly reference an encounter with the divine like that we read of in Job.

Modern scholars utilize different techniques in order to present hypotheses of the date of the book of Job. Marvin H. Pope, Habel, Pfeffer, Good, and Hurvitz attempt to place Job historically. Pope believes that Job can be dated as post-exilic for "If the author were Judean or a Jew who had experienced either the shock of national disaster or the joy of restoration, it would seem inevitable that to him the story of Job would be a parable of his nation's fate and destiny."[58] The problematic character of the Adversary may be an addition by a different

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[56] Hurvitz, 30
[57] Pope, XXXIII
[58] Pope, XXXV

redactor. Pope cites Robert Gordis who dates Job around the time of Deutero-Isaiah, the second Temple period, because this was the prime time for wisdom literature.[59]

Pfeffer notes that there are translations of the book of Job which might provide an indication of the dating. The Qumran community[60] left two texts of Job, both from cave XI.[61] The Targum of Job is one of these texts.

> [It] contains substantial and continuous passages from the second half of Job; from chapter 17 through to the end of the book. In particular, sizable portions of Elihu's speeches and of God's lectures to Job are well preserved. Except for a few fragments of Leviticus, no other Aramaic translations of any book of the *Tnach* were found at Qumran.[62]

Habel and Good do not offer a definite date for the book of Job.

> I [Good] think that the Book of Job took its present form after the Babylonian Exile. I have no idea how long thereafter. The fact that the setting of the book is distant in time and place from its readers—entirely outside of Israel, in fact—makes it most useful to deal with the work as fiction. It is not usable as a historical work, nor does it help in historical reconstructions of other works.[63]

Modern scholars are resigned to an ambiguous date for the text of Job. It is probable that the text of Job is post-exilic. The usage of late Biblical Hebrew and the relationship to Aramaic indicate that this text is related to the other post-exilic texts including Ezra, Nehemiah, I and II Chronicles, and Esther. It seems that the character of Job is not an exclusively Israelite figure. This means that while some desire to describe the Israelite community as insular, this is not possible based upon the text. Near Eastern theologies and traditions did not exist in a vacuum. Israelites knew about the Babylonians and so forth, thus it is not surprising that similar texts and traditions existed.

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[59] ibid
[60] This community lived between 134 BCE-68CE.
[61] Pope, 14
[62] ibid, 14-15
[63] Good, 5

My opinion is that the evidence to accurately date the entire book of Job is not presently available. It is easier to attempt to date sections of the story, but at its best this is also guesswork. While the desire to date a text is clear, the story of Job is timeless. It is possible for the individual in any era from history to find their voice in Job's questions and to find comfort in the presence of YHWH in the whirlwind.

Genre

The use of literary conventions is relevant to the study of Bible, particularly Job, because it necessitates paying "attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, [and] compositional units..." and shifts the focus from the dating of the narrative.[64] This notion, articulated so well by Robert Alter, enables the story of Job to be studied according to the literary intention of the author(s) or redactor(s).[65] The following is a brief overview of the scholarly opinions of the literary conventions or genres operating within the text of Job.

In the broadest sense there is center and frame to the story of Job. In his book, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in* Job, David Penchansky outlines these two sections highlighting similarities and differences.[66] In the center, chapters 3-42:6, the primary genre is poetry. The origins of many of the strange words stem from words in Aramaic, Arabic, Akkadian, and Egyptian. The means of conveying the story is lengthy dialogue in which the characters state the same ideas in different ways. The principle theology is that of rebellion and skepticism. Job, the primary character, is portrayed as railing against God. YHWH is described

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[64] Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. (Basic Books, 1981), 12.
[65] Whenever I refer to author(s) henceforth I am also including the possibility for the work of a redactor to be evident in the text.
[66] Penchansky, David. *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminister/John Know Press, 1990).

as thundering and majestic, abstract, and performing little action. Instead of describing action, the plot line is advanced through monologues. The names of God are El, Eloah, Elohim and Shaddai.[67] Within each monologue the individual character's personal theology emerges as they berate Job. In turn, Job never curses YHWH but cries out for some type of response to his plight.

The frame to the story is significantly shorter. Chapters 1-2 and 42:7-17 provide the reader with a majority of the action and summarize everything that informs the bulk of the story. Prose is the primary format. God is referred to as Elohim or YHWH. Formal speech is supplemented to narrative action. Job is described as pious, patient, and orthodox. God is represented by the language of insecurity and petulance. A unique feature of the prose tale is that it summarizes all of the poetic sections and endures in the memory of those who read it.

Donald E. Gowan thinks the author of Job had wisdom literature in mind when constructing the text and finds value in reading the text with this genre in mind.[68] The author, as Gowan describes him, used the familiar pattern of wisdom literature when constructing the story as far as it was useful and then changed the story "from a celebration of wisdom into a claim that it is useless."[69] The big problem with Gowan's reading is that the personal appearance of YHWH should not be part of wisdom script. Once YHWH appears classifying the entire text into one genre fails.

Rachel Adler has written about the importance of the genre of lament. "In laments, human beings bewail all that hurts about being human: ... feeling abandoned by an indifferent or

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[67] Pope, xxiv.
[68] Gowan, Donald E. "Reading Job as a 'Wisdom Script,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 55, (1992): 89.
[69] Ibid, 90.

actively punitive God," which is Job's cry in chapter 3.[70] Dr. Adler's observation of the appearance of the genre of lament within Job is helpful because laments are not frozen in time. Job therefore, can model a lament that an individual in the twenty-first century might write.

Similarly, Habel finds the complete lament genre present in Job with a unique twist.[71] "The typical Lament in the Psalms," writes Habel, "assumes a triangular relationship involving the sufferer, the enemy, and God."[72] The problem with Job is that God is the enemy. Job rails against God. Today communities can construct laments for the state of the world, to express frustration at the unknown, and to name our suffering and move forward. Studying Job and considering the use of lament for Job might enable the individual or community that experiences something difficult to learn how to lament their own situation. This is true to tradition and has great potential in a pastoral counseling situation.

William Whedbee understands the book of Job to be a comedy replete with irony and the absurd. A comedy is comprised of two principle elements: a perception of incongruity and a basic plot that ends in the hero's happiness and a serene society once more.[73] Whedbee and others attempt to find Greek elements of tragedy and comedy into this story.

Pope, who wrote his commentary on Job in 1965, immediately describes the "piecemeal composition" of the book's literary form.[74] Highlighting the difference between the prologue/epilogue and the dialogue, Pope describes many of the distinctions that have already been addressed in this paper. He adds that what he terms the prologue/epilogue of the book forms an ancient folk tale which "the author of the Dialogue used as the framework and point of

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[70] Adler, Rachel. "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament," *The Chronicle* 68, (2006): 10.
[71] Habel, 42.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid, 44.
[74] Pope, xxiii.

departure for his poetic treatment of the problem of suffering."[75] When finally pressed to define a genre for the text, Pope simply states,

> ...there is no single classification appropriate to the literary form of the Book of Job. It shares something of the characteristics of all the literary forms that have been ascribed to it, but it is impossible to classify it exclusively as didactic, dramatic, epic, or anything else... Definition of literary form generally presumes literary unity and this point is still disputed with regard to the Book of Job.[76]

In my opinion Pope and those who cite him and attempt to avoid the issue of genre are avoiding the analysis in which the text of Job begs the reader to engage. Yes, these various genres exist within the text but why? What was the author(s) trying to tell the reader of the experience of suffering? Is it that sometimes there can be no words, no genre that can encapsulate the experience of suffering? Rather, the attempt to find a genre for different sections of the story enables the author(s) to experiment in conveying the message.

It is the declaration of a new genre that truly describes the complexity of the multiple pieces of the puzzle of Job. Carol Newsom suggests that the book of Job is a polyphonic text. She argues:

> ...if a new reading is to be culturally valuable it should engage the book by means of emerging reading conventions ... The reading I propose takes its place alongside those of Good and Clines as part of the project of postmodernism, but unlike theirs, it follows a path other than deconstructive criticism.[77]

Using the model presented by Mikhail Bakhtin, a twentieth century Russian philosopher and literary critic, Newsom identifies three elements that constitute a polyphonic text: the text embodies a dialogic sense of truth;[78] the author's position is not privileged;[79] and the polyphonic

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[75] Ibid, xxiv.
[76] Ibid, xxxi.
[77] Newsom, Carol. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.
[78] Ibid, 2.

text ends without finalizing closure.[80] This all-encompassing genre allows the other identifiable forms present within the text to exist and remain in conversation with one another.

Chapters 38-42:6 can only be described as poetry. This is only appropriate as YHWH's response. Poetry is often subject to interpretation. Prose is not always read as an artistic form in the same manner. The responsibility falls to the reader who must search within the language to find what precisely Job finds comfort in that enables him to move forward. At face value YHWH's words do not seem to provide any source of comfort, but Job's reaction teaches us there is something more to YHWH's words.

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[79] Ibid, 3.
[80] Ibid, 21.

Chapter 2 – Questions and Answers

The language of the book of Job is part of the majesty of the tale. The author(s) carefully created a story with a complicated dialogue that raises theological questions plaguing the central character, Job. This chapter seeks to analyze the questions asked and the answers that are presented. In particular the importance of Job's response to the final YHWH speech is emphasized as it presents the essential message of the book: how the individual sufferer might respond.

The complexity of the speeches changes with each cycle. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar seek to quiet the screaming voice of the sufferer. The first two speech cycles are identical; Job speaks before and after each friend. In the third cycle Zophar is silent. These monologues refer to one another in vocabulary and in general theme. The focus of this chapter is to highlight the questions that Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar ask in order to further analyze the content of YHWH's response in chapters 38-41. The meaning of the words forming the questions is difficult as there are many hapax legomena.

Job begins speaking at the beginning of chapter 3. He curses the day of his birth, questions all that he has known to be true, but never goes so far as to curse the deity. Job only wants to know why all of these bad things have happened. Why his children were killed, his fortune destroyed, and his body afflicted with sores? If he was doing everything right in his religious life, how did YHWH permit these things to happen?

Eliphaz is the first to respond to Job. He cries out to his friend that he has done no wrong. God's retributive justice surely is not the cause of Job's troubles in 4:7: "Think, who that was innocent has perished where have moral people been destroyed?"[81] Job's children must

[81] Translation from Good, 57.

have deserved what they had coming to them, according to Eliphaz's logic. The setup between YHWH and the Adversary would cause a theology crisis for Eliphaz.

Prior to a response from the other two friends, Job anticipates the failure in speaking to them. In Chapter 7 he begins to address the deity directly. He cries out: "What have I done to you, you watcher of men?"[82] Job waits for a response.

It is Bildad we hear from next. Bildad presents doctrine in the form of a rhetorical question.[83] "Does El bend justice, Shaddai bend the right? If your sons have sinned against him, he has sent them off in custody of their guilt."[84] Bildad presents no words of comfort. He states in few words that Job's children died because they deserved to. Bildad uses natural images, a plant and a spider web, to prove his point about the fragility of life.

Job speaks again in chapter 9 and asks: "...how can a man be innocent with El?"[85] Job begins to answer his own question and that presented in Eliphaz's statement in 4:17-21.

> ... the answer [implies] "he cannot be innocent." The question points to someone accused and found guilty before the law. Eliphaz talked morality, and Job talks law. But they use the same words, and because words can always mean more than one thing, they talk both to and past each other.[86]

Job here is calling out for an acknowledgement of the power differential between him and the deity who has the force behind the law. Due to all that has happened to him, Job now sees power as brutality.

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[82] Ibid. 67.
[83] Good. 217.
[84] Good. 69.
[85] Translation of verse 2 is from Good. 71.
[86] Good. 222.

Zophar the Na'amite is sure that if YHWH answered Job directly, Job's arrogance would dissipate. Any divine word is a piece of wisdom for Zophar and the revelation of such speech is almost beyond Job's capacity.[87]

In the second cycle of speeches Job begins his interrogation of the deity. He asks, "What scope has my fault and sin? Let me know my guilt and sin. Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? "[88] It seems that Job might be able to tolerate or learn to live with all that has happened to him if he understood what he did wrong. Reward and punishment theology is only manageable for him when the outcome is anticipated.

The friends each continue to chastise Job and the actions of his now deceased family and seem to force their theologies upon him. The questions are not as readily offered, however. The reader can sense that the dialogue is reaching its fiery climax with screaming voices not listening to what the other is even saying.

Job has reached his wit's end when he speaks in chapters 26-31. In Chapter 26 he is emphatic about his own weaknesses. Chapter 27 is where Job swears an oath.

> Again Job took up his discourse: As El lives, who has turned away my case, Shaddai, who has embittered my soul, as long as I have breath, Eloah's wind in my nostrils, if my lips speak viciousness, my tongue, if it mutter deceit—I'm damned if I'll say you are right; until I perish, I'll not turn away my integrity. To my rightness I hold fast, will not weaken it; my heart finds nothing from my days to taunt. Let my enemy be considered wicked, the one who rises against me, vicious. For what hope has the godless when he is snipped off, when Eloah carries his life away?[89]

"[It] presents a duality between Job's truthfulness and the deity's injustice that the rest of the chapter takes even further."[90] In this chapter Job is in the process of redeveloping his

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[87] Good, 230.
[88] 13:23-24 as in Good, 85.
[89] Translation of 27:1-8 by Good, 120-121.
[90] Good, 387.

relationship with YHWH, specifically in 27:5-6. The Job we met in chapter 3 would not be able to say such things. The sufferer is transformed through the process of suffering.

Chapter 28 is a unique poem on wisdom that might explain why the book is considered to be within the genre of wisdom literature. This poem is a verse that defines wisdom by what she is and is not. Good cites other scholars who claim that this chapter does not belong here.[91] As Job's words come to an end before the climax of the whirlwind speeches, he speaks of the past in chapter 29, sketches his present in chapter 30, and envisions the fantasy trial in chapter 31.

Once Job completes his final appeal for the divine presence Elihu enters the scene. He presents Job with a reminder of how inappropriate YHWH's appearance might be and tries to close the text himself.[92] Elihu's youth is emphasized in the few prose verses introducing his otherwise silent presence.[93] This thesis is not focused upon Elihu and his role in the text. However he does speak about suffering differently from any of the characters in the story. Because it is Elihu that the redactors placed before YHWH's words, his words deserve more attention than I am able to give them at this juncture. At the same time I wish to note that it is significant that it is important to acknowledge how youth responds to suffering and to Job. This text is too rich to be speedily dismissed because it is difficult. At another time I hope to look more closely at this element of the Jobian narrative.

Up to this point in the text the characters do a surprisingly good job of talking past one another. Job wants to know "why." Why did he lose his children? Why did he lose his riches? Why has his body been covered with sores? Job does not know what we, the reader know. He has no idea of the setup of the prologue, that Elohim has responded to a challenge from the Adversary. However, this prologue is likely a late edition to the text. The bad things that Job

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[91] Good, 290.
[92] Habel, 443.
[93] See Job 32:4.

endured were not a result of the prologue; the prologue is an author's attempt to explain what happened to Job.

Job has called for a divine appearance, a chance to ask the questions he has been trying answer in his less-than-satisfactory dialogue with his friends. It is never clear that the response to the questions is the most significant part of this desired experience for Job. Job needs the divine to defend the faith that he is clinging to so desperately. Job never curses the deity for what has happened to him, but he needs to be reassured. He needs acknowledgement in some fashion that he has not been abandoned by the God he worships. Job's desire is for knowledge of why the bad things happened to him, this might seem like a simple answer to a difficult question

Job gets the recognition he seeks when YHWH answers him from the whirlwind. YHWH speaks and seems disturbed by the need to defend the divine self to a mortal who has no capacity for the knowledge of the created order of the universe. From the power of the seemingly uncontrollable sea that needed to be blocked in, to the horse engaged in battle, YHWH has the knowledge that no human being possesses.

If Job gets what he wants he has a strange way of clueing in the reader. Job says: "Behold! I am insignificant. How can I answer You? I lay my hand upon my mouth. Once I spoke but I will not answer. Twice, and I will go no further."[94] Evidently Job is completely humbled by the first whirlwind speech and does not need to proceed with his line of questioning. As Habel says; "Job's answers are therefore equivalent to a legal retraction which sets aside his demand for formal vindication as the injured party."[95]

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[94] My translation of Job 40:4-5.
[95] Habel, 529.

The problem is, while the intention of Job's words is clear, no one knows precisely what they mean. Good translates verses 4-5: "Oh, I am small, what could I reply to you? I put my hand to my mouth. I spoke once, and I will not answer, twice, and I will add nothing."[96] "Behold, I am small; how can I refute you? I clap my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, I cannot answer; Twice, and I will do so no more."[97] Pope says: "Lo, I am small, how can I answer you? My hand I lay on my mouth; I have spoken once, I will not reply, Twice, but I will say no more."[98] These three scholars translate קלתי as 'small' while I choose 'insignificant,' as I find it more accurately depicts Job's emotional state. The translations differ in word choice but not connotation.

YHWH's second whirlwind speech picks up almost where the first speech left off, with dismissal of any challenge of YHWH's power, majesty and splendor. Behemoth and Leviathan are unidentifiable creatures, although many scholars have made attempts. More importantly though, why are they in the book of Job? Habel posits that Behemoth is a symbol for the historical enemies of Israel which are under YHWH's control.[99] It is also possible that these creatures are indicators of figures in Egyptian and Babylonain mythology.[100] The hypothesis I find most likely is:

> Behemoth and Leviathan are mortal creatures like Job. The focus of the text, however, lies on their character, not as ordinary zoological entities or symbols of evil, but as didactic images employed by Yahweh to teach Job about God's ways ... Behemoth and Leviathan are mirrors through which Job may view his own existence of protest and suffering.[101]

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[96] Good, 349.
[97] Habel 520.
[98] Pope, 316.
[99] Habel, 557.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid, 558.

Behemoth and Leviathan are creatures like Job, created by YHWH who has capacity to do both tremendous harm and good. YHWH is the Creator of both of these creatures and the ultimate Creator of Job. YHWH puts boundaries and limits on what is possible for the creations because this is precisely what creation is – setting limits. Just as there is potential for good in Job, so to is there the possibility for bad.

YHWH's words end somewhat abruptly. There is no final challenge to Job. Chapter 41 ends with the exhortation about Leviathan and then Job finds his voice again. Job says:

> I know all that You can do and no evil thought can be cut off from You. Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge, tell me! I did not understand the wonders before me, I did not know. Listen! I will speak; I will ask of You and You will tell me. I have heard You with my ears and now my eyes have seen You; thus I reject my own words and conclude my mourning [for I am but] ashes and dust.[102]

Job is transformed from the whirlwind experience. Job is comforted by the chastising words of YHWH which put him back into a place of awe at the order of the universe. Job must confront his own words, those moments when he challenged the bad things that happened to him, and in effect, reestablish his relationship with YHWH.

Job begins his response with an acknowledgement of the omnipotence of YHWH; "I know all that You can do and no evil thought can be cut off from You."[103] Job was listening to every word YHWH said and is able to acknowledge this in one summary statement. Job is answering in a different way then he did in 40:4-5.

Job 42:4 is a particularly difficult sentence to understand. If only there were quotation marks in the Hebrew Bible! "Listen! I will speak; I will ask of You and You will tell me."[104]

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[102] My translation Job 42:1-6.
[103] 42:2
[104] Translation my own.

My translation implies that Job is the speaker of the entire sentence. It is also possible the translation could be: "Hear, and I will speak, I will ask you questions, and you instruct me;"[105] or "Listen, and I will speak; I will question you, and you tell me:"[106] or "[You said,] and 'Hear now and I will speak, I will ask and you will inform me.'"[107] I agree with Good who claims: "When you think of it, "Hear, and I will speak" is a strange thing to put into Yahweh's mouth. Such an opening gambit is used most often by an inferior speaking to a superior..."[108] This is why I think it is Job who speaks the entire sentence. He is stating to the Divine that he can demonstrate his comprehension of all that has happened in the previous 40 chapters. No longer does Job seem to be crying out in a rage but he is thinking more coherently, thoughtfully and is willing to ask the questions and receive an answer in due time.

42:5 introduces an entirely new idea, sight. Job acknowledges: "now my eyes have seen You."[109] Although we know that, "YHWH answered Job from a whirlwind," it is never entirely clear that this whirlwind is visible to Job. This concept of sight forces the reader to acknowledge that YHWH is revealed through a whirlwind to mask the Divine presence. The Hebrew Bible explicitly states in Exodus 33:20 that "no human being can see me and live." There are a few exceptions to this: Moses seeing YHWH's back and Ezekiel's vision of the radiance of YHWH.

> When people see the god, they are very specially placed, or are placed at very special times... Job's claim that his eye sees Yahweh is startling, to say the least. Given the strictures against seeing the divine, many scholars argue that his seeing must be metaphorical.[110]

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[105] Good, 171.
[106] Pope, 347.
[107] Habel, 575.
[108] Good, 372.
[109] My translation.
[110] Good, 374.

I do not believe that Job is speaking literally about seeing YHWH. While I cannot know precisely what Job experienced, I think this language is a metaphor; for the first time Job felt heard. His body experienced the return of comfort. "At the least Job is saying that he has come to a new experience of the divine presence, which stems from both hearing and seeing the god."[111]

Job is changed by the experience with YHWH and he manifests this in verse 6; "Thus I reject my own words and conclude my mourning [for I am but] ashes and dust."[112] Job is a person transformed. Whatever happened from the time he sat down in the ashes and dust (2:8) where Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar found him (2:12), Job can get up and move on with his life. The root נחם I have translated as "conclude," though I am struck by the inadequacy of the English language. Concluding in the sense of being comforted and moving forward is truly the complete idea of this verb.

It is a unique feature of my translation that part of Job's response is the acknowledgement, "[for I am but] ashes and dust."[113] Job is acknowledging the ashes and dust of Creation and simultaneously the ashes and dust of his own humanity. This is a statement of transformation. Habel writes:

> "Dust and ashes" therefore seem to represent the status and role of Job as isolated sufferer and humiliated litigant. Job is now ready to abandon this role... Job has decided to "change his mind" about proceeding with litigation or lament, and is ready to return to normal life again."[114]

Job is ready to live again. He has spent at least seven days lamenting his losses. This statement is his way of ritualizing his return to the world. While Job is ready to move forward he is not

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[111] Ibid. 375.
[112] My translation.
[113] 42:6 My translation.
[114] Habel, 583.

forgetting the dialogue and the losses incurred. Instead he is creating a new life, a new "normal" that will enable him to live with his past. Job is changed by the entire experience of dialogues with YHWH. No longer is his innocence an issue. He is focused anew upon the task of living.

Job's response in chapter 42, particularly verse 6, is the most significant line of the text because it teaches sufferers after Job how they might respond. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar model ineffective responses to an individual. Elihu starts to get it right. YHWH's appearance, which will be discussed in chapter 5, provides Job comfort, and finally Job is ready to get up from his mourning. He is changed by the experience of suffering because he needed to reestablish his relationship with YHWH. Job asked, "why me?" He never received a direct answer. Perhaps he did not need to. While he could not voice his question in words on the deepest level he received his answer.

Chapter 3 - Why *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* isn't enough

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold S. Kushner is a popular book among American religious communities. Kushner managed to speak to a spiritual need that was otherwise unfulfilled at the time of its first publication in 1981, and the book continues to be popular. In the preface to the twentieth anniversary edition, Kushner is aware of the theological failings of his work for some.

> One of my favorite letters of the thousands I have received is from a convent of Roman Catholic nuns in Massachusetts who wrote to tell me that they are not sure they agree with my theology, but they give out an average of five copies of my book a week to help afflicted people feel better. The concluded the letter: 'Once they feel better, we can straighten out their theology.'[115]

This would be fine if the intent of the book was to bring comfort to people. Kushner uses his training as a rabbi to underscore the power of the God-idea in which he finds meaning. He aims to assist people in finding comfort when inexplicable things happen to them. Instead of turning away from religion Kushner is encouraging people to find comfort in religion and struggle with how their new experiences will shape their faith going forward, just as he needed to do when his child received a prognosis of premature death.

The reader immediately finds him or herself captivated by the nature of the questions Kushner raises.

> I had been a good person. I had tried to do what was right in the sight of God. More than that, I was living a more religiously committed life than most people I knew, people who had large, healthy families. I believed that I was following God's ways and doing His work. How could this be happening to my family? If God existed, if he was minimally fair, let alone loving and forgiving, how could He do this to me?[116]

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[115] Kushner, Harold S. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), xi.
[116] Ibid, 5.

The reward and punishment theology that is presented here is never entirely broken down, leaving the reader to question if this is the only type of theology available to Kushner. Fairness is not the *modus operandi* of the world. Nowhere does God claim that terrible things will not happen if you follow the laws laid out in the Torah, but definitely bad things will happen if you break the rules. Jacob tricks his brother to get the birthright and the blessing from Isaac. The sins of the fathers cause the fourth generation to suffer. The structures of the Temple in Jerusalem are destroyed because of causeless hatred. Moses is not permitted to enter into the Land of Israel for striking a rock. Similarly, to even use the word "fair" about the illness that took Kushner's own son would be immensely inappropriate. "Fairness" is not the issue here. In my opinion, comprehension of the unknowable, the ineffable, is what Kushner truly seeks.

So why bad things happen to good people becomes the essential question addressed in the book sharing the same title. However, this deserves to be much more nuanced. Any answer to a 'why' question is always going to be theoretical. The heart of the matter is what might be the appropriate response. How is that response different to an individual versus a community? How can the person in the throes of suffering be permitted the space to cry out, ask the questions no one can answer, and still feel heard?

When the human being was created, God said, "let us make the human being in our image, in our likeness."[117] The Hebrew here is very specific that it is *Elohim* who is creating the human being, which is understood in my translation to be a first person plural. We know that Judaism affirms faith in one God, so the plural notion of the one God is tricky. The human being is created in "our" image but it is still the one God; therefore I understand this important

[117] Translation my own of Genesis 1:26.

statement to mean that the human being is created in all the possibilities that are Divine. Often this is represented in the Hebrew Bible using different God names.

Whomever or whatever God is to the human being in the twenty-first century, there can be no attempt to wrap the human being's mind around the notion of a God that causes or has the capacity to alleviate suffering. We simply know too much about too many terrible things that people endure. When my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer I was angry and worried about why this was happening. In my heart I was furious with God, but in my head I was cognizant that God has nothing to do with the tumor in my mom's breast. It took time to move beyond the initial shock. I came to find that God was present for me and most importantly for my mom in personal interactions. When my mom was suffering most from her treatments, God was present in the smallest kindnesses: a phone call, a note, a smile, or a shared laugh.

Emanuel Levinas, the twentieth century French philosopher, speaks of suffering in his text *Entre Nous*. The experience of encounter with the other is pivotal to Levinas' ethics and philosophy. It is upon seeing the face of the other that the individual is compelled to action. Levinas writes:

> ...there is a radical difference between *the suffering in the other*, where it is unforgivable to *me*, solicits me and calls me, and suffering *in me*, my own experience of suffering whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only one of which suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering (inexorable though it may be) of someone else.[118]

Meaning is made of suffering in the inter-human experience. The meaning is between the self and the sufferer when the self attempts to alleviate the other's suffering and the sufferer experiences the self's response and their suffering is alleviated. Instead of asking the questions

[118] Levinas, Emanuel. "Useless Suffering." *Entre Nous*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 94.

about God's role in suffering Levinas forces the human being to acknowledge his or her individual capacity to alleviate suffering for the other.

Kushner attempts to create a dichotomy between fairness and justice. "Our souls yearn for justice, because we so desperately want to believe that God will be fair to us..."[119] God who is fair does not often act justly, and the reverse is also true. Justice is measured by rules. Suffering eclipses rules. To search for a relationship between justice and suffering is like hunting for a four-leaf clover on a grassy field.

Then Kushner begins his analysis of Job in Chapter Two. The problem of the text of Job according to Kushner is the question, "why God lets good people suffer."[120] This question might be the take-away message from Job that Kushner reads but it is never explicitly asked by any of the books characters. There are many questions: Why does God appear? Why is Job singled out? Why does Elohim place a wager on the life of a human being? The principle question Kushner outlines here begins with an assumption about the way God acts. As I have indicated in other sections of this thesis, the wager scene of Job was likely added to the dialogue section at a later time. Therefore the notion that Elohim and the Adversary wager over Job's life must be held at bay for a moment. Job does experience some kind of loss that sends him into seven days of mourning. The reader comes to understand that Job is not certain why terrible things befell him and that the "answers" provided by Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar are unsatisfactory to him.

Chapters 29 and 30 are identified by Kushner as the climax. "Job swears his innocence. He claims that he never neglected the poor, never took anything that did not belong to him, never boasted of his wealth or rejoiced in his enemy's misfortune. He challenges God to appear with

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[119] Kushner, 39.
[120] Ibid, 44.

evidence..."[121] Kushner does not provide his own close reading of this chapter and I see Job's demand for proof and a trial. Is Job speaking directly to the deity, asking for an explanation, or is he speaking metaphorically? This speech is packed with complicated language and deserves closer attention if it is thought to be the climax, particularly because Kushner seems to draw so much insight from it. The basic problem that I have with identifying chapter 31 as the climax is that it negates YHWH's appearance from the whirlwind, rendering it an afterthought.

Abraham Cohen criticizes Kushner and his read of the YHWH speeches, specifically the emphasis placed on Job 40:9-14. This text comes from the second YHWH speech and might be a "later interpolation into the text which adds little to its overall message."[122] YHWH presented Job with a challenge to harness evil as YHWH harnessed the primordial creatures Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15-32). There are three dense chapters attributed to the speech of YHWH and there is nothing particular in this section as opposed to the other elements of the first YHWH speech that stands out to me as unique. If these verses (40:9-14) are particularly important to Kushner's argument then it would seem that he is grappling with the notion that everything that is in the world was developed at the time of Creation. It is not possible for Job to comprehend the nature of the ordered universe because he is not anything like YHWH.

Kushner's summary of Job is missing the Elihu speeches entirely. While there is significant scholarship that might agree that this portion of the book was added at a later date, the speeches remain part of the Hebrew Bible and deserve some mention. The absence of these speeches interferes with the notions of evil and the climax of Job 29-30.

When the subject of chapters 38-42:6 is presented, it is summarized too succinctly, omitting the nuances in the language. "...God answers Job out of the whirlwind. Job's case is

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[121] Ibid, 49.
[122] Cohen, Abraham. "Theology and Theodicy: On Reading Harold Kushner," in *Modern Judaism 16* (1996): 232.

so compelling, his challenge so forceful, that God Himself comes down to earth to answer him."[123] The reasons for YHWH's appearance are never made clear to Job or the reader. There is a voice coming from a whirlwind but I do not feel comfortable asserting that God is not present in the other dialogues, perhaps as a silent observer. If God can hear Job's speech then it is all the more significant that YHWH appears at all in the form of the tempest. In the next chapter I will present a Buberian reading of Job which greatly informs my own understanding of the importance of YHWH's appearance.

The theological claims Kushner makes about the nature of God are truly the most difficult for me. First, Kushner presumes a radically imminent God; a God that is looming over every human action also has a different relationship to evil. If God is imminent then why do people suffer at all? This view of God requires an unchanging faith, an acceptance of the reason things happen in the world. An imminent God is responsible for evil. Second, the focus for Kushner is on the individual experience. The story of Job is that of one man and his encounter with suffering. On the other hand, there are some who think that Job is the story of Israel in exile and therefore is a communal experience of suffering.

In chapter three, "Sometimes There Is No Reason," Kushner is confronted with questions posed by audience members at his lecture he finds himself unable to answer. I believe that no clergy member can ever remove the responsibility of pastoral care provider and to answer these questions solely as a theologian is limiting the potential of the encounter. When asked, "'If the bad things that happen to us are results of bad luck, and not the will of God, ... what makes bad luck happen?'"[124] Kushner describes being stumped by this question, perhaps because it is the equivalent of being stopped in the parking lot on your way home from a long day with a serious

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Kushner, 63.

matter. This woman, someone he probably would not see again, is in fact not asking him a question of theology. This question on the surface appears theological, however with more careful probing my training and experience has taught me that there is a much deeper, personal need being addressed here. She is asking, "Rabbi, why did this happen to me? What did I do wrong?"

The answer to the unnamed woman provided by Kushner is also most unsatisfactory. Randomness, he says, is difficult for the human being to digest when most other things seem so ordered and predictable. His view of an imminent God would not hold up here because within the concept of imminence is the notion that things happen for a reason. Kushner never says that randomness is what sometimes can make like exciting because he is living in a carefully ordered universe. There is no room for God in the random for Kushner. Everything must have some type of explanation.

So if a person follows all of the rules, both societal and religious, they should be exempt from the random. This is the case with Job and with many individuals who are considered orthodox in praxis. Then why cancer, genetic disease and pain? It is perhaps pain that forces the human being to acknowledge his or her fallibility.

Kushner does provide an attempt to answer his own question, why do bad things happen to good people? He writes, "One reason is that our being human leaves us free to hurt each other, and God can't stop us without taking away the freedom that makes us human."[125] In an attempt to stave off the issue of God's role in the holocaust, Kushner can say: "[The holocaust] was caused by human beings choosing to be cruel to their fellow men."[126] Thus Adolf Hitler was a mastermind of evil who had the capacity to choose between good and bad and selected the

[125] Ibid, 109.
[126] Ibid, 110.

latter. Kushner believes that God was with the survivors of the terrors of World War Two and not with the perpetrators. This might enable him to sleep at night. Although YHWH appears to Job in the manifestation of the whirlwind, isn't it possible that YHWH's presence was always available to Job, but he just could not see it?

There is an element of Kushner's analysis of Job with which I agree: the three friends who come to sit with him in 2:11-13. Job's friends show up for him. They sit with him in silence and wait for him to speak. Initially, the three friends just listen to Job (chapter 3).[127] It is only when they try to answer Job's questions that they fail him entirely.

Kushner's text goes on to discuss issues of guilt and prayer which again are interlaced with his theology of a God that is only imminent and not transcendent. Prayer when done correctly has the possibility to "redeem people from isolation. It assures them that they need not feel alone and abandoned."[128] People use the traditional prayers not in order to find God but to find a congregation. This notion is empty for the person who is in the experience of suffering and is seeking comfort from anywhere it can be found, who is living as Job did sitting on a heap and crying out for answers. In that moment no answer can be sufficient. Rather it is presence, either of another human being or YHWH, that can relieve. The individualized experience of suffering presented in Job and also throughout *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* cannot be treated with a generalized prescription for every individual. Suffering is entirely unique. It seems uncontrollable from the inside.

Kushner's view of nature is maintained throughout the book: "[He] maintains that Nature represents a realm whose existence is fully independent of God, and upon which God has no

[127] Kushner says this also, 119-120.
[128] Ibid, 163.

direct effect."[129] Kushner's God-view is very clear: "[God] is a supreme, spiritual, personal, and mysterious Being of reality at large, to whom man, living in the matrix of an independent natural domain, must turn to find hope, direction, and self-realization."[130] There is no explanation of how this benefits the human being. This is an example of the liberal use of literary license in this book.

> Kushner opens his work stating that he believes in God and in the goodness in the world. Obviously, now, we would have him correct this to say that he believes in God and in neutrality of the world. At the end of his book Kushner continues to insist on goodness of the world, striving to dispel the opposite view. "If the death of an elderly woman in Auschwitz or a child in a hospital ward leaves us doubting God and less able to affirm *the world's goodness*, then that woman and that child become 'the devil's martyrs..." Pages later, Kushner asks that we remain strong and hopeful in the face of difficulties: "Are you capable of forgiving and accepting in love a world which has disappointed you but not being perfect, a *world in which there is so much unfairness and cruelty, disease and crime, earthquake and accident?*" What became of the world's goodness, which Kushner defended in the very face of Auschwitz itself? Clearly, writing in two different contexts, though only ten pages apart, Kushner freely pens two strikingly contradictory views of the nature of the world that cannot coexist in the same system of thought.[131]

Cohen rightly highlights the inconsistency in Kushner's writing about God. While Kushner makes no lofty claims to write theology on an academic level, he still should remain consistent. The fact that he does not indicates to the reader that he is unsure of some of his own arguments.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People is an attempt to bring comfort to people who are facing challenges in their life. What to do when bad things happen is a real question that deserves theological, pastoral, and practical answers. Unfortunately, Kushner's book avoids the

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[129] Cohen, 240.
[130] Ibid, 241.
[131] Ibid, 241-242.

real issues and uses the creation story and Job to weave a complicated, often contradictory response that still does not address the fundamental issues.

Bad things do happen to good people. But the words, "bad" and "good" can be subjective. Kushner begins to get at the crux of the matter in his title and what he says about the importance of presence. Showing up is also part of human inclination. The world saw this with the outpouring of support after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the United States and the Tsunami which took so many lives in the Pacific Rim.

Chapter 4 - A Buberian reading of Job

When a man finds that it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have no acknowledge the fact that even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.[132]

The reader of the book of Job is drawn into the story by the profoundly perverted sense of justice that is brought down upon the innocent Job and his family. Job is the story of every human being because in his or her own way, every human being experiences suffering. In order to find meaning in the chaos scholars have interpreted the complicated text to uncover the life lessons contained in the book. One such scholar is Martin Buber. Theologian, teacher, Bible scholar, and political activist, Buber's reading of the book of Job provides insight into the Jobian narrative that makes the text relevant in the modern day. This chapter is an analysis of Buber's reading of the book of Job and how his reading influences my own understanding of the text.

Martin Buber was born in 1878 in Vienna. His scholarship was deeply influenced by his grandfather Solomon Buber, the producer of modern editions of rabbinic midrash.[133] In 1900 Buber moved to Berlin and in 1916 to Heppenheim near Frankfurt where he continued his work as an editor.[134] It was in Heppenheim that Buber met Franz Rosenzweig who encouraged him to become a lecturer at the newly established adult education center the Freies jüdisches Lehrhaus, and at the University of Frankfurt. Rosenzweig and Buber collaborated on a translation of the Hebrew Bible into German.

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[132] Frankl, Victor. *Man's Search for Meaning.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 86.
[133] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Martin Buber," Stanford University, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/.
[134] Ibid.

In 1938 Buber left Germany for Jerusalem where he taught at the Hebrew University and continued his work as a cultural Zionist promoting a two-state solution upon the partition of Palestine.

Martin Buber wrote about the book of Job in *The Prophetic Faith* and in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*. In *The Prophetic Faith* Buber compares Job to the text of Psalm 73. Like this psalm and Deutero-Isaiah, Buber dates the composition of Job to the time of the Babylonian exile. Thus the 'I' of the book of Job, "stands for the 'I' of Israel" and it represents the suffering of a people.[135] This means that when YHWH answers Job, it is YHWH speaking to the people weeping by the rivers of Babylon in mourning. The singular voice of Job is the voice of the exiled Israel demanding answers from the divine. Buber does not utilize the trial metaphor often found in Job. The dialogue contained in the text works with his philosophy of encounter between two beings.

Martin Buber believed that "authentic human existence...is found in 'meeting,' in the reality that arises between people, not in a reality suggested by theories or sensations."[136] Meaning emerges from the encounter between two persons. If one person does not fully present his or her individuality in that moment, then one being submerges the other. "Rather than surrender oneself in dialogue, Buber believes that only maintaining one's particularity while sharing it with another truly calls relationship into being."[137] Job has a connection to the Divine. The connection here does not begin with the experience of suffering. The text clearly states that,

> His [Job's] sons used to have feasts, each one being host on his day, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When the cycle of feast days was complete, Job would sanctify them, getting up early in the morning and offering

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[135] Glatzer, Nahum N. "Baeck-Buber-Rosenzweig reading the book of Job," (paper presented at the Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, New York, 1966), 10.
[136] Borowitz, Eugene. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, Inc., 1983) 145.
[137] Ibid, 146.

> sacrifices for each one. For Job said, 'Perhaps my children have cursed Elohim sinfully in their hearts.' Job did this for every cycle of feast days.[138]

Therefore it is reasonable to consider Job was in some form of relationship with Elohim. Thus, what follows in the plot seems plausible.

Contained within the text of Job are four views of God's relationship to the suffering of the human being. The prologue, Job's friends, the God-view presented by Job, and the words of YHWH from the speeches in 38-41 each show a possible response to human suffering.[139] The question, 'why do we suffer what we suffer' has a religious character to it. But this is not the question that is addressed within the text of Job. Rather, Job cries out for the knowledge to re-make his world, his nomos now destroyed. Indirectly Job asks his reader to confront the philosophical implications contained in suffering with him. Both the reader and Job learn about God's actions together while also uncovering the way that God acts.

The prologue of the book of Job presents the popular view of God that needs to change in order to confront the present situation of the people of Israel in exile. This notion is played upon most directly with the root ברכ which simultaneously mean bless and curse.[140] This radical shift in language forces the reader to confront his/her theology and prepare for it to be uprooted by what will follow in the coming dialogue. Job faith does not seem to waver after these troubling actions. "Naked I came out at birth, and naked I'll return. YHWH gave, and YHWH took; YHWH's name be blest."[141]

Steven Kepnes ascribes this reading of the experience of suffering to Job's wife. Each of the losses that Job endures is also hers though we do not know much of her response. The

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[138] Good, 49-51.
[139] Buber, Martin, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies by Martin Buber*, ed. Nahum M. Glatzer. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 190-194.
[140] See Habel, p 88 note to 1:5 and Good, 50.
[141] Good, 53.

unnamed wife sees the losses emerging from "evil intent. Job's wife saw that God was toying with Job."[142] Kepnes states he is using Martin Buber's four frames to understand suffering: the view of the prologue, the friends view of God, the view of God as evident in Job's complaint and protest, and the view expressed by God. From what Buber states in his essay this is not entirely the case. Job's wife does not speak much. To understand the entire prologue and the response to suffering as a response to her few words is perhaps giving Mrs. Job more responsibility for suffering than Kepnes credits with her. To ascribe the power of a societal view of suffering to Job's wife is irresponsible exegesis.

The friends who come to Job and sit with him in his mourning (Job 2:11-13) support a God that practices reward and punishment based upon the actions of the human being. To Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad, Job must be suffering because he has sinned in some way. In short, "...the friends are mainly concerned with providing quick rationalizations for Job's plight that will allow them to dismiss their own responsibility to him. The friends' justifications protect their wish to believe that the world follows the order of retributive justice."[143] The text itself rejects this theology in 42:7: "After YHWH had spoken these words to Job, YHWH said to Eliphaz of Teman, 'I am very angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken truth of me, as has my servant Job."[144] Reward and punishment has its biblical roots but it is not a theology that works in the time of Job or in our day.

The third view of God emerges from Job's experience of suffering. The once silent Job begins cursing the day of his birth and stands up to the challenges presented by his friends. The challenge for Job is that "unlike his friends, Job knows of justice only as a human activity, willed

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[142] Kepnes, Steven. "Rereading Job as textual theodicy," in *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.
[143] Ibid, 44.
[144] Good, 171.

by God, but opposed by His acts. The truth of being just and the reality caused by the unjust acts of God are irreconcilable."[145] Job is a man that is aware that terrible things have happened but that YHWH must not be cursed. This infuriates Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar who endlessly challenge Job. But it does not mean that Job is without emotion. His melancholy is to be expected after experiencing such losses. Job's anger at his creation, his friends, and his God has "a cathartic and curative dimension to it. Where the friends believe that Job's anger will 'tear him to pieces' (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."[146] Job displays an inner strength that is non-normative for his day. Job can maintain the core of his personhood, a man "scrupulously moral, religious, one who avoided evil."[147]

YHWH presents the final view of Godself in chapters 38-42 of the book of Job. Martin Buber sees two separate intentions operating in these speeches from the tempest. First, there is a clear demonstration of the mystery of God's rule in nature. Using rhetorical questions about the moment of the creation of the universe forces Job to acknowledge his own smallness compared to the vastness that is YHWH.

The second intent of the speeches is to use nature to contradict theological wisdom.[148] The God that appears to Job is a God directly in touch with nature appearing from a tempest.[149] Job must confront a wisdom that is beyond his comprehension. Buber understands this justice as, "not <u>the</u> divine justice, which remains hidden, but <u>a</u> divine justice, namely that manifest in creation. The creation of the world is justice, not a recompensing and compensating justice, but

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[145] Buber, 191-192.
[146] Kepnes, 46.
[147] Good, 49.
[148] Buber, 194.
[149] Kepnes, 50.

a distributing, a giving justice."[150] The suffering Job endured or the suffering the people of Israel experienced as the result of exile is an act of re-establishing the human being's sense of order in the world.

The quest for comfort after an experience of suffering can be a lifelong pursuit. Martin Buber's reading is that the divine appearance to Job is a revelation.

> ...The overcoming of the riddle of suffering can only come from the domain of revelation but it is not the revelation in general that is here decisive, but the particular revelation to the individual: the revelation as an answer to the individual sufferer concerning the question of his sufferings, the self-limitation of God to a person, answering a person.[151]

It is because YHWH appears to Job that Buber can view this experience as a moment of dialogue, of encounter, of revelation. YHWH's presence in Job's life is what allows the suffering he endured to coexist with a sense of possibility in a future relationship between human beings and YHWH.

YHWH's appearance in the tempest itself is the answer that Job seeks in a Buberian reading. It is the divine presence and not the words conveyed according to Buber that is the essential moment of the narrative. It is the "self-limitation of God to a person, answering a person."[152] This experience and perhaps only this experience leads to Job's dramatic actions in 42:6, "Thus I reject my own words and conclude my mourning [for I am but] ashes and dust."[153] The content of YHWH's speeches does not ease the suffering of the human being. Evil remains in the world. Job finds some measure of comfort or peace after this revelatory experience. The presence of YHWH alone is enough to ease Job's suffering.

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[150] Buber, 195. The emphasis is Buber's.
[151] Ibid, 196.
[152] Glatzer, 11.
[153] Translation my own.

Job's reaction here displays what Buber believes must be the response to suffering. The relationship between the human being and God must already exist for the human being in order to endure suffering and move forward with his scars still evident. "Job exemplifies the man who remains loyal to the covenant. His estrangement from God is thus reduced to a minimum..."[154] This explains the manner in which Job keeps his faith intact against his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar and their assaults at his possible misdeeds.

Job understands the existence of evil in a way that his friends do not and cannot. According to Buber, "evil...is aimlessness, lack of direction, lack of decision – in man ... once he has responded to the call of creature and Creator, he will no longer encounter evil in the world outside him."[155] Job's understanding of the nature and order of the universe is radically different from his friends. When YHWH speaks and questions Job's knowledge of the divine order of the universe it proves Job has an understanding not shared by the other speakers.

I want God to be ever-present and for there be potential for a revelation in my times of suffering. This would bring me comfort and it brings comfort to the people I encounter in pastoral situations. God's presence means that some being greater than myself is witnessing my experience and this, in some measure, validates my suffering.

There are limitations to a Buberian reading of Job. The text does not explicitly support the notion that it is YHWH's presence that comforts Job and enables him to conclude his mourning. If this were the case chapters 38:2-42:5 could be excised. Instead YHWH's speeches are filled with magnificent language about the time of the creation of the universe and the ordering of the universe. Job is the one that requests a divine audience in the form of a trial but Job never has the opportunity to cross-examine his sole witness.

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[154] Glatzer, 12.
[155] Ibid.

Buber desires for both parties in dialogue to engage wholly with the other without one party subsuming the other. It is challenging to imagine a confrontation with God that would allow both parties to remain their autonomy. Even if the "I" of Job is in fact the entire people of Israel, Buber's notion of dialogue does not work.

Martin Buber presents a reading of the book of Job that acknowledges the existence of suffering in the world. He makes no attempt to minimize the experience of the suffering, but strives to find a place for God at the appropriate time. While Buber makes no mention of his own experience leading to his immigration to the land of Israel, it can be inferred that he does not believe in a God that pulls on the strings of reward and punishment. Rather the notion that the divine presence was hidden from the people of Israel in their darkest moments would better coincide with a Buberian reading of human experience.

Victor Frankl in the passage cited at the beginning of this paper describes what he learned from his experience of suffering during the Second World War. Frankl describes precisely what Job goes through in the story retold in the Hebrew Bible as though a part of Job's story is his own. Suffering is a part of life that is almost inevitable. The story of Job as understood by Martin Buber allows the reader and student of Job to begin to explore the potential for holiness in the experience of suffering. When the potential exists for God to be present holiness is possible. While it might be impossible for the human being to know it in the moment, God's presence can be felt in all of life's moments. Sometimes the human being is just unable to be aware of the divine presence but Job teaches us to open up our minds and spirits to the possibility of our own tempest.

Conclusion

I begin with a story. "Rabbi Bunam said to his disciples: 'Everyone must have two pockets so that he can reach into one or the other according to his needs. In his right pocket are to be the words: 'For my sake was the world created,' and in his left pocket, 'I am dust and ashes.'"[156] Perhaps Rabbi Bunam is teaching a lesson about the book of Job, for the story begins and ends with Job sitting in and then relinquishing him of ashes and dust. However, in the dialogue Job speaks as though he has done no wrong, YHWH could not have caused him such suffering for he is a good person. Job can learn from his mistakes and admit to his own errors in judgment.

Recorded in Job's story is a magnificent encounter with YHWH in a whirlwind that is the climax of the book and the moment of transformation of this experience of suffering. YHWH's appearance is the acknowledgement that Job sought. His 'friends' were unable to remain present for him through his journey into the darkest places of the self, the place of doubt and self-pity. They could not let him yell and scream without answering back. Elihu presents a complicated bridge between the threesome Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and in further study I would like to look at his words. But it is the appearance of YHWH, or rather the acknowledgment of the divine presence that enables Job to move forward.

Here my own theology informs my understanding. YHWH was always present, is always present for the human being. The challenge is for those made of ashes and dust to become aware of the ways YHWH is present for each of us. This is the takeaway message of Job.

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[156] Shulman, Sheila. "What is Our Love?" in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality* by Jonathan Magonet (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 103.

Put simply Job cries out because he cannot comprehend the devastation of his family and wealth. In his initial cry he does ask grand theological questions of the deity but they are rhetorical. Job was asking for comfort but his friends were incapable of doing so. Instead of acknowledging Job's pain they speak of their own theology. They try to convince Job to get up when he really just needs someone to hear him. This is why YHWH provides some sense of comfort to Job in the complex poetry on creation. Job needed an encounter with someone who might at least meet him from where he is. YHWH does this simply by appearing. Job's emotions were swirling about him like a storm and this is precisely where the divine speaks to Job.

This study primarily centered on the whirlwind speeches and Job's response as presented in Chapters 38-42:6; it is my first attempt at finding meaning in what I find to be one of the richest books of the Hebrew Bible. While this thesis is the marker of the completion of my rabbinic studies at HUC, by no means is this the end of my wrestling with Job. In addition to the careful reading I hope to do of the Elihu speech there are also many books that remained unopened, articles hidden away in journals, and words that I have yet to understand. This perhaps is the most fitting testament to my studies, that while this is an ending it is also a beginning.

May I always have two pockets each with a slip of paper.

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