

תְּהִלַּת יִשְׁכָּן-אֵוֶר

The Book of Job: Rabbinic Dilation of Scope and Narrative

by

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FOR MY GRANDMOTHER

MRS. LILLIAN LEVEY

12 ADAR I 5687 — 21 IYAR 5780

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My Dearest Sasha,

God blessed my life with your unconditional love.

You are now at peace because you deserve to be at peace.

May we see each other again. Amen.

'Many daughters have done valiantly, but thou excellest them all.'

(Proverbs 31:29)

Love always from your grandson,

Asher Hillel

הספר הזה ייחשב כקרבת תודה
מוקדש בכבוד אל הגברת הגדולה
ברכה רחל-לאה בת הרב אשר וגאָלדאָ
זכר צדיקה וקדושה לברכה לחיי העולם הבא
באהבה רבה מעומק לב נכדה ישורר ויהללה

אשת חן וחיל שתמכה בנזקקים
עשתה חסד בחשאי ברוח אמונים
נשאה את העולם על כתפיה הצרות
הוסר העול לבסוף וזכינו אוהביה לראות
איך החליפה כח וגידלה כנפיים זהובות
תחיה היי עולם בין מדושני טל אורות
אוכלים לשובע נפשם ושותים מכוס הישועות

אה"ב כ"ד אייר תש"פ למבנ"י

רבות בנות עשו קיל ואת עליית על-בִּלְגָּה (משלי לא, כט)



Sasha and I pose for a photo at the commencement exercises of the City University of New York Baccalaureate Program for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies, June, 2014.

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Preface

During the long, winding course of my search for truth in this pretty, petty world of ours, I have met many human beings who, like me, hunger for the bread of life. These men and women have lived lives of want and plenty, glory and ignominy; the Goddess of Fate extended her cup to them all. Some put their lips to the chalice and sipped in vintage wine while others among them reeled in disgust as the drop they ingested revealed itself to be a rancid mix of gall and wormwood. In spite of the varying fortunes of these men and women, the call of the Sublime would eventually drown out all other voices, from shouts of triumph and jubilation to cries of sadness and woe. God, as it were, called out to them all.

It is not praiseworthy to engage in name-dropping and so I shall refrain from doing so, best as I am able. Suffice it to say that along the tumultuous way toward this moment, I have been at times intrigued by the ideas of some of the aforementioned heaven-touched humans, and on other occasions bemused, even irritated. Those spiritually conscious souls who well value beauty and glory find preeminent favor in my eyes. Their sallow antagonists who haunt the pantheon of religious philosophy with disapproving cries of censure against all things pleasing to the senses are abhorrent to me, anathema to a sensibility that perceives the Divine as the source of all good.¹

The religious thinkers who call for an end to formalism and ceremony are in fact antinomians who lack the courage of their convictions.² In contrast to them, we meet up with legalists who value statute and ordinance above all else. This leathery class of theologians rubs against the human grain, as it were, as life once relegated to a *de minimis* role ceases to be natural and

1. Rabbi Shime'on son of Yehuda, in the name of Rabbi Shime'on son of Yo hai, said: 'Beauty, strength, riches, and glory... are fitting for the righteous and fitting for the world'. (*Baraita Avot*, Perek Qinyan Torah)

2. My opinion

instead becomes a long series of mechanized, even contrived, actions.

“Whence cometh my help?” I have wondered of late (and for decades) in feeble desperation, still yearning after all this time to find one truly human sage who speaks to my heart and sets my feet upon a path to the Transcendent One, a path on which I shan’t forget my name. In short, who is fit to serve as my *rebbe*? Whose *hasid* can I be?

My favorite professor of Jewish Studies, Dr. Saul B. Troen, required the students enrolled in his undergraduate course “Job, Ecclesiastes and the Human Predicament” to read Hayyim Greenberg’s essay on The Book of Job entitled “In Dust and Ashes”. I was thirty-four years old at the time, in the final semester of the City University of New York Baccalaureate Program for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies. Although I was then submerged in a glut of coursework and heading breathlessly toward the completion of my Life Experience Portfolio as well as my first, self-published, Hebrew novella, Dr. Troen’s class gave me pause for thought and reflection and proved to be an intense yet solacing foray into the art of self-liberation.

Before I could fully appreciate the human depth of Greenberg’s essay it must have felt crucial for me to know the final word - my learned teacher’s final word - on the nature of *Sefer Iyyov*, The Book of Job. Is it truly the gist of that ancient Hebrew tome - oldest of the Hagiographa - whether faith can exist irrespective of reward?³ Through the thorough study of every verse within that grand book as well as commentaries both Jewish and Patristic, medieval and modern, it has recently become clear to me that this is indeed the nub of the narrative. In retrospect, though, it was none other than Dr. Troen who revealed what may be called “the pith of the nub”.

“Is *Sefer Iyyov* a tragedy with a happy ending?” he asked us. “Well, most of the book is a variation on the theme of misfortune,” I chanced. “You’re missing the point,” the good professor

3. See Boyd, J.P. *Self-Pronouncing Bible Dictionary*. New York: Ottenheimer Publishers, Inc., 1958, p. 55.

admonished. “The line between tragedy and comedy is very thin. If one immerses himself in the story of Job, sooner or later he will discover that the book is in fact a dark comedy. Themes such as the unmitigated loss of joy and the unattainability of redemption as well as the stern reproach by an unjust God who vehemently insists upon His own righteousness are all comedic in nature. Charlie Chaplin’s famous ‘tramp’ is a purely Joban character.”

Job’s message was becoming clearer: Life, with all its vicissitudes, follies and freneticism, is ultimately inscrutable. Couch our hopes and fears in pious language though we might, we remain trapped in a realm of impermanence and impalpability. On the face of it, such may seem a ludicrous answer to the eternal question of human suffering but great, edifying wisdom inheres therein notwithstanding for all the world’s a farce. No wonder, then, that French poet Jean de Santeul⁴ wrote, “Castigat ridendo mores” (“laughing corrects morals”).

Subliminal theological messages aside, *Sefer Iyyov* brims with poignancy about a man whose tortured soul finds its ultimate salvation by yielding to the futility of an *a priori* faith. So many of us tether our belief to doctrine and remain in thrall to the ideas conjured up by brains long turned to dust. To Job, however (at least to the illuminated Job of the final, forty-second chapter of his book), salvation and all its attendant blessings come with the acceptance that God, though axiomatically real, cannot be figured out. Faith? A must. Dogma? An absurdity.

It was Hayyim Greenberg,⁵ doyen of the Labor Zionist thinkers, who, pen in exiguous hand, kept his crystalline eyes upon a suffering Jewry as well as upon a God who, apparently could not care less. But God, as his shield-bearers⁶ would have it, was there. Dazed and listless Israel, reeking from the ovens and zombified in the killing pits, was now convulsing in a paroxysm of

4. 1630—97

5. b. 1889 Bessarabia, d. 1953 New York

6. בעלי תריסין (BT *Bekhorot* 36a)

grief over a post-Auschwitz theodicy and stultified by her once wide-eyed faith in Heaven.

Hitler had confuted the Jews' basic notions of God's justice and the rabbis—some among them—could prate about His sempiternal mercies no longer. It was at this liminal stage when the people of the Jewish nation, wan and limp, would receive a lagniappe: An unalloyed outrage with their absentee Father in Heaven would give them sight of what is real. As did Job, they could at last declare, *Now mine eye seeth Thee*.⁷

For it is a fact that the images captured by the retina of the human eye are upside-down. They are then inverted by the brain so one can make sense of them. Making free use of the words of Joseph bar Joshua,⁸ a believer of the Joban school might well declare, “I have seen an inverted world”. He makes a conscious effort to give a sort of Divine rhyme and reason to that upendedness. Through the thickety helter-skelter of our unjust realm, he gropes about for the guiding hand of God and, as Isaiah, hymns the sky-bound pose: *The mind stayed on Thee Thou keepest in perfect peace*.⁹ And so with heightened vision, Job and his votaries scan the dim, dusky moonlight for the fiery silhouette of God. Terrible and unchanging, it appears but for a moment and then passes quickly out of sight. This is the first *musar haskel* or “edifying lesson” imparted by The Book of Job.

The second, less obvious one was revealed to us by Rabbi Paul M. Hoffman, spiritual leader of

7. Jb. 42:5. Please note that henceforth, biblical verses and extracts thereof will be presented in *italics* without quotation marks. Much of the time, the English translation of the Tanakh is that of the 1917 JPS (Jewish Publication Society) edition. In many instances, I have emended the JPS translation or provided my own. Biblical book titles are for the most part abbreviated. Lengthy or particularly salient pericopes appear as stand-alone paragraphs, typeset in “center justify,” in 10-point Cambria font and 1.5 line spacing, *italicized* when appropriate according to my presentational format. A full translation of source text is provided in the footnotes when necessary. Biographical information is included if deemed useful in rendering facts and personages less abstract. On rare occasions, a protracted biography has been judged appropriate. Note further that while I have retained the customary English spellings of biblical names and places, I have transliterated these features when they appear in rabbinic texts in accordance with a clearer, more modern phonetic system.

8. BT *Bava Batra* 10ב עולם הפוך ראיתי 10ב

9. Isa. 26:3

the South Shore Jewish Center in New York. “What message of comfort can *Sefer Iyyov* offer to one in mourning for a loved one?” the good rabbi asked me rhetorically, hopeful of a keen reply. “Well,” I chanced, “It undermines rational theodicy and subverts any and all attempts to formulate a science of God.” “That it does,” retorted Rabbi Hoffman. “But what can a soul in pain do with such a clinical, if correct, deduction?”

I pursed my lips, hesitant to utter a false word about a biblical book I knew and loved so well. “I’ll tell, you,” the rabbi went on. “At a Jewish burial service, right after the grave has been filled with earth, we recite the *Tzidduq ha-Din* prayer, affirming God’s perfect judgment. The penultimate line of that prayer is borrowed from The Book of Job: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*”¹⁰ I evinced a puzzled look.

“Is it not obvious?” quizzed Rabbi Hoffman. “Job’s seven sons had the custom of holding a feast each night of the week in the home of a different sibling. The three daughters were always invited, of course, and their father would bring a burnt offering to God every morning in order to sanctify the previous night’s festivities and to mitigate any impious thoughts that might have passed through the minds of his reveling sons in the hour of their mirth.”¹¹ Job’s family were very close and they truly loved one another. When his children were later torn from him, Job blessed God’s name for having graced him with the regular opportunity to make merry with them and to shower them with his love and affection.”

I was left not a little ashamed that so poignant a lesson from *Sefer Iyyov* had escaped my attention all these years. Still, one final question concerning God’s justice remained in my mind despite the brilliance and originality of Rabbi Hoffman’s insight. With more nerve than intelligence, I asked him, “Is not the mourner still liable to blame God for the loss of his loved

10. Jb. 1:21 This is actually the second half of the verse.

11. *ibid.* 1:4-5

one?” The good rabbi grimaced and concluded, “When we are faced with tragedy or engulfed by grief, God has no immediate relevance beyond the roles of Healer and Uplifter. Over and above that, the bereaved soul might feel compelled to thank Him for the joyous times he had been blessed to share with his dear departed one.”

As the grandson of Holocaust survivors, one to whom the miracle of the reborn Jewish State dares to confound an otherwise empirical nihilism, I have long lived ensconced in the absurd quandary of Job. *Why hast Thou set me as a mark for Thee?*¹² cries Job the suffering Jew. The pain increases when we are told *Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him.*¹³ To make matters worse, our faith in Divine deliverance is crushed when we realize that though God agrees to The Satan’s challenge to test the measure of Job’s faith to the nth degree,¹⁴ it is God Himself who admits *thou didst move Me against him, to destroy him without cause.*¹⁵

In the case of the *Aqedat Yitzḥaq*, the Binding of Isaac,¹⁶ God seeks the ultimate show of Abraham’s devotion and commands him to bring his son, the singularly beloved Isaac, to the hill of Moriah,¹⁷ there to offer the lad to Heaven as a burnt offering. But did God truly wish for a human sacrifice? Do not the Scriptures say that He hates such practices and considers them abominations?¹⁸ Is not Jephthah held in low esteem by the rabbis for having sacrificed his virgin daughter to God in fulfillment of an inane vow?¹⁹ Beyond the apologetic that the verse in

12. *ibid.* 7:20

13. *ibid.* 36:26

14. *ibid.* 2:1-6

15. *ibid.* v. 3

16. Gen. 22:1-19

17. Solomon’s temple was subsequently built there. (II Chr. 3:1)

18. Deut. 12:31. See also Lev. 20:1-5 and Jer. 19:5

19. Jdg. 11:30-40. See *Yalqut Shime’oni* 68: “Between this one and that one, the young maiden was lost... Both of them were punished: Jephthah died from a disfiguring disease.” Indeed, I remember when, in the sixth grade, our *rebbe* began a Bible class with the words, “*Raboysai* [gentlemen], this morning we will learn about Yiftah ha-Gile’adi [Jephthah the Gileadite]. Yiftah was a stupid person.”

Most of the *Mefarshim*, the classical rabbinic exegetes, including Rashi, Radaq, Rabbag, *Metzudat David*, and Malbim, reason that Jephthah did not actually sacrifice his daughter. In the Jephthah controversy, Rashi to Num. 30:2, in fact a quote from the ancient halakhic Midrash *Sifrei* (153:1; see also BT *Nedarim* 78a), is often

mentioned to the effect that the annulment of a vow may only be effected by one who is expert in the Law, and that in the absence of a legalist, the vow may be annulled by three laymen (ואם אין יחיד מומחה, מפני ששלשה רדיפות כפרת נדרים ביחיד מומחה). This comment has been repurposed by some as evidence that according to Rashi, preeminent non-Sefardic rabbinic scholar of the Middle Ages, if one promises to transgress any law of the Torah, his words are not binding. Jephthah's vow to sacrifice whomever comes out to greet him upon his defeat of the Ammonites is one such promise. Still, the Talmud preserves a tradition that Jephthah did in fact slaughter his daughter (BT *Ta'anit* 4a).

Our first mention of Rashi merits a biographical sketch of that great Jewish personage. Rashi (acronym **R**abbi **S**helomo ben **Y**itzḥaq) was born in 1040 in Troyes, Champagne, in northern France. His father, R. Yitzḥaq, was a pious sexton supposedly descended from the House of David. His mother's brother was Shime'on bar Yitzḥaq, rabbi of Mainz, Germany. The Franco-German milieu was a far cry from *Sefarad*, the Hispano-Arabic Jewish culture of Andalus into which Maimonides would be born a generation after Rashi's death in 1105. Unlike the Sefardim, the Franco-German Jews had little to interest in philosophy. The Talmud was the focus of their study and the Bible was expounded homiletically. Like their coreligionists in Yemen, the Jews of proto-Ashkenaz were lovers of Midrash. Their rabbis wrote in a hodgepodge of Hebrew and Aramaic and Rashi continued this tradition, sprinkling in many *la'azim*, non-Hebrew usages, from Old French.

Upon marrying Rivqa at the age of seventeen, young Shelomo went to the yeshiva at Worms on the Upper Rhine. A few years later, he moved on to Mainz. By the age of twenty-five, Shelomo had exhausted his teachers' store of knowledge. And so he returned to Troyes and established his own yeshiva, *Yeshivat Ge'on Ya'aqov* ("The Pride of Jacob Academy"). Rashi became the preeminent *poseq*, legal decisor, for the Franco-German Jews, and he answered questions on Jewish law and lore from near and far. These responsa can be found in the annotated collection *Teshuvot Rashi*, ed. I. Elfenbein (New York, 1943). Rashi also displayed considerable talent as a Hebrew poet and penned hymns and *selihot* (penitential prayers) that are still recited in the Synagogue.

To Rashi we owe two debts of gratitude. In his unique conflationist system of scriptural exegesis, he presents *peshat* ("plain meaning") and *derash* ("homiletic exposition") in symbiosis. The two approaches lose their distinction and a quite powerful, if contrived, Jewish holism heaves in sight. Rashi seems to have commenced his great work on the Pentateuch while still a seminarian. Indeed, that commentary bears the markings of a yeshiva scholar in thrall to the wisdom of his teachers. Rashi's grandson Shemu'el ben Me'ir, i.e. Rashbam, (ca. 1085—1174) writes in his own exegesis to Gen. 37:1 that he upbraided his grandfather for having written a commentary that was not definitive *peshat*. Rashi accepted his grandson's criticism and told him he would revise his work if time allowed. Still, until this day, it is traditional to learn *Humash Im Perush Rashi*, The Five Books of Moses with Rashi's Commentary, early on in one's religious schooling.

We must extend yet another laurel of thanksgiving to this great man. For he saved the study of the Talmud for future generations. Were it up to Maimonides, the Jewish layman would devote his intellectual energies to the Bible and the *Mishneh Torah*, his own exhaustive digest of religious law and practice. But Rashi worked tirelessly to calm the raging Sea of the Talmud and, by his careful, concise commentary, to construct isles of peace for those who might otherwise drown in the depths. No talmudist worthy of the name would dare to bypass Rashi.

Rabbi Shelomo was possessed of a saintly and humble personality. When the meaning eludes him, he writes, "I do not know". When converted Jews escaped their Christian or Muslim captors (for Rashi lived during the First Crusade), the great rabbi showed them the utmost compassion and leniency. Blessed not with sons but with the three daughters Yoḥeved, Miriam, and Raḥel, he taught each personally and they became scholars of Torah in their own right. A loving and kindly father, Rashi was careful to avoid misogynistic language in his writings. When referencing a passage from the Talmud or Midrash that is unfavorable to women, he is elliptical.

Rashi was a liberal, writing: "From the time I began to comprehend the Talmud, my heart has inclined toward lenient opinions" - מיום הבינותי בדברי תלמוד, לבי נוטה אחר המתירים (Teshuvot *Hakhmei Tzorfat ve-Lotar*, ch. 11). He was also a pluralist. When in Num. 27:16 Moses refers to God as *the God of the spirits of all flesh*, the great commentator dovetails a teaching from *Midrash Tanḥuma* (*Pinḥas* 10) about the importance of tolerance: "Why is this said? Moses said to God: Master of the World, the character of each person is revealed to You, and no two are alike. Appoint over them a leader who will tolerate each person according to his individual character." The independence with which Rashi's grandchildren Rashbam, Rabbenu Tam, and Rivam studied and expounded the Bible and Talmud are a testament to their grandfather's openness to the ideas and attitudes of others. Indeed, the rabbis from twelfth-thru-mid-fifteenth-century France and Germany known as the *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, the "Glossators," who often disagree with Rashi's interpretation of the talmudic text, were essentially an outgrowth

Genesis says והעלהו (literally “and lift him up”)²⁰ and not והקריבהו (“and sacrifice him”), one can find ideas in the rabbinic literature that offer a mitigative view of God’s demand of Abraham, and which perhaps peel back veiled layers of meaning within the sacred text itself.

The *olah*, the type of sacrifice God demands of Abraham,²¹ is one that rises, hence the name. The Mishnah classes the *olah* as קודש קודשים, “[among] the most holy [of sacrifices]”.²² The twelfth-century Spanish exegete Abraham ibn Ezra²³ expresses the idea that the sinner should be the one sacrificing himself to God, not the animal.²⁴ Such an inference is possible from Scripture²⁵ as well as from the Talmud.²⁶ Based on this theme of self-sacrifice, it could be suggested that God wanted something internal from Abraham, an idea in harmony with the rabbinic notion רחמנא ליבא בעי - “It is the heart the Merciful One desires”.²⁷ Perhaps this is among the reasons the rabbis considered the *olah*, the burnt offering, so very holy. It is an indication and expression of the basic Divine will.

The Mishnah states that the *olah* requires הפשט וניתוח, flaying and dismemberment. When a creature is flayed, its innards become visible. When it is dismembered, each constituent part can be viewed at the micro level, allowing the sacrificer to ponder the many pieces that collectively

of *Bet Rashi*, his inner circle consisting of family members and close disciples.

Supercommentaries on Rashi’s biblical and talmudic studies abound. The sincerity and sensitivity with which he expresses himself continues to draw students of Torah to him in each generation. There are many sobriquets by which Rashi is called: “The Great Light,” “Father of the Talmud,” “Teacher of All the Exiles,” “Explicator of the Law,” “Brother of the Torah”. In his book *Tzeda la-Derekh* (“Provision for the Journey”), fourteenth-century spanish rabbi Menahem ben Zerah says: “Before him there never arose such a mentor and guide across the Sea of the Talmud who explains [the most complex] matters in clear, concise language. Were it not for him, the Talmud would have been forgotten in Israel.”

20. Gen 22:2

21. *ibid.*

22. Mishnah *Zevaḥim* 5:4

23. 1089, Tudela—1167, Calahorra

24. *ibn Ezra* on Lev. 1:1 (כי בן פירוש לכפר לתת כופר) על כל חלק לעולם הבא.

25. Ps. 51:19

26. See R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar’s teaching (BT *Eruvin* 19a).

27. BT *Sanhedrin* 106b

made up the unified life-form. God demands complete transparency from Abraham. He wants him to flay his pride upon the altar of self-sacrifice, to contemplate the inward parts of himself, and to bequeath that which is beautiful to his beloved Isaac. For the name Moriah (מֹרְיָה), the hill whence God instructed Abraham to bring his son for this great moment of existential sacrifice,²⁸ though usually translated as “chosen,”²⁹ can also be rendered “instruction”.³⁰

Toward the end of the *Aqeda* narrative, just as the Patriarch’s knife-wielding hand is stretched forth over Isaac, an angel calls out, declaring that God has now been convinced of his spiritual devotion. Abraham lifts up his eyes and beholds an entangled ram. The verse says the animal was נֶאֱחָז בַּסֶּבֶךְ בְּקַרְנָיו, caught in the thicket by its horns. The headlocked ram represents the rule of the Id, the emotional constriction of one whose objects are mere wish fulfillment and instant gratification.³¹ But God desires הַפְשֵׁט וְנִיתוּחַ, He desires that His servant ponder his passions and flay and dismember his own fleshly concerns. He desires nothing less than what psychiatrist Silvano Arieti³² called “the tertiary process,” in which the artist reasons a synergistic order from out of his past state of being. According to Arieti’s typology, it is God who would then declare to Abraham, artist of the spirit:³³ “You have touched me”.³⁴

28. Gen. 22:2

29. from האמר

30. from הוריה

31. For the word קרן, “horn,” can also mean “ray”. In fact, “corona” derives from this word.

32. 1914, Pisa, Italy—1981, New York City. One of the world’s foremost authorities on schizophrenia, Arieti, a Jew, was forced to leave his home country due to Mussolini’s anti-Semitic policies. Settling in the United States, he became a professor of psychiatry at New York Medical College. Drawing from Freud, Arieti divides the human psyche into three distinct cognitive processes: The primary process, which dominates in dreams and in certain states of mental illness; the normal, reality-oriented secondary process of waking consciousness; and the tertiary process, by which the individual synthesizes the primary and secondary, thereby activating his creative capacity. He regarded the so-called “tertiary process” his central contribution. See Arieti, Silvano. *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*. New York: Basic Books, 1976. See also Geels, Antoon. 1982. “Mystical Experience and the Emergence of Creativity” In *Religious Ecstasy*, ed. Nils G. Holms. Stockholm: Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, no. 11, 27-62.

33. See Gen. 26:5

34. Such is the nature of the angel’s affirmation of Abraham’s success in crossing swords with his own pride and emerging in victory. See *ibid.* 22:12 and 15-18.

We return to Job. To the rabbinic mind, God's allowance of - and participation in - the undoing of innocents should be disturbing on many levels. Particularly loathsome is the effort to square such a barbarous cosmic game with the conviction that to God is foreknowledge, perfect and untrammelled. The measure of a man's fortitude is known even to his neighbors, as the Talmud teaches: "Every gourd can be known from its stalk."³⁵ What then is the point of a trial by Heaven? While the story of Job contradicts the notion of knowing the future, it is none other than Job who proclaims: *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.*³⁶ It is he who is fatalistic. It is he who makes a self-fulfilling prophecy about Man's fall from grace.

That we must accept needless suffering meted out from on High by a God gone mad, by a God who, though potentially the Living Redeemer,³⁷ allows the souls of His mangled children to writhe upon the ash-heap of the crematorium - for the sake of a wager, no less - must prove that life possesses no rhyme or reason. Job understands all of this, as he tells his friends: *Lo, mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it.*³⁸ Yet he refuses to descend into the abyss of unbelief. He refuses to give into nihilism, proclaiming, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,*³⁹ an idea similar to that expressed by Abraham Joshua Heschel,⁴⁰ who said, "Prayer may not save us. But it can make us worthy of being saved".⁴¹ It is man who must conjure up the sublime from within his own soul, as King Solomon states: *The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord.*⁴²

35. BT *Berakhot* 48a

36. Jb. 14:4

37. *ibid.* 19:25

38. *ibid.* 13:1

39. *ibid.* v. 15

40. b. 1907 Warsaw, d. 1972 New York City

41. See Carl Stern's 1972 interview with Heschel on the NBC program *The Eternal Light*, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEXK9xcRCho>

42. Pr. 20:27

It is no wonder that both Heschel and Greenberg, loving sons of the *Alte Heim*,⁴³ scarred by incalculable, personal loss at the hands of the Nazis and witnesses to the resurrection of the Jewish State a scant three years after the liberation of the death camps, seemed to have found living waters within the dry, arid wilderness, within the existential desert that nourishes unbelief. Make no mistake, though, the stream flows according to man's design. Like Moses before them,⁴⁴ Heschel and Greenberg take their staff and strike the rock. With faces dripping with perspiration, they abrade the stone until, at last, *the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank.*⁴⁵

Truly, both Heschel and Greenberg concurred with young Elihu that *it is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty, that giveth them understanding.*⁴⁶ Fabulists they were not, obscurantists they were not. When, at long last, one unmask the ardent yet equivocal disquisitions of Hayyim Greenberg, ostensibly a Hebrew-Yiddish humanist and Labor Zionist, and when one peels back the hefty layers of Abraham Joshua Heschel's revivalist fervor, he discovers the unexpected: Before him, gilded by *the way where light dwellest*,⁴⁷ stand two Joban theists, the one, an elegant, pragmatist *maskil*⁴⁸ fascinated by the strata of feelings and ideas that underlay the gamut of Jewish religious literature, the other, scion of a ḥasidic dynasty who journeyed beyond the scuffed walls of the *Kloyz*⁴⁹ to found an holistic Jewish theology that

43. Yiddish for "The Old World" i.e. the permeative Jewish culture of Eastern Europe, in full bloom until the War.

44. Num. 20:11

45. *ibid.*

46. Jb. 32:8

47. *ibid.* 38:19

48. lit. "intellectual". The term connotes a cultured and refined Jewish scholar well-versed in the classical religious literature of his People, but especially in Bible, Jewish philosophy, and the Hebrew language.

49. Yiddish for "cloister". Prior to the opening of the great ḥasidic yeshiva of Lublin, Poland in 1930, the *Kloyz* served as the elite institution of higher Torah learning among the *ḥasidim* as it had for the outlying communities of *misnaggedim* (the scholastic, fervently Orthodox "opponents" of the *ḥasidim*). Nearly every town in Eastern and Central Europe with a sizeable Jewish population had its own *kloyz*, a small house of study headed by a prominent Torah scholar appointed by the founder and frequented by selected scholars.

proclaimed the divinity of man and the Torah and affirmed the unique destiny of Israel, calling upon the erudition of heterodox Jewish, even non-Jewish, scholars in the process. Of Heschel, we have spoken our peace. As for Greenberg, let him rest for now; we shall awaken him in due course.

The Book of Job should be the linchpin of every Jewish theologian who loves his People enough to bristle with anger at the absence of a just and caring God. He should dive head-first into its sea of lurid accusations and fervid recriminations, that tempestuous ocean in which both Seeking Man and Dismissive God drown. He should wrap himself in the uncertainty that shrouds the lens of the עֵינַי פְּקִיחָהּ or “Open Eye,” euphemism for “perfect faith” in the language of the mystics, in a veil of unknowing. For then, bleary-eyed and most ironically, he shall be forced to admit that *God doeth great things and unsearchable,*⁵⁰ that *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.*⁵¹ This capitulatory submission to the Divine mystery is the essence of the Joban faith, spoken in humble surrender by the suffering man from Uz: *Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.*⁵²

Like Job, the Jew crowns his pain with an anguished call to the Sublime: *I cry unto Thee, and Thou dost not answer me.*⁵³ And in the cry - even in that cry - there is faith. No matter his temporal circumstance, the Jew keeps his heart open to a lyricism that fills the human experience with an awareness of a Transcendent Reality, as the verse states: *In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind.*⁵⁴ He squints until his eyes cross, straining to

50. Jb. 5:9

51. Isa. 55:8

52. Jb. 42:3

53. *ibid.* 30:20

54. *ibid.* 12:10

behold a perfect, ultimate destiny⁵⁵ that overlays history and existence with the promise of a world far better than his own, as it is written: *And though thy beginning was small, Yet thy end should greatly increase.*⁵⁶

It would appear that he who has studied enough history will inevitably conclude several incontrovertible truths, among which is that Job is the Jew and the Jew is Job. For if by Tradition it was Jacob's sons who persuaded the dying patriarch of their faith by proclaiming: *HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE,*⁵⁷ then it is the great man from Idumea who, whilst in mourning for all his children, reassured God of his trust in Him - and of his forgiveness of Him - by declaring: *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*⁵⁸ Job holds that we come into the world with nothing but a mother's love. We leave it with nothing except, perhaps, an illuminated spirit.

I wish now to share my favorite prayer with you, my dear reader. The rabbi who spoke it was a man with feet on the ground and a mind in the highest heaven. He would not allow his work in the Law to callous his heart or unspool the lace of his soul. During the years of my study of *The Book of Job*, at moments of success and failure, sadness and joy, the prayer of Alexandri, rabbi of late third-century Judæa, nourished my spirit, lifted me up, and drove me forward. The most sublime passage in the whole of the rabbinic literature, Rabbi Alexandri's prayer expresses everything I could hope to articulate before God and Man:

55. *ibid.* 23:14

56. *ibid.* 8:7

57. Deut. 6:4

58. Jb. 1:21

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּעֲמִידֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶן אֹרֶחַ וְאֵל תַּעֲמִידֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶן חֹשֶׁכַת.
וְאֵל יִדְוָה לְבָנֵנו וְאֵל יִחְשְׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ.

(ברכות יז.)

“May this be Thy will, O Lord our God: Place us in a corner of light and not in a corner of darkness.

Let not our hearts love in vain. And let not our eyes grow dark with despair.”

(BT *Berakhot* 17a)

I dedicate this work to my martyred forbears:

The Weiss family of Újfehértó (Ratzfert), Hungary

The Fülöp and Ehrenfeld families of Bihar, Romania, née Hungary

The Idler family of Dynów (Dinov), Galicia

The Burstein family of Łódź, Poland

O earth, cover not thou my blood, And let my cry have no resting-place.

(Job 16:18)

And to my living relatives in The United States of America and Israel.

And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt look about thee, and shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall court thy favor.

(ibid. 11:18-19)

Asher Hillel Burstein

November 27, 2020

11 Kislev 5781

Erev Shabbat Parashat va-Yetzei

Thesis Statement

In this thesis I will attempt to demonstrate that many teachings of the stewards of the rabbinic tradition, from the *Tanna'im*⁵⁹ down to the *Aḥaronim*,⁶⁰ shed new and at times unexpected light on various verses and themes from The Book of Job. The *Midrash Aggada* or “homily” will often serve as the springboard to various discussions and as substantiation of the rabbinic viewpoint.⁶¹ Ideas from nonreligious or non-Jewish literature - at times from quite unexpected

59. ca. 10–220 CE

60. ca. the sixteenth century to the present

61. An introduction to the Midrashic method is here in order: According to Günter Stemberger, “Rabbinic midrash is characterised by the basic principle of understanding scripture from scripture, in its totality.” (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, 237.) In other words, the difficulties in Scripture are resolved by Scripture. In addition, the Midrash rewrites many verses with an eye to recontextualizing the biblical narrative. In contradistinction to the so-called פשוט or “plain” meaning of Scripture, the פרוש or “probed” understanding that predominates Israel’s ancient homiletical books subjects the biblical text to the sensibilities of the rabbis. And despite the fervor of some overly imaginative exegetes, the Talmud admonishes: אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו - “No biblical text abandons its plain meaning.” (BT *Shabbat* 63a, *Yevamot* 11b and 24a)

Nevertheless, the profusion of differing viewpoints included in the Midrash succeeds in proffering a variegated view of Scripture. In this way we believe the Midrashic method to be a modern one, in line with the sensibilities of literary theorist and critic Terry Eagleton, an advocate of “layers of meaning”. “The interpreter’s task,” says Eagleton, “should be to elucidate the potential meanings of a text, and not restrict himself to just one.” (*Literary Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, page 22)

The following text, taken from Ecclesiastes Rabba (§ 51 or 2:1:1, depending on the ms.) illustrates the revisionist tendency of the rabbis as evidenced in the Midrash:

אמרתי אני בלפי לכה נא אנפכה בשמה (קהלת ב. א) רבי פנחס ורבי חזקיה בשם רבי סימון בר זבדי, רבי פנחס אמר אנפכה ואנפכה. אנסה בדברי תורה, ואנסה בדברי מנין. אנסה מדברי מנין לדברי תורה.

I said in my heart: Come now, I will try you with mirth. (Eccl. 2:1) R. Phineas and R. Hezekiah quoted R. Shime’on bar Zavdi: ‘I will try thee and I will flee thee. I will make a test with words of Torah and I will make a test with words of heresy. I will flee from words of heresy to words of Torah’.

Rabbi Phineas’ remark constitutes a double-entendre: Through subtle literary device, he is conceding that the book of Ecclesiastes abounds in statements that are anathema to the rabbinic ethos. He is also stating that his own exegesis will be transformative of the text. This is a proclamation of the rabbinic appropriation of the biblical narrative. Such proclamation is meant to negate the notion that the Book of Ecclesiastes was doctrinally obscene. This re-working of the biblical message was accomplished by the Sages with the greatest ingenuity and remains one of the more intriguing aspects of the early rabbinical literature.

Indeed, according to Suseela C. Yesudian-Storfjell, “each generation of readers possess their own horizon of expectations”; (*The Reception of Qoheleth in a Selection of Rabbinic, Patristic and Nonconformist Texts* (South Yorkshire: University of Sheffield, 2003, 4) and “the rabbis through exegesis were constructing a different reality” (ibid., p. 19). In his *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism*, Ira Chernus has demonstrated that the rabbis employed Midrash in an effort to answer popular theological, theodical and theophanic questions (*Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash*. Boston: Walter De Gruyter, Inc., 1981, 126). So then, the method of פרוש serves to conform the sacred text to rabbanite sensibilities and to apply the ancient biblical text to timely questions and current circumstances.

places - will help to enrich our understanding of various exegetical and theological issues.

The Story and Structure of The Book of Job

Foundational Information

Sefer Iyyov, The Book of Job, is located in the Masoretic Text between Proverbs and Canticles, within the final third of the Tanakh known as the Hagiographa. It is a sapiential study cast in the mold of a dramatic narrative, telling the vicissitudinous life-story of the pious and wealthy patriarch of Uz. *Sefer Iyyov* puts forth the idea that evil is a mystery of inscrutable creation. Of disputed authorship,⁶² Job is the oldest of the sacred Hebrew writings. The Hebrew employed in the book is ancient, which inclines a few traditionalist scholars to consider the idea proffered by “some,” as the Talmud puts it, that Job lived in the time of Jacob the Patriarch.⁶³

Noted for its thematic sublimity, brimming pathos, and beauty of language, The Book of Job has a mostly poetic character⁶⁴ and as such a modicum of credence must, on the other hand, be lent to the so-called “certain rabbi,” again, as the Talmud dubs him, who held that Job never existed and that the book bearing his name is merely a parable;⁶⁵ Maimonides, too, holds this view.⁶⁶ The third-to-fourth-century Palestinian rabbi Samuel bar Nahmani objects to this opinion as the vivid geocultural detail grounds the story in the real world. Samuel’s position is untenable

62. Moses is the traditional author of *Sefer Iyyov*. See BT *Bava Batra* 15a-b. The exegete Abraham ibn Ezra (about 1150 CE) declares this to be the consensus of the rabbis of the Talmud.

63. BT, *Bava Batra* 15b. The suggestion made by Joshua ben Levi (*ad locum*) that Job lived in the time of Moses is not as insupportable as his colleagues’ view that Job lived in Esther’s day or that, possibly, he was among the Babylonian exiles. This Job has been referred to as “the Babylonian Job”. (See Jastrow, Morris. 1906. “A Babylonian Parallel to the Story of Job”. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 25, No 2. Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, 135-191.)

64. The poetic body of the book spans (with the requisite narrative interpolations) from 3:1 to 42:6.

65. *ibid*, 15a

66. *The Guide for the Perplexed* III: 22, beginning.

as it completely ignores the phenomenon of fictional truth. As one philosopher writes: “Even the most sparsely described narrative requires a ‘world’ in which the protagonists act, though the features of this world may quickly shade off into indeterminacy.”⁶⁷ The third-century Palestinian rabbi Shime’on ben Laqish holds a view that nearly approximates this idea, contending that Job the man did indeed exist but that the account attributed to him is fictional.⁶⁸

The Central Message of Job⁶⁹

Once in the East in a land called Uz lived a man named Job. Job was perfect and upright; he revered God and eschewed evil.⁷⁰ This man Job was the wealthiest in his country, blessed with droves of sheep, camels, oxen and she-asses. His household was large and included many young servants whose job it was to oversee the numerous animals, to look after the grazing sheep and laden camels and to supervise the oxen and she-asses as they ploughed the rich soil in their master’s possession.⁷¹

But to Job, the most precious thing in life was his children. He was father to seven sons and three daughters,⁷² a lovely troop of boys and girls whose custom it was to make merry each night of the week in the home of a different brother. After the cycle of seven days had finished, the queue would commence yet again.⁷³ Then one day, on the day of the year when the angels have an audience with God, The Satan, the Divinely sanctioned prosecutor whose job it is to hinder

67. Currie, Gregory. Sep., 1986. “Fictional Truth” In *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 50, No. 2. Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 195-212.

68. Genesis Rabbah § 57

69. What immediately follows is our paraphrase of the story of Job. We occasionally employ the rabbinic interpretation.

70. Jb. 1:1

71. *ibid.*, v. 3

72. *ibid.*, v. 2

73. *ibid.*, verses 4-5

the sons of men,⁷⁴ thereby gauging the true measure of their righteousness, approached the Holy One, Blessed Be He.⁷⁵ God asks: *Hast thou given thought to My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man who reveres Me and escheweth evil?*⁷⁶

Does he revere Thee for nought? asks The Satan. *Hast Thou not encased him in a protective force field, blessing him over all other men?* God furrows His brow as the prosecutor continues. *But put forth Thy hand, o God, blighting all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.*⁷⁷ And so, having had His chief ambassador on Earth impugned, God allows The Satan to put Job through every trial save for death.⁷⁸ The text relates that a gang of marauding Sabeans⁷⁹ comes and slays Job's young servants by the edge of the sword.⁸⁰ A fire descends from the sky and consumes the sheep along with their shepherds.⁸¹ Three bands of Chaldeans seize the camels and kill off their drivers.⁸² Worst of all, while Job's children are happily enjoying one of their nightly soirées, a great wind comes from the wilderness and smites the four corners of the house, which caves in on them and crushes them to death.⁸³

Job arises, rents his mantle, and shaves his head. Fallen to the ground, he worships God, moaning: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked shall I return to the earth. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* Starting with the outer trappings of his person, the man from Uz began to set his focus *ad hominem*, on the welfare of his inner life, aiming to retain his integrity and uphold his faith in God.⁸⁴

74. The word אָוֵן means "hindrance" or "adversary". See II Sam. 19:23 and I Kgs. 11:14.

75. *ibid.*, verses 6-7

76. *ibid.*, v. 8

77. *ibid.*, verses 9-11

78. *ibid.*, v. 12

79. descendants of Sheba, a Joktanite Arab (see Joel 3:8)

80. *ibid.*, v. 15

81. *ibid.*, v. 16

82. *ibid.*, v. 17

83. *ibid.*, verses 18-19

84. *ibid.*, verses 20-22

And so, defeated by Job, a dejected Satan returns to the Presence of God:

Skin for skin! he cries.⁸⁵ It is human nature that one takes every protective measure to avoid death. Job has accepted his afflictions with good cheer because he thinks a reverent attitude will move Thee to spare his life.⁸⁶ But put forth Thine hand and touch his bone and flesh and he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.⁸⁷

Again God allows The Satan to put Job through every trial save for death.⁸⁸ The prosecutor then smites him with a painful, smoldering rash that reduces the once great man to an inflamed mass of pus-filled boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head. Pathetically, Job obtains a potsherd to scratch the burning itch and takes his seat upon the ash heap.⁸⁹

Though his wife urges him to thank God for his past blessings and then to give up the ghost,⁹⁰ Job holds fast to his integrity, stating: *Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?*⁹¹ Though he will eventually voice his deep resentment of God's curse, he refuses to commit the supreme sacrilege of suicide, for the body houses the Spirit of God, the breath of the Almighty.⁹²

And now come the comforters, or rather, the defenders of God. Eliphaz or "God is His Strength" characteristically argues in Heaven's behalf and refuses to allow Job to revel in the sanctity of martyrdom. *Remember*, he admonishes. *Who ever perished, being innocent? Where*

85. *ibid.*, 2:1-4, so Rashi: כן דרך בני אדם כשרואה החרב באה על ראשו מנין בזרועו לפניו

86. *ibid.*, 2:4, so *Metzudat David*: וכאומר הנה איוב יחשוב פן נגזר עליי המיתה ונאבד כל אשר לו תמורת נפשו ויעמוד חי ולזה - *Metzudat David* ("Fortress of David") and *Metzudat Tziyyon* ("Fortress of Zion") are classic commentaries to the *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") and the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") written in the main by R. David Altschuler of Prague (1687—1769) and completed by his son R. Yehi'el Hillel Altschuler. Based largely upon the exegesis of Maimonidean rabbi and grammarian R. David Kimchi of France (1160–1235), the *Metzudat David* is a macro-level commentary, interpreting the meaning of the verse, while the *Metzudat Tziyyon* operates at the micro-level, explaining individual words.

87. *ibid.*, v, 5

88. *ibid.*, v, 6

89. *ibid.*, verses 7-8

90. *ibid.*, v. 9. So according to John (Yohanan) Bloch in his brief exegetical work *Ketonet Passim* or *Many-colored Tunic* (London, 1928, pp. 53-54). We shall explore another of Bloch's insights on *The Book of Job* later in this study.

91. *ibid.*, v, 10

92. *ibid.*, 32:8

*were the upright cut off?*⁹³

Bildad or “Son of Strife” is equally true to his name. Job’s insistence upon his own righteousness grates on Bildad and has brings about a fissure, indeed a theological disconnect, between the two men. *Thy utterances are but a mighty wind. Doth God pervert judgment?* he asks. *Doth the Almighty pervert justice? If thy children sinned against Him, He delivered them into the hand of their transgression.*⁹⁴

Zophar, the “Little Sparrow,” chirps and tweets, at first repeating the words of Eliphaz and Bildad but then shocking everyone with his cruel originality, saying *Know that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*⁹⁵ Alas, the sparrow has become a vulture, a heartless prosecutor of the afflicted. *So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.*⁹⁶

Enter Elihu, boy defender of God. His name aptly means “God is His,” which makes sense as he is previous enough to assume ownership of Divine truth and to question the wisdom of the great man from Uz. Elihu remarks, *Job openeth his mouth in vanity; he multiplieth words without knowledge.*⁹⁷ A possible personification of God, Elihu here prefigures the Divine censure *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?*⁹⁸ In his youthful zeal, Elihu becomes infuriated by Job for having vindicated himself rather than God. Finally, Job lets loose: *Why hast Thou set me as a mark for Thee?*⁹⁹

Job has touched the live nerve. Enraged by his want of an answer, an irate God lashes out in a

93. *ibid.* 4:7

94. *ibid.* 8:2-4

95. *ibid.* 11:6

96. *ibid.* 32:1

97. *ibid.* 35:16

98. 32:2

99. *ibid.* 7:20

thunderstorm and answers His servant from the eye of the fearsome gale:

*Who is this that, confused and without knowledge, presumes to speak words of counsel?!¹⁰⁰
Declare, if thou hast the understanding!¹⁰¹ Canst thou bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose
the bands of Orion?¹⁰² Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?!¹⁰³ Who set the
corner-stone thereof, when the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for
joy?!¹⁰⁴ Wilt thou dare to make void My judgment? Wilt thou condemn Me, that thou mayest be
justified? Hast thou power like Me? Canst thou, a feeble maggot,¹⁰⁵ thunder with My voice? Try
to deck thyself now with majesty and excellency, and array thyself with glory and beauty as
thou, even thou, doest such wonders!¹⁰⁶*

Job falls to the ground,¹⁰⁷ awed by the Divine effluence.¹⁰⁸ He proclaims God's omnipotence¹⁰⁹ as well as his own disgrace¹¹⁰ and ignorance.¹¹¹ God rebukes all of Job's friends save for young Elihu for misrepresenting His ways¹¹² and restores, nay doubles, his previous wealth.¹¹³ Job's wife gives birth to ten new children,¹¹⁴ naming his firstborn daughter Jemima or "Dove," the second, Kezia or "Cassia,"¹¹⁵ the third, Keren-happuch or "Ray of Beauty".¹¹⁶ *And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.*¹¹⁷ After this Job lived a hundred-and-forty years, seeing his great-great

100. *ibid.* So our rendering.

101. *ibid.*, v. 4

102. *ibid.*, v. 31

103. *ibid.*, v. 4

104. *ibid.*, verses 6-7

105. 25:6

106. 40:8-10. We have rendered v. 10 according to the interpretation of the *Metzudat David*: כאומר נסה עתה לכהון הדבר וקשומ עצמך בגאון ובגובה והלבש עצמך בהודר והדר לעשות מעשים נפלאים.

107. Implied by Jb. 42:2

108. *ibid.*, 40:4-5

109. 42:2

110. 40:4 Targ. **הא אַיְדִלְזִלִית**

111. *ibid.*, v. 3

112. 42:7. It could be argued that such an act of misrepresenting the Divine is the intended meaning of the Third Commandment. See Ex. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11 where the usage **שאת לשיא** denotes "to carry maladroitly," the connotation of which is "to misserve".

113. *ibid.*, verses 10 and 12 (cf. v. 12 with 1:3)

114. 42:13

115. "Chinese cinnamon" in modern parlance

116. 42:14

117. v. 15. Job prevented contention from arising upon his death by distributing the inheritance whilst alive.

Compare this to the unfair distribution of Abraham's inheritance. Sarah demanded that Ishmael, Abraham's son by his handmaiden Hagar, not share in Isaac's inheritance. Abraham heeds his wife's demand and casts young

grandchildren.¹¹⁸ So Job died, being old and full of glorious and joyous days.¹¹⁹

Job is introduced as a pietist who propitiates an at-times malevolent God.¹²⁰ Yet his true nature comes to the fore when confronted by insurmountable loss. There upon a smoldering heap of ash, covered with sores and chided by Heaven's silence,¹²¹ a new man emerges, unbound by programmatic religiosity and divested of neurotic ritualism. It is this "Natural Job"¹²² who will seek to renounce the faith of the "Antebellum Job".¹²³ For despite God's confidence in his servant's indestructible faith,¹²⁴ Job succumbed to his own humanity in the end. He rues the day he had been born¹²⁵ and states that he had always feared that the proverbial axe would eventually fall.¹²⁶

When the favor of the Lord is removed, hope wanders and goodness fades into the night.¹²⁷ In the absence of a caring God,¹²⁸ so we are taught, a state of enmity ensues between man and the Divine.¹²⁹ Along the way, Job oscillates between belief and doubt. On the one hand, he desires to preserve a faith that, though repudiated by the cruel tragedies visited upon him,¹³⁰ remains nevertheless a cradle of comfort.¹³¹ On the other hand, Job wishes to inform God of His

Ishmael and his mother out into the wilderness where they almost die of starvation. That Ishmael was disinherited is confirmed when God later commands Abraham to take his "only son" Isaac (Gen. 22: 2, 12, and 16).

118. v. 16

119. v. 17 So the ibn Ezra: *שהיו ימיו בכבוד ובשמחה*

120. In chapter one, verse five, Job offers a sacrifice unto God for each of his sons, reasoning: *It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.*

121. 19:7, 23:8

122. Being the Job from chapter three of the book which bears his name, thru chapter forty-two.

123. Being the Job of chapters one and two. The "Natural Job" and the "Antebellum Job" are our terms.

124. 1:8 and 2:3

125. 3:3-13

126. *ibidem*, verses 25 and 26.

127. 7:4,13,14

128. In fact it could be proffered that God's consignment of His role to that of observer does not in and of itself demonstrate a lack of care.

129. 13:24 *Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and holdest me for Thine enemy?*

130. 9:17, 16:12

131. 23:11 *My foot hath held His steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*; 28:28 *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

cruelty.¹³² But in the finale of the book Job surrenders his doubts to the unknowability of the Divine.¹³³ Even before the felicitous final chapter we already see glimpses of Job's eventual victory over faithlessness. These glimpses are actually disconnected professions of faith and appear, as it were, like limbs breaking out of a cocoon one at a time:

*God is greater than man,*¹³⁴

Far be it from the Almighty to do wickedness, and from the Lord of the Mountains to commit iniquity".¹³⁵

*Lo! God is mighty,*¹³⁶

and despiseth not any: He is mighty in strength of heart".¹³⁷

These prefigurations of Job's spiritual victory are also a door to understanding. We bear witness to Job's incremental realization about the mystery of human existence.

Job overcomes his doubts, or at least sublimates them, and rebuilds his life, fathering ten more children¹³⁸ and achieving twice the prosperity he had attained before the great calamity.¹³⁹

Goodness thus prevails irrespective of reward, for Job had found his God¹⁴⁰ in the midst of

132. 32:20 *I will speak, that I may be relieved; I will open my lips and answer.* 30:21 *Thou art become cruel to me; with Thy strong hand Thou opposest me.*

133. 42:3 *I have therefore uttered that which I did not comprehend; things too wonderful for me which I could not have known.*

134. 33:12

135. 34:10

136. Rashi: "in wisdom and mercy".

137. 36:5. Rashi: *He is mighty in strength of heart*: "to take revenge. Therefore, He will not allow a wicked man to live."

138. 42:13

139. cf. 1:3 and 42:12

140. 42:2. *I know that Thou canst do every thing, and that no purpose can be withholden from Thee.* Sa'adia Ga'on holds this verse to be illustrative of God's omnipotence. See Sa'adia's *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, p. 95.

Born Sa'id ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi in 892, he was a native of Fayum (Pithom) in Upper Egypt. Hebraizing his name to סעדיה or "Aid of God," Sa'adia proved himself worthy of that title to his fellow Rabbinites whose champion he became. The period of the Ge'onim (589 CE—1038 CE) reaches its zenith with his life.

Without Sa'adia, the world would not have a Maimonides two centuries later. Indeed, Sa'adia's memory was probably superior to that of the Rambam for it is said that, possessing total recall, he could tell the exact number of times a Hebrew word occurred in the Tanakh. It is no wonder, then, that Sa'adia wrote the world's first Hebrew dictionary, the *Egron* ("Lexicon"), at the age of twenty. Three years later, he penned a scholarly criticism of Anan, leader of the Karaite sect of Scripturalist Jews.

Moving to Palestine, the young genius took a decisive role in the calendar dispute that was destabilizing Jewish communities around the globe for authorities differed as to when the festivals fall out. A rising star in the rabbinic world, Sa'adia wrote *Sefer ha-Mo'adim*, "Book of the Festivals," to clarify these matters. It was probably also at this time when he wrote his commentary to *Sefer Yetzira*, "The Book of Formation," the oldest work of Jewish

Divinely sanctioned destruction¹⁴¹ and abject terror,¹⁴² with no expectation of the emoluments of Heaven. It is therefore *Job's* faith that triumphs in the end, and not by virtue of God's restoration of his life.¹⁴³ For the latter must be seen as a fitting crown placed upon the head of one who, despite having lost the symbols of life, had refused to quell the yearnings of his soul.

Various Issues Explored

Was Job Truly Righteous?

Job had always placed the highest premium on the observance of some form of Divine law, as

mysticism.

Moving to Babylonia, then the epicenter of Jewish learning, David ben Zakkai, the *Resh Galuta* or “exilarch,” political leader of the Jews descended from Jehoiachin, king of Judah, appointed the young Egyptian scholar *Ga'on*, Glorious Pride, of Sura, a city east of the Euphrates. The yeshiva at Sura had once been the most prestigious in the world but its power and influence were on the wane for several generations and its competitor, the yeshiva at Pumbedita, rose to preeminence. With Sa'adia now at the helm, Sura soon returned to her former glory. The greatest scholars from hither and yon made their home at Sura, learning at the feet of the Sa'adia, who seems to have been a commanding and magnetic personality.

Author of the first Hebrew dictionary, Sa'adia was a pioneer in many other fields as well. He was the first to write monographs on Halakhic (legal) subjects in lyrical, flowing Hebrew. He wrote the first Judæo-Arabic translation of the Tanakh as well as a learned commentary. His extant work covers about half the Bible. When on account of his uncompromising nature the *Resh Galuta* dismissed him from office, each excommunicated the other. For the next few years, Sa'adia spent his free time writing *Kitab al-amanat wa-al-i atiqadat*, (“The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,” Heb. *Sefer ha-Emunot ve-ha-De'ot*). The initial draft completed in 933, this great work was the first book of Jewish philosophy written since Philo of Alexandria had penned his metaphorical commentary on the Bible in the first century CE. An avowed rationalist, Sa'adia held that the miracles described in Scripture must be understood in a natural, and not supernatural, way. He held the doctrine of reincarnation to be inimical and alien to the Faith of Israel.

Sa'adia's tripartite division of his great book of philosophy, the clearness and directness of his language, and the linearity of his thought were major, though still overlooked, influences on Maimonides. An outstanding poet, Sa'adia published his own *siddur*, prayer book, containing many of his original hymns. Aside from *Tafsir al-Sab'ina Laftzah*, a study on the Hebrew and Aramaic *hapax legomena* that occur in Scripture, he wrote little in or about the latter tongue, perhaps indicating a less than favorable opinion of that unwieldy jargon. Of course, Sa'adia authored many legal responsa and polemical works.

Upon the fallout between Sa'adia and David, the latter's sycophants accused the *Ga'on* of everything from gentile ancestry to pederasty. Sa'adia would only answer ideological or procedural accusations. A sober man of wisdom, he never responded to *ad hominem* attacks. Still, the calumnies on his character wounded him deeply and he fell into a depression from which he would never emerge. Sa'adia and the exilarch were eventually reconciled. Reinstated in his office, the most famous of the Babylonian *Ge'onim* held it for only five more years. He died in 942 at the age of sixty, a victim to melancholia.

141. 1:12 and 2:6

142. The terror had been brought upon by God's Speech in chapters 38 thru 41.

143. 42:12,13,16,17

the verse states: *My foot hath held fast to His steps, His way have I kept, and turned not aside. I have not gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured up the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.*¹⁴⁴ In other words, the carrying out of God's will had always been at the top of Job's considerations. In God's Speech,¹⁴⁵ this is not contradicted. Perhaps Job had been deemed *a perfect and upright man*¹⁴⁶ by virtue of this fact.

The Purpose of The Book of Job

According to Greg Boyd, "The point of The Book of Job is to teach us that the mystery of evil is a mystery of a war-torn and unfathomably complex creation, not the mystery of God's all-controlling will."¹⁴⁷ We agree with Boyd's contention. In his article entitled "The Message and Purpose of Job,"¹⁴⁸ Baptist Old Testament scholar E. Ray Clendenen makes the following point: "...Job never knew the rest of the story. He never knew about the conversation between God and Satan in the prologue. The story of Job is bigger than the story of Job's experience. The message and purpose of The Book of Job must include the whole book: the prologue, dialogues, and epilogue. It must mean more than what Job learned, although that must be included."¹⁴⁹

This larger view that the reader gleans from The Book of Job includes the following truths:

- God has sovereignty over the actions of The Satan, who cannot bring ruin upon Job without

144. 23:11

145. chs. 38 thru 41

146. 38.1:8 and 2:3

147. See <http://reknew.org/2008/01/the-point-of-the-book-of-job/>

148. See http://www.academia.edu/1926526/Message_and_Purpose_of_Job

149. As Clendenen points out, the message of *The Book of Job* had been obfuscated by the Church Fathers:

"Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), relying solely on the prologue, saw the message of Job in his self-denial and perseverance under trials, which should be imitated by those struggling with the devil. On the other hand, Jerome (ca. 347–419) saw the book's message in Job's testimonies to his faith in the coming Redeemer (e.g., 19:23–27) and in the resurrection (19:25–27)." See Clendenen, E. Ray. "The Message and Purpose of The Book of Job," *Biblical Illustrator* 39.4 (2013): 22–25.

Divine consent.¹⁵⁰

- It is beyond our human ability to understand the Divine wisdom which impels the suffering of the innocent.¹⁵¹
- The wicked will be punished.¹⁵²
- Suffering is not always the result of wayward conduct.¹⁵³
- Suffering can be a purifying agent.¹⁵⁴
- God always deserves praise and glory, man's suffering notwithstanding.¹⁵⁵

Job, His Wife, Suffering and Sufferers

Despite the loss of his children, his wealth and his very home, the twenty-first verse of chapter one depicts a Job whose faith in God is undiminished: *And he said; naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.* When Job took a potsherd to scrape what seems to have been an eczematous ailment brought on by the extreme stress of his loss,¹⁵⁶ his wife was finally exasperated and said: *“Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Just curse God and die!”*

Perhaps it was the visual of a formerly renowned man of honor and enterprise like Job now

150. *ibid.* 1:12; 2:6

151. 38:1-2; 42:3

152. 21:17-18

153. 16:16-17. Cf. Eccl. 7:15 in which the Preacher, i.e. Solomon, bemoans the fact that the righteous do not always prosper, nor do the wicked always suffer: *All things have I seen in the days of my vanity; there is a righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his evil-doing.* Yet the rabbinic *Birkat ha-Mazon*, “The Grace After Meals,” closes with two verses ascribed to King David, which declare the righteous individual and nation unforsaken: *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless his people with peace* (Ps. 37:25 and 29:10). In Rabbinism, a socio-religious culture that matured in exile, pessimism was ironically never allowed to take hold as conventional dogma.

154. Jb. 5:17

155. 13:15

156. Chapter two, verse eight. See the October 13, 2003 edition of the *Daily Mail*, which states: “... eczema can definitely be triggered by stress”.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-199512/Can-stress-trigger-eczema.html>

tending pathetically to an inflammatory skin itch that brought on the pity of his wife. Yet, it is not clear whether by the words בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים (meaning literally “bless thou God”) the wife was speaking in euphemism and sought to convey that Job should drop his pious pretenses and finally upbraid his Maker for having cursed him with so severe a loss, or if she meant that he should in fact recite the pre-mortem confessional and give up the ghost. We don’t know for certain if the former or latter connotation was intended by Job’s wife. But it is true that in chapter one, verse five, Job says אִלְמָוִי הָמָאֵו בְּנֵי וּבְרָכּוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלִבָּבָם meaning *It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts*, which proves that such usage was indeed euphemistic in his day. The term בְּרַבַּת אֱלֹהִים continued to serve as a euphemism for “blasphemy” in Talmudic times.¹⁵⁷

Although God rebukes Job¹⁵⁸ as well as his friends,¹⁵⁹ we do not read of any Divine censure of Job’s wife.¹⁶⁰ This astounding fact had been overlooked by Augustine of Hippo¹⁶¹ who called Job’s wife “the devil’s accomplice” and John Calvin¹⁶² who labelled her “a diabolical fury”. According to Daniel Darling in his article “The Most Misunderstood Woman in the Bible,”¹⁶³ God may have excused the impropriety of Job’s wife on account of her excruciating pain. For she had witnessed the death of her children, the disappearance of her earthly comforts and the

157. בְּרַבַּת הַשֵּׁם became a euphemism in rabbinic Hebrew for “blasphemy”. See BT *Sanhedrin* 56a and *Tosefta, Avoda Zara* 6:9. Some exegetes, however, understand the words of Job’s wife בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים in the literal sense, i.e., “Bless God”.

158. See chs. 38 through 41.

159. 42:7-9

160. This lends support to those exegetes who understand the words of Job’s wife בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים in the literal sense i.e. *Bless God*.

161. 354–430. Algerian Christian theologian and Church Father. Some of Augustine’s thoughts on The Book of Job are presented in the introduction to Nahum N. Glatzer’s *The Dimensions of Job* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1968).

162. 1509–1564. influential French preacher, theologian and Protestant reformer. The Joban “Sermon 147” of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is presented in excerpts by Glatzer.

163. <http://www.todaychristianwoman.com/articles/2011/may/mostmisunderstood.html?start=1>

physical and emotional deterioration of her husband for whom she had likely become caretaker.¹⁶⁴ As Darling writes: “All we know of God's treatment of Job's wife is how he blessed her after the trial was over. She shared in the doubling of their landed wealth (Job 42:10).¹⁶⁵ She had the privilege of giving birth to ten more children, whom the Scriptures declared the most beautiful in all of the land (Job 42:12-15). And it's likely she shared in the many more fruitful years of her husband's life. The Scriptures say that Job lived long enough to see four generations of his offspring (Job 42:16).”¹⁶⁶

We find it unlikely that Job's wife might have instead opted to tell her husband to take his own life. For in chapter two, verse ten, Job states answers his wife's exasperation: *You are now speaking like one of the foolish women*. In other words, Job's wife was normally a woman of faith. This must have been the case, for how else could Job's household have been so tight-knit, tranquil and God-centered?¹⁶⁷ Her words in 2:9, Job now implies, were but an aberration. We do not think Job ever seriously considered suicide, perhaps because such a faithless act might in its aftermath be seen as having justified God's execration, condemned by Job throughout as unjust. Even when Job says *My soul is weary of my life*,¹⁶⁸ he means to say that he abhors what his life has become, and not that he intends to bring on death of his own volition.

164. We do not consider Job's ensuing oscillations between faith and doubt to bespeak a deep-seated instability. Rather, they are the manifestation of insanity, brought on by a most painful loss.

165. Isa. 61:7 states: לָבֵן בְּאַרְצָם כְּמִשְׁנֵה יִרְשׁוּ - *therefore in their land they shall possess double*. See Anat, Moshe A. and Gevanyahu, Haim M.I. *Tanakh la-Am: The People's Bible*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers Ltd., 1974. Volume *Ketuvim Alef*, p. 886.

166. Four generations is symbolic in the Tanakh of a personage's futurity. See Ex. 20:5 and 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; and Deut. 5:9.

167. See Jb. ch. 1.

168. *ibid.* 10:1 נִקְמָה נַפְשִׁי בְּחַיִּי - See Sreberk, Shlomo. *Miqra Meforash*. Tel Aviv: Shlomo Sreberk Publishing House Ltd. and Maariv, 1955. On the aforementioned phrase, inadequately rendered by Rashi, Ramban and others as “my soul quarrels [within me],” Sreberk writes מִשׁוּרֵשׁ נִקְמָה - “Deriving from the root נִקְמָה meaning ‘to feel loathing’, נַפְשִׁי מֵאֲסֵה, קִצָּה בַחַיִּי, וְלִבִּי אֲנִי יִרָא עוֹד, וּבִכְן אֶתֵּן חוֹפֵשׁ לְתִלְוֹנָתִי בַמְרִירוֹת נַפְשִׁי, - my soul despises, [indeed] is disgusted by, my life, which makes me yet afraid. And so, [spurred on] by the bitterness of my soul, I shall give freedom unto my plaint.”

Job himself tells us why he has belabored his objections to Heaven: he needs to release his pent-up anger and frustration. As it is written: *Let me speak that I may be at ease.*¹⁶⁹ This most natural reaction to great suffering serves, to our mind, to deflate Job, Olympian champion of God's justice, and finally to humanize him. This is the relatable Job. It is by virtue of this statement, so honest and yet so illusive (for it is spoken *quasi praeteriens*), that the competing theologies of Job and his friends lose their force. For while Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and the young Elihu had been motivated in their objections to Job's words by religious zeal, he was prompted to speak by the pain of his very soul. In the fervor of their faith, Job's friends were made oblivious to his basic human need to literally "speak his peace".

God's Blessing to Job at the End of the Story

In the forty-second chapter of the book, God restores Job's wealth, providing him with double the amount of his former riches,¹⁷⁰ a sign of his chosenness as firstborn of God.¹⁷¹ He gives Job seven sons and three daughters,¹⁷² being the number and configuration of his deceased children.¹⁷³ Job's new daughters are described as fairest in the land.¹⁷⁴ This latter description may be the author's tribute to Job's wife, who in spite of her oft-misunderstood statement in 2:9, is then consigned by the book to silent resignation, so noble and yet so unnoticed, even as her husband takes to flights of fury and impatience. Would that John Chrysostom¹⁷⁵ had spoken of "the piety of Job's wife" rather than "the piety of Job."¹⁷⁶ He might then have made some sense.

169. *ibid.* 32:20

170. 42:10,12

171. See notes 338 and 339.

172. *ibid.*, v. 13.

173. *ibid.* 1:2

174. *ibid.* 42:15 *And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job.*

175. *circa* 347–407. A Greco-Syrian by birth, this anti-Semitic Church Father with an ascetic bent served as archbishop of Constantinople.

176. St. John Chrysostom: *Commentary on the Sages: Commentary on Job*. Translated by Robert Charles Hill.

While we were at first displeased with the neat resolution to Job's agony that chapter forty-two provides, we have come to understand that the book is essentially a story intended to be narrated i.e. that the book needs to *end* like a story. An emaciated, defeated Job falling lifeless into the dust and the crazed suicide of his beset wife would not have provided the reader with a satisfying denouement. In fact, such an ending would have rendered the many profound truths so sublimely stated throughout the book pointless, implying that only misery follows misery. With such a final impression, how might the reader (or listener) have internalized the grand majesty of God's Speech? Would not the theological sparring between Job, his friends and Elihu have lost their power in the wake of the final fall of the protagonist? The book resolves on a happy tone because it is only with a serene heart that the reader will yield to the Divine justice, so transcendent, otherly and incomprehensible, and so clearly the central theme of the book.

The Names of Job's Friends

אֱלִיפַז means "God his strength"¹⁷⁷ and the name portends its bearer as one who will argue in God's behalf.

בִּלְדָד means "son of strife" and seems to have been chosen by the author to indicate that Job's obstinacy and belligerence have brought about a fissure, indeed a theological disconnect, between himself and his three friends.

צִפּוֹרִי means "little bird" in Hebrew, by which the author sought to intimate that this character's words will essentially be a kind of patter, a chirping repetition of what has already been stated

Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007.
Chrysostom's *On Adam and Job*.

177. This and the ensuing name definitions are based upon James P. Boyd's *The Self-Pronouncing Bible Dictionary*. Framington, MA: Ottenheimer Publishers, Inc., 1958.

by Eliphaz and Bildad. That is not to say that Zophar’s speech wants for originality, but the reader must first mine through the predictable, the trite.

Although not considered to be part of Job’s inner social circle, Elihu also deserves our attention at this point as his name bears a didactic meaning no less intriguing than the connotations of the names of “the three friends”. For the name אֱלִיהוּ means “God is his” and connotes its bearer as one who has assumed ownership of the Divine truth. That Elihu is referred to as בֶּן־בְּרַכְיָאֵל הַבּוֹיֵי, literally, as “son of the blasphemer, the plunderer”¹⁷⁸ is no accident and is probably the Author’s method of condemning one who in his youthful zeal had voiced a conventional theology that is off-the-mark. (We shall suggest the nature of his errancy later in this study.) We are told that Elihu came from מִשִּׁפְּהַת־רָם, literally “the exalted family”. Here the author’s intent is to depict Job’s young antagonist as brazen and to the manner born.

The Modus Operandi of Job and His Book

Job had been afraid that his lifestyle was too good and that something malevolent could occur. And so he took action. In chapter one, verse five, Job offers up precautionary sacrifices to God, one burnt offering for each of his sons, in case they had “sinned and blasphemed God in their hearts”. It may be that in so doing Job expresses the fear that but for the placative sacrifices a loving God would turn into a vindictive, capricious Hera. Or perhaps he knew the character of his children. Here is the verse:

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said: 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and blasphemed God in their hearts.'
Thus did Job continually.

178. Jb. 32:2

In his work *Dieses Volk: Jüdische Existenz*, Leo Baeck¹⁷⁹ states his belief that The Book of Job culminates in the twenty-eighth chapter. As Matthew Henry¹⁸⁰ writes: “The strain of this chapter is very unlike the rest of this book. Job forgets his sores, and all his sorrows, and talks like a philosopher or a virtuoso. There is a great deal both of natural and moral philosophy in this discourse...”¹⁸¹ Henry has it right unlike Ernest Renan¹⁸² who reveals his ignorance by calling this chapter’s *Ode to Wisdom* “pompous”. He understands that this chapter’s break with the dialectical conventions of the book must hold some significance. Indeed, we feel chapter twenty-eight constitutes a subliminal underpinning to the plot of suffering, faith, doubt, theological debate. *הַכְּמָה* - “wisdom,” or more accurately *הַתְּכֻמָּה*¹⁸³ - “the divinity and otherness of wisdom” - is the theme of this chapter and must needs constitute the major message of The Book of Job.

Our great book’s ultimate answer to Job, and by extension to every doubting Thomas, is that *wisdom is not found in the land of the living*.¹⁸⁴ That statement is the apogee of *Sefer Iyyov*. Only *God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof*.¹⁸⁵ It now becomes clear why the author felt the need to wax florid about the value of Wisdom.¹⁸⁶ The most Man can hope for is to fear God and refrain from wickedness. These two acts comprise but *a replica of wisdom* that has fallen to humanity, as the chapter concludes: *And unto man He said: 'Behold, the fear of*

179. 1873—1956. Representative of the liberal German school of Judaism that combined rigorous scholarship with humanistic values, Baeck was one of the very few rabbis to have survived the Holocaust. His thoughts on The Book of Job are presented on pages 51 to 56 of Glatzer’s book.

180. 1662—1714. Henry was a Presbyterian minister and Bible exegete. Matthew’s thoughts on Job are included in his six-volume *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

181. See Jb., ch. 28 in Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Box Una edition, 2009.

182. 1823—1892. Renan was a French historian of religion and orientalist.

183. Jb. 28:12

184. *ibid.*, v. 13: *וְלֹא תִמְצָא בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים*

185. *ibid.* v. 23

186. *ibid.*, principally verses 1 thru 11, 13 thru 19, 21 and 22. The imagery bears a resemblance to Solomon’s odes to wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”¹⁸⁷ When, in the finale of the book, Job surrenders his doubts to the unknowability of the Divine,¹⁸⁸ he is paying inevitable heed to the message of chapter twenty-eight. Thus does that section serve as a very important plot point.

God’s Message to Job and its Tenability

The Divine message appears in chapters thirty-eight thru forty-one, a subsection of the book which has come to be known as “God’s Speech”. Though this heavenly monologue seems to be the dramatic highlight of the book, it disappoints on a didactic level. For the Great Theophany, God’s thunderous response to Job,¹⁸⁹ fails to provide a reason for his suffering. For what is it but the dreadful voice of the Lord lashing out at His creation who has dared to question the Divine justice? G-d’s want of a rationale for Job’s treatment may be a sign of His embarrassment at the ordeal. As a result of the Speech, Job is forced into submission - but he is not illuminated, at least not intellectually. As Hayyim Greenberg wrote, “God’s voice from the storm explained nothing to Job - it merely expanded the area of his not knowing and not understanding; it opened before him unlimited horizons of the inconceivable and impenetrable, and deepened the mystery of existence.”¹⁹⁰ But as we stated above,¹⁹¹ to the author of Job the human experience reaches its denouement not in mental efflorescence but in humble submission to the transcendent force of

187. Jb. 28:28

188. 29.42:3 *I have therefore uttered that which I did not comprehend; things too wonderful for me which I could not have known.*

189. Abusers often lash out in a tirade of blame and contempt when they feel ashamed or perceive they are at risk of being criticized, excluded, or rejected. See Morrison, A. P. (2011). “The Psychodynamics of Shame”. In R. L. Dearing & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Shame in the Therapy Hour* (p. 23–43). American Psychological Association. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F12326-001>

190. Glatzer, p. 223

191. See our treatment of Jb. chapters 1 and 2, especially 2:10, above.

Heaven.¹⁹²

Margarete Susman and Hayyim Greenberg

As the grandson of Holocaust survivors, I was particularly drawn to Margarete Susman's work *Das Buch Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes* as well as Hayim Greenberg's article entitled *In Dust and Ashes*. For in the latter piece, Greenberg, Russian-born Hebraist and Yiddishist, scion of a bygone Jewish milieu of which our present generation can only read and romanticize, calls for the end of ecclesiastical excuse-making. In short, he undermines the very idea of theology. Writing at the outset of the Nazi genocide, Greenberg presents a binary question to the reader: Is God all-powerful and at the same time compassionate? If you answer in the affirmative, then there is no excuse for His silence and apathy amidst the slaughter of the innocent. If you answer in the negative, then why bother worshipping Him? As Greenberg writes: "Does He shed tears over every drop of innocent blood, yet is Himself too weak and helpless, chained by dumb necessity or subject to the chaos of accident?" Greenberg quotes Ivan Karamazoff: "There is no justification for the tear of even a single suffering child".¹⁹³

Furthermore, as must have been thought by every survivor of the concentration camps, if God has a reason for the slaughter of the innocent, then He has Himself "become a Nazi". And, the best thought included in Glatzer's book, Greenberg states:

192. The God who breaks out of Heaven and into an earthly storm in order to talk to Job is the same One who displaces and therefore transcends space by appearing in the *Merkava*, the throne-chariot, i.e., the four-wheeled vehicle ridden by God and driven by the Cherubim (see Ezek. 1). The *Merkava* was to become an object of visionary contemplation for early Jewish mystics. The pattern in Jb. 38, Ezek. 1, as well as Nah. 1:3, is that of a transcendent, not immanent, God. Yet, in I Kgs 19:11, God is not in the wind but in *a still, small voice*, i.e., housed in the conscious of the prophet Elijah.

193. Glatzer, p. 224. We note that Greenberg's views are those of a thinking, feeling human being. Further, God has said He repents of certain deeds He committed or would commit. (See Gen. 6:6-7 and 1 Sam. 15:11. See also Ex. 32:12-14; II Sam. 24:16; 1 Chr. 21:15; Ps. 106:45; Jer. 4:28; 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; and Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2.)

“In prehistoric times, God punished sinful mankind without the aid of people. The punishment came directly from heaven. Such was the Deluge, and such too was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it would seem that the forces of nature at the command of their creator is not sufficient, and in historic times the Lord of the Universe has resorted to hired gangsters, Assyria or Babylonia, Mongols or Romans; and in our own day it is Hitler. With fiery justice, God punishes the sinful at the hands of those who are a thousand-fold more sinful, and intentionally converts a great people to first-class wickedness so that they should settle His scores with second-class sinners. Seeing that God’s law of love was not sufficiently well practiced in Poland and in Scandinavia, in France and in Belgium, He transformed scores of millions of Germans into sadistic murderers and sent them to cure the other nations of their lack of love. Were a mortal king to do anything of the sort, we would regard him as an insane tyrant. But when the Lord of the Universe does this, it is necessary to put on an expression of piety and to recite a benediction.

Yes, ‘Blessed be the true judge....’”¹⁹⁴

In response to the terrifying imagery of God’s Speech, successful in silencing even the “*mighty wind*”¹⁹⁵ of Job, Hayim Greenberg calls out the motivation behind the Divine monologue, exposing it as misguided: Earthquakes and floods, wars and pogroms can and should give rise to moods of repentance and a sense of general sinfulness. But these have nothing to do with the cosmic police magistrate who doles out reward and punishment for good deeds and for transgressions. No one ever demonstrated the existence of such a God in the past, nor can it be done today.”¹⁹⁶ So much for the so-called conventional theology of Elihu.

As we have stated, Greenberg calls the very enterprise of theology into question and, of course, he uses a verse from The Book of Job to substantiate his position, or as a proof text:

Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hidden from

194. The kind of *chutzpa*, the kind of temerity, that inspired this brilliant, insightful protestation - and despite its tongue-in-cheek tone it is indeed brilliant - might in rabbinical parlance be called *עֲזוּת דְקַדוּשָׁה* - “holy temerity”. For to me, Greenberg’s Judaic learning entitles him to deem the traditional theology obsolete. Had Horace M. Kallen or H. Wheeler Robinson written these lines, I would have taken it as the greatest offense to my People and would forthwith have torn Glatzer’s anthology asunder. But the fact that these lines were penned by a *maskil* makes them acceptable. They have been expressed by a man who has spent decades deep in thought and study, a man of Hebrew letters whose very breath was diamond-tinted with the love of Israel. Still, the questions throb in my heart: Does Greenberg ignore an aware yet silent humanity? Does not the blame lie with them?

195. Jb. 8:2

196. Glatzer, p. 222

*the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. God understands the way thereof,
and He knows the place thereof.*¹⁹⁷

Perhaps God approved of Job's submission to His transcendence and unknowability and assented to his eventual bypassing of conventional notions about theodicy and theophany. In the end, so it seems, Job got it right, unlike his friends who betook to God's defense. In a comically ironic turn, we learn that their defense was repulsive to Heaven: *And the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled*¹⁹⁸ *against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of Me rightly, as did My servant Job.*¹⁹⁹ That is the point of the epoch of Job. In the end, God calls for nothing less than a defenestration of theology. This fact renders the book a dark comedy and as such Greenberg cannot be considered a heretic but rather, like Job, "a servant of God". It was when we apprehended this awesome view of Job that we finally understood what Margarete Susman meant when she referred to "the infinitely distant God". If left unsatisfied by the chilling prospects of "the Joban truth," Susman would likely tell you that God's message to the man from Uz is that "he does not understand, and that is his answer". An answer, writes novelist Herman Wouk,²⁰⁰ "that answers nothing."²⁰¹

But that is not the end of the story for, as Wouk shows, Job has beaten God. He makes obeisance to his Maker in a mix of reverence and magnanimity: "God with all His roaring has conceded Job's main point, that the missing piece is with Him! God claims only that His reason is beyond Job. That, Job is perfectly willing to admit. With the main point settled, Job humbles himself, is more than satisfied, falls on his face."²⁰² One might well picture the Joban truth as a

197. *ibid.* 28:20, 21, 23

198. Lit. *My nose has flared up*, a common usage in biblical Hebrew.

199. 42:7

200. 1915—2019

201. Wouk, Herman. *War and Remembrance*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. 2010 Kindle Edition of the original 1978 novel.

202. *ibid.*, p. 1065

tombstone on which is carved the epitaph of theodicy: “Here Lies History’s Futile Effort to Defend God”. That is, until he has spoken with Maimonides. For “the Great Eagle”²⁰³ held that Job’s sense of liberation stemmed not from his having achieved a philosophical answer to the problem of suffering, but rather in a newly acquired Stoicism that enabled him to bear his burden with a measure of coolth and impassivity.²⁰⁴

What are the practical ramifications of the Joban truth for organized religion? Susman tells us: “God must assume a new shape; it must start anew and in a new version: a version in which God is all silence and man alone speaks”.²⁰⁵ We will revisit this idea later on.

The Difference Between the Exhortations of Job’s Friends and Those of Elihu

Appearing out of nowhere, Elihu the Buzite enters the fray in chapter thirty-two and disappears five chapters later. And though he commences his discourse with humility²⁰⁶ as is meet for a young man, he eventually grates on many readers, coming across to them as a cocksure know-it-all²⁰⁷ or perhaps a parrot, mouthing what he has been told. The cruxes of Elihu’s monologue are Divine providence²⁰⁸ and positive discipline.

Similar to the opinion held by Eliphaz,²⁰⁹ Elihu states that God may decree suffering for the righteous for their own spiritual betterment:

He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous; but with kings upon the throne He setteth them for ever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; Then He declareth unto them their work, and their transgressions, that they have

203. הנשר הגדול remains an enduring Hebrew sobriquet for Maimonides. For he soars high above his contemporaries and sees the full expanse of Jewish religious literature and thought.

204. See *Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 23 and Hartman, David. *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976, p. 264, n. 55.

205. Glatzer, p. 92

206. Jb. 32:6

207. *ibid.* 33:1-3

208. Referred to in the rabbinical parlance as פרטיות השגחה or “private supervision”.

209. *Blessed is the man whom God correcteth* (Jb. 5:17)

*behaved themselves proudly. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they hearken and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.*²¹⁰

This sentiment undergirds the teaching of Rabbi Yoḥanan:

“Why was Israel compared to the olive tree? For even as the olive does not give up its oil without pressure, So does Israel not become bettered in religion except through persecution.”²¹¹

The fact that Elihu is not mentioned in the epilogue²¹² in which God expresses anger at Job's friends for having made false assumptions about the Divine leads us to suspect that “the Buzite” is in fact not a man but rather Job’s alter ego who wages a war of conscience within the mind of the protagonist. For Job continually oscillates between piety²¹³ and doubt.²¹⁴ We believe these sudden cognitive changes to be more than just mood swings. To be sure, Job’s mentality had been upset by the trauma of his loss, perhaps destroying his emotional stasis. And it is not far-fetched to suggest that in the course of his bitter mourning and internal spiritual war he developed a dissociative personality disorder. Job’s madness is that of a man split in two. God’s Speech is Job’s final and most terrifying struggle against his doubts. In the end, the storm passes, revealing the vivifying light of a new beginning.

Even before the felicitous final chapter of the book we already see glimpses of Job’s eventual victory over faithlessness. These glimpses are actually disconnected professions of faith and appear, as it were, like limbs breaking out of a membrane one at a time:

*God is greater than man,*²¹⁵ *Far be it from the Almighty to do wickedness, and from the Lord of the Mountains to commit iniquity,*²¹⁶ *Lo! God is mighty, and despiseth not any: He is mighty in strength and wisdom.*²¹⁷

210. *ibid.* 36:7-10

211. BT *Menahot* 53b

212. Jb. 42:7-10

213. See, for example, 1:21, 2:10, 9:1-14, and 13:15.

214. See, for example, 7:20-21, 9:18, 12:24, and 19:6.

215. 33:12

216. 34:10

217. 36:5

Job overcomes his doubts, or at least sublimates them, and rebuilds his life, fathering ten more children and achieving twice the prosperity he had attained before the great calamity. Elihu had served as the personification of Job's willingness to forgive the fates his loss, a move so frightfully inspired by the ghastly imagery in God's Speech. This fact explains Elihu's prefiguration of said imagery²¹⁸ as well as his prescient forecast of the theology of the Divine transcendence. This is also the reason why, in chapter forty-two, God does not castigate Elihu as He does the three friends for having proffered an erroneous theology.²¹⁹ For while Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had spoken from their individual life experience, *Elihu speaks from revelation*, as it is written: *Indeed it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Lord of the Mountains, that makes him understand.*²²⁰ This is in line with the statement in the *Ode to Wisdom*: *Whence cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding, seeing it is hid from the eyes of all the living?... God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth its place.*²²¹ Additionally, Elihu's inexperience has forced him to speak only from revelation, or at least to parrot what he has been taught. He is, after all, still a boy. Perhaps God did not wish to uproot the flower of youth.²²² It is also possible God saw in him great promise, a worth far above his peers.²²³

In the fideistic world in which Job and his compatriots live, true wisdom is not acquired through experience but revealed by Heaven. Elihu was thus privileged and as such remains

218. 36:27-33 and 37:2-18.

219. Still, it is not that Job's friends have nothing of value to say. See Rashi on Jb. 6:25: "Every expression of reproof in Job helps to clarify and verify [important theological] matters."

220. 32:8

221. 28:20, 21, 23

222. BT *Shabbat* 152a. "It was taught, R. Yossi b. Kisma said: Two (healthy young legs) are better than three (legs, one being a walking cane) and woe for the one thing that goes and does not return. What is that? Said R. H̄isda: One's youth. When R. Dimi came, he said: Youth is a crown of roses; old age is a crown of (heavy) willowrods."

223. Mishnah *Avot* 4:27. "R. Me'ir said: Look not at the flask, but at what it contains: there may be a new flask full of old wine, and an old flask that has not even new wine in it."

unassailed by God. This is the main difference between Elihu's exhortations and those of Job's friends: Theirs are wrought by pain and experience, his are revelatory. It can be said that the young upstart *from the family of Ram*²²⁴ actually represents a more perfect version of Job. Elihu is the young Job, the Job as yet untouched by the cruel realities of the natural world. In the end, Job capitulates, reinvigorating his faith; he becomes himself once again.²²⁵ Perhaps he also regains his youth. After all, he does sire another family.

Job's Initial Response to the Calamity and God's Confidence in His Faithfulness

Job's first response to the death of his children is one of absolute submission to the will of God: *Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And he said, Naked came I out of my mother's belly, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*²²⁶ It is just this kind of acceptance of fate that is lauded by the narrator as righteous: *In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*²²⁷

For a believer like Job, his initial response to the tragedies that befell him makes sense. For in the hour of his prosperity he had given all credit to Heaven. He cannot suddenly lash out at God, for to do so would only prove that his reverence of Heaven had been vapid, even a show, predicated solely on his good fortune. Job's initial submission to the whims of fortune²²⁸ is well within the framework of his inner life. It is also a psychological defense mechanism.

224. מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת רָם (32:2) can be translated as "from the kindred of God the Exalted".

225. And resuming the role of a just God, He too becomes Himself again. As Abraham asked, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do justly?* (Gen. 18:25)

226. 1:21-22

227. *ibid.*, v. 23

228. Such whims were brought about by The Satan's Heaven-sanctioned destruction of Job's family and wealth, with the permission of, and according to the parameters set by, God.

We are relieved when the rabbis inform us that this heroic exemplar of rock-solid faith in God was in fact no man at all, but rather a character in a didactic drama, serving as an example for humanity.²²⁹ The biblical text intimates the same thing, which serves to mitigate the insanity of Job's initial submissiveness: *And the Eternal said unto The Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that **there is none like him in the earth**, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*²³⁰

Of course, starting with chapter three, Job ceases to be a dumb “injustice collector”²³¹ and finally lets out his anger at his pathetic situation. It seems that despite God's confidence in his servant's indestructible faith,²³² Job succumbed to his own humanity in the end. He rues the day he had been born²³³ and states that he had always feared that a day would come when he would be stung by the cruelties of life.²³⁴ Early on in the story, we learn that God had been mistaken in His appraisal of Job's ability to tolerate torture in silence,²³⁵ and that Job had in fact never possessed a true faith²³⁶ but had rather been in the habit of making obeisance to a vindictive deity who might at any time settle the score with his all-too happy servant in Uz. The axe, says Job, had finally fallen: *For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that of which I was afraid is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; trouble finally came.*²³⁷

229. BT *Bava Batra* 16a

230. Jb. 1:8

231. This is a term used by the Austrian-born Jewish psychiatrist Dr. Edmund Bergler in his book *Counterfeit Sex: Homosexuality, Impotence and Frigidity*. New York: Grune and Stratton (1958).

232. Jb. 1:8 and 2:3

233. 3:3-13

234. *ibid.*, verses 25 and 26

235. See notes 155 and 245.

236. In his essay “God, Job and Evil,” speculative philosopher Paul Weiss (1901—2002) has it correct: “if it is simple blasphemy that is in point, there is no doubt but that God lost and Satan won, for Job blasphemed again and again, sincerely, roundly, and wholeheartedly”.

237. Jb. 3:25-26

From the monologues of Job’s three friends, from God’s Speech,²³⁸ and from statements made by the protagonist himself,²³⁹ we are to assume that God is righteous, but The Book of Job never substantiates this assumption. In fact, if we credit G.K. Chesterton’s assertion that Job was tormented “not because he was the worst of men, but because he was the best,”²⁴⁰ rather than concluding like Chesterton that “the ways of God are a mystery” and far from being “comforted by paradoxes” like Job who stated “*Though He slay me I will trust in Him,*”²⁴¹ we are left with the impression that *the god of Job is an unjust god*. Paul Weiss’ comment that “God has His own standards of goodness and does not disturb the natural order of things” is an apologist’s cop-out. Nor are we proffered any tangible proof of God’s righteousness, so lauded by Job in the first and second chapters, beyond His own self-attestation in chapters 38 thru 41. In fact, we believe that Carl Gustav Jung²⁴² had it right when he stated that, far from being a free Lord of creation, the God of Job is both amoral and inconsistent. This God envies man for something he alone possesses: “a somewhat keener consciousness”.²⁴³

That Job capitulates in the end is no proof of his concession to the law of God, to whose light he in his misery had been blinded.²⁴⁴ In the final chapter, Job admits to his ignorance²⁴⁵ and confesses God’s existence.²⁴⁶ But such professions seem more the proverbial throwing up of the

238. The latter in chapters 38 thru 41.

239. 33:12, 34:10, and 36:5

240. Chesterton (1874—936) was an apologist for Catholicism as well as a poet and social critic. He made this statement in his *Introduction to The Book of Job* (London, 1916).

241. Jb. 13:15

242. 1875-1961. Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist, trained in psychoanalysis by Dr. Sigmund Freud.

On Jung’s anti-Semitism, see Cohen, Betsy. “Jung’s Answer to Jews,” *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 56-71.

243. See Glatzer, page 45.

244. So implied in Jb. 42:5

245. Jb. 42:3 *I have uttered that which I did not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.*

246. *ibid.*, v. 5 *I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee.* According to one rabbinic understanding, Job bears witness to God’s revelation at Sinai. According to Dr. Troen, Jb. 42:1-6 says it all. Job states that he now understands what has transpired. In v. 8, God says: *My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I do not unto you aught unseemly; for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.* Job has won God’s respect and is in this wise the victor in the saga.

hands in exasperation. In point of fact, Job never actually repudiates any points of his remonstrance. Rather, it seems that Job has made the conscious determination that a life spent brooding over past misfortune would be an ultimately unconstructive one.²⁴⁷ A life spent in anger is a life wasted. Job's final words as recorded in the book are cryptic: *I therefore abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*²⁴⁸ Does Job abhor his stated ignorance and renounce his erstwhile unbelief? The context in which the above words were spoken seems to answer in the affirmative. But underlying the words is a kind of illuminative self-loathing, brought about by the ugliness of the trial he has been made to endure. Perhaps Job loathes himself because he reasons that only a scoundrel could have been thus visited by evil. Or maybe the time he had spent sitting upon the dunghill emaciated and full of sores had erased the memory of his former glory to some extent. Perhaps his trial has caused him to dismiss his *months past, his days when God preserved him*²⁴⁹ as but a fleeting moment of undeserved physical comfort. Or perchance he was paying for the earthly pleasures he had long enjoyed.²⁵⁰ Be that as it may, the end recapitulates the beginning. However, The Satan is no longer present in the story. Indeed, we are left wondering what he thinks of his failed wager with God. And he has failed. For what else could his absence indicate?

Life on a certain level is crude, random, unfair. Job has finally tasted of the sour grapes. He now knows that the natural world is no respecter of persons. And he recognizes his relationship with his Creator Who made him from dust. He therefore abhors not his own self-worth but his erstwhile ignorance,²⁵¹ though he must be proudly aware that his capacity to mitigate his

247. Implied by 42:6 (*Wherefore I abhor my words, and repent*)

248. *ibid.*

249. See 29:3.

250. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 28:5 "All who accept earthly pleasures upon themselves, are prevented (from enjoying) the pleasures of the hereafter. And all who do not accept earthly pleasures upon themselves, are given the pleasures of the hereafter."

251. a possible euphemistic meaning of *dust and ashes* (42:6)

companions' punishment at the hands of Heaven is evidence of the purity of his soul and, along with it, his innocence.

Job Considers His Friends Miserable Comforters

Chapter sixteen opens with Job's statement that his three friends have thus far been inept comforters: *And Job answered (Eliphaz) and said: I've had to hear such things: Ye are all miserable comforters.* Rather than speak words of consolation to their beset friend, the three friends choose instead to insult him: Straightaway, Bildad refers to Job's cries as רִיחַ כְּבִיר, a *mighty wind*,²⁵² hot air that, though roaring in a noisy gust, passes and is soon forgotten. Job's speeches may sound a loud chord, but the notes are dissonant; he knows not what he says. Accusing Job's children of having brought God's mortal judgement on their heads by their own sin,²⁵³ Bildad gives new meaning to the word "insufferable".

And, amidst pious pronouncements about God's unsearchable nature,²⁵⁴ Zophar the Naamathite states what seems to our mind to constitute the vilest and most asinine response a man could give to his suffering neighbor's cry for solace: *Just know that God exacts of you less than your iniquity (deserves).*²⁵⁵ The Targum *ad locum* is just as powerful: וְדַע אֲרוֹם אֲנָשִׁי לֶךְ אֱלֹהִים מֵעוֹיֵד: - "And know that God causes you to forget your guilt". In their religious fervor, Job's otherwise astute friends blind themselves to his pain and make themselves deaf to his cries for relief: *Let Him take His rod away from me, and let not His fear terrify me!*²⁵⁶

Sadly, we learn that the suffering man from Uz was ignored not only by Heaven but by his

252. *ibid.* 8:2

253. *ibid.* v. 4

254. 11:7-10

255. *ibid.* v. 6

256. 9:34

friends as well. Unable to see the forest for the trees, they take to God's defense but render themselves small men, and with a zeal worthy of the medieval inquisitors, argue over fine points of theology. No wonder Job finally implores them to stop talking altogether: *Hold your peace!*²⁵⁷

But was Job truly ignored by Heaven? The Talmud teaches: "He who judges his neighbor in the scale of merit is himself judged favorably."²⁵⁸ If the prophet Micah is right and God wishes Man to love mercy,²⁵⁹ then by their actions, Job's friends fell short. Perhaps He later rebukes them²⁶⁰ for this sin.

We have already shown that, above all, Job needs to release his repressed anger and frustration, as it is written: *Let me speak that I may be at ease.*²⁶¹ Yet, Job's friends remain oblivious to his very human need to voice his anger and frustrations, for they are too caught up in their small and pious objections to his statements to be sensitive to his human need for unconditional love. And while Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are motivated in their objections to Job's words by religious zeal, he is prompted to speak out the pain of his very soul. This must be the reason Job employs the noun עִמָּל in describing his friends' ineffectual efforts to bring him relief. For that Hebrew word connotes "tedium" and was aptly chosen by a stricken man whose cries had been met by obtuseness and belabored catechism rather than a listening ear.

The Theology of Job

God Speaks to Job

In Chapter 40, Verse 6, God takes up an argument with Job: *Then the LORD answered Job out*

257. 13:13

258. BT *Shabbat* 127b

259. Mic. 6:8

260. Jb. 42:7-8

261. 32:20. Cf. 10:1 - אֶעֱזֹבָה עָלַי שִׁדְדִי, אֲדַבְרָה בְּמַר נִפְשִׁי -

*of the whirlwind: Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you annul My judgment? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?*²⁶² Still speaking out of the whirling, rushing wind,²⁶³ God now asks Job if he himself is able to oversee the moral governance of earth. For Job has admitted to being God's inferior in wisdom²⁶⁴ but has freely charged Him with fault in the way He administers the moral realm.²⁶⁵ God's question, quoted above, is blunt and pointed.

Then in the next subsection God invites Job to take up the Divine throne, as it were. From that vantage point, how would he tackle the issues faced by the Creator every day? As it is written:

*Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour forth the overflowings of your anger, and look on every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you, that your own right hand can give you victory.*²⁶⁶

Proffering the example of the Behemoth,²⁶⁷ exemplar of strength and self-sufficiency, God continues:

*Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. Behold, his strength is in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. He makes his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron.*²⁶⁸ *He is the chief of God's works, wielding a sword over his peers!*²⁶⁹

In the next chapter, God continues His unanswerable question to Job, this time using the mighty

262. 40:6-8

263. 38:1

264. Implied in verses 33:12, 34:10, and 36:5.

265. See 30:21 and 31:3.

266. 40:9-14

267. Jb. 3:8 and Ps. 74:13 identify the Leviathan with the Primeval Sea (Hebrew: תהום) of Gen. 1:2. Ps. 74:14 describes the creature as a multiheaded aquatic monster killed by God and given as food to the Hebrews in the wilderness. The name "Behemoth," mentioned in Jb, 40:15-24, seems to have been the Coptic name for the water-ox or hippopotamus. In the Divine Speech to Job, the Behemoth and Leviathan are creatures with enormous strength, which only God can control. Yet to Him they are reduced to the status of pets, with rings through their noses and the Leviathan on a leash.

268. *ibid.*, verses 15-18

269. *ibid.* v. 19

Leviathan as the example:

*Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? Lay hands on him; think of the battle; you will not do it again! Behold, the hope of a man is disappointed; he is laid low even at the sight of him. No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.*²⁷⁰

Then, in the second half of Verse 2 as well as Verse 3, God tells Job that if such beasts overwhelm him, then:

*Who then is he that can stand before **Me**? Who has given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.*²⁷¹

In the end, Job relents, acknowledging God's exclusive control over His creation:

*Then Job answered the LORD: I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.*²⁷²

Perhaps a whirlwind is the proper place from which to lambast a man who, in calling God's rulership into question, has no idea of the whirling randomness of the world and of the wisdom needed to control it. Another possibility is that the whirlwind represents a kind of opaque obscurity, meant to depict the mystery of God's law. This latter idea was suggested by Maimonides as the motivation behind the Torah's choice of a cloud from which God spoke His Law unto Moses.²⁷³ God's Speech to Job illustrates man's conceptual smallness within the greater scheme of things.²⁷⁴ This idea constitutes the central theme of *Sefer Iyyov*.

The Common Thread to the Speeches of Job's Friends in the First Fourteen Chapters of Job

After a grieving Job has cursed the day of his own birth,²⁷⁵ Eliphaz opens up, the first of Job's

270. *ibid.* 40:31-32, 41:1-2a

271. 41:2b-3

272. Jb. 42:1-2

273. Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim* ("Guide for the Perplexed") – Book III, Ch. 9.

274. From God's Speech it can be inferred that Man's smallness is conceptual. He lacks the capacity to fully understand because he had no hand in the creative process and does not participate in the governance of the universe.

275. Jb. 3:1-16

friends to offer a retort to the lamentations of the man from Uz. *אֱלִיפַז* means *God his strength*²⁷⁶ and the name describes its bearer as one who argues in God’s behalf.²⁷⁷ We see the “nocturnal vision” as epicentral in the early oratory of Eliphaz: A didactic admonition in classical Semitic fashion, it makes the contrast between the righteousness of God and the puniness and temporariness of Man *via* supernal vision:

Now a revelation was secretly made known unto me, and my ear received a whisper thereof; by way of ideas expressed through nocturnal visions, when deep sleep falls upon men. Fear came upon me, and trembling; it shook all my bones with fright. Then a spirit passed in front of me and the hair on my flesh stood up. It rose up but I could not distinguish its countenance; [it was] an image before my very eyes. I then heard a soft voice saying ‘Shall a mortal be more righteous than God? Is Man purer than his Maker? Lo! He does not believe in His prophets, and he charges His messengers with folly! Surely then, [he will not confide in] dwellers of earthen clay houses, whose foundation is [in the] dust, who in their frailty are crushed [as it were] before the moth. In one day they are pounded asunder, and without noticing it, they perish for all time. Lo, [as soon as] their [life-]cord is cut, they die unwittingly.’²⁷⁸

Through the revelation of his vision, Eliphaz endeavors to frighten Job into quiet submission to God’s judgment. The statement *Lo! He does not believe in His prophets, and he charges His messengers with folly!*²⁷⁹ might be an expression of Eliphaz’s belief that his is a Divine mission to steer an errant Job back to the True Faith. These words may also point to Eliphaz’s keen sense of Job’s incredulity.

The next high point in the speech of Eliphaz is his insistence that Job’s suffering redounds to

276. See note 177.

277. Other similarly named biblical characters are here called to mind, such as Boaz, wealthy landowner of Bethlehem and second husband to Ruth the Moabitess. The name Boaz means “He possesses power”. Indeed, Ruth 2:1 calls him “a strong man of valor”. Ergo, the importance of the name Eliphaz should not be lost on us. He must have been a man of substance. In fact, in his commentary to Jb. 4:16, a vision concerning Job revealed to Eliphaz, Rashi implies he had the power of prophecy: “The early prophets heard [lit. used] the voice, whereas the later ones heard an echo, like a man who hits with a hammer, and the echo resounds far away.” To the great commentator, the *Shekhina*, God’s own presence, rested on the Temanite, despite his low birth: “He was Esau’s son, and because he was nurtured in Isaac’s bosom, he merited that God’s presence rest upon him.”

278. Jb. 4:12-21. The translation is my own.

279. *ibid.* 5:18

his own benefit: *Behold, blessed is the man whom God corrects: therefore despise not the chastening of the Lord of the Mountains.*²⁸⁰ Job answers Eliphaz, stating his desire for a trial with

God and castigating what he considers to be trite doctrine cruelly hurled upon a bereaved father:

*To him that is afflicted pity should be shown from his friend; but instead he forsakes the fear of the Lord of the Mountains; "Yea, you overwhelm the fatherless, and you dig a pit for your friend".*²⁸¹

In chapter seven, Job remains indignant, calling his life רִיחַ ("wind") and his days הֶבֶל ("breath").²⁸² He desires death²⁸³ and freedom from the cruelty of God's scrutiny.²⁸⁴ But so long as

he lives, Job will not remain silent: *Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.*²⁸⁵ This last proclamation of

Job's demonstrates that Eliphaz has thus far failed in his mission to quiet his suffering friend.

Enter Bildad the Shuhite, the "son of strife"²⁸⁶ He calls out Job's sanctimony²⁸⁷ and gives voice to a most clever rationale: *If you were pure and upright, then God would rouse Himself for you, and grant your lofty righteousness its due.*²⁸⁸

Then, in an effort to temper the sharpness of his words, Bildad assures Job of his restoration if only he would yield to God's righteous judgement:

*And though thy beginning was small, yet thy end should greatly increase.*²⁸⁹ *Behold, God will not cast away an innocent man, neither will He uphold the evil-doers; Till He fill thy mouth with laughter, and thy lips with shouting. They that hate you shall be clothed in shame; and the tent*

280. *ibid.* 5:17 Despite its root-meaning, the adjectival construction אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁמַח conveys "blessed" and not, as is commonly supposed, "happy" or "fortunate". יִשְׁמַח, usually rendered "Almighty," literally means "Breasted One" and is a euphemism for "Lord of the Mountains" or "Mountain-God".

281. *ibid.* 6:14,27

282. *ibid.* 7:7,16. In light of Gen. 2:7, which depicts Man as operating on a God-given breath, Job might be hinting at the idea that he is just an automaton of God.

283. *ibid.* v. 15

284. *ibid.* v. 19

285. *ibid.* v. 11

286. See note 177.

287. See Jb. 8:13 where Bildad blithely dubs Job a hypocrite: *Such are the paths of all of them who have forgotten God; the hypocrite's hope is but doomed.*

288. *ibid.* 8:6

289. *ibid.* v. 7

*of the wicked shall not remain.*²⁹⁰

Job answers Bildad over the course of the ninth and tenth chapters, expressing doubt in the very possibility of Man's attainment of true righteousness,²⁹¹ insisting on God's baseless and endless cruelty,²⁹² and begging for relief.²⁹³ Job wants to know the charges against him.²⁹⁴ The central point in Job's present harangue seems to be the maintaining of his own innocence, so plainly stated: *עַל־דַּעְתְּךָ כִּי־לֹא אָרָשָׁע* (*You know I am not wicked*)²⁹⁵ There lies so much audacity in those five Hebrew words: "God," says Job, "You know that your judgment of Me is unjust".

We feel ourselves compelled at this point to remark on the fifth and sixth verses from this chapter, which equal the aforementioned asseveration of Job's in brazenness but surpass it in profundity: *Have You eyes of flesh? Do You see as men see? Are Your days as the days of Man? Are Your years as Man's days?*²⁹⁶ These remarks by Job are unequalled in the entire Bible in their far-reaching implications: "O God," says Job, "You know everything except what it is like not to be God".²⁹⁷ We will revisit this idea later on.

It should not be lost on the reader that as the tone of Job's friends rises and becomes more shrill, Job's rejoinders take on a more confident, even arrogant, tone. This push-pull dynamic of Job and his friends is a fascinating study in psychological warfare, in which each party vies for supremacy and their respective oratories embody an ever more outlandish point of view. At this point in the book, Zophar the Naamathite speaks his own answer unto Job. Bearing in mind that

290. *ibid.* verses 20, 21, and 22

291. 9:2

292. *ibid.*, verses 17 and 18

293. *ibid.* v. 34

294. *ibid.* 10:2. Cf. the episode of Sodom where God examines the measure of the city's wickedness (Gen. 18:21).

295. Jb. 10:7

296. *ibid.* verses 4 and 5

297. For these words alone The Book of Job is worthy of earnest study. Christianity uses the Crucifixion to fill the gaping emotional hole in monotheism left by the concept of an otherly deity. With the Incarnation, the charge of an aloof, unfeeling God loses much of its force. There are other texts that touch upon God's not knowing how Man feels, including Isa. 55:8: *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.*

the name צִפֹּר or *little bird* establishes its bearer as garrulous, even stultiloquent,²⁹⁸ it comes as no surprise when Zophar calls Job an insincere blatherskite, worthy of the condemnation of wiser men:

*Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be justified?
Should your lies make men hold their peace? And when you mock, shall no man make you
ashamed?*²⁹⁹

Alas, in Davidic fashion,³⁰⁰ the Naamathite declares the ways of God inscrutable, His judgment lenient.³⁰¹

The final third of Zophar's speech appears in the form of an assurance of the good life for him who keeps faith in God; this seems to constitute a reiteration of like expressions made by Eliphaz and Bildad. We wish to repeat it here, emphasizing its probable irritation to the ears of an intensely frustrated Job:

*If thou set thy heart aright, and stretch out thy hands toward Him-- If iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not unrighteousness dwell in thy tents-- Surely then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear; For thou shalt forget thy misery; thou shalt remember it as waters that are passed away; And thy life shall be clearer than the noonday; though there be darkness, it shall be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt look about thee, and shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make supplication unto thee.*³⁰²

These droning words of Zophar's seem unintentionally cruel and ill-suited to a man like Job who in his abject pain has been praying for death. In the present moment, what has Job to live for? What is his hope in the wake of his earth-shattering loss? Ironically, the final words of the Naamathite reveal some sense: *But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no*

298. See note 177.

299. 11:2-3

300. See Ps. 139:6

301. Jb. 11:6

302. *ibid.*, verses 13-19. We have here modified the JPS translation.

*way to flee, and their hope shall be the drooping of the soul.*³⁰³

In chapter twelve, Job responds most ably to Zophar, prefiguring imagery in God's Speech³⁰⁴ and proclaiming God's omnipotence³⁰⁵ as well as His omniscience.³⁰⁶ Job declares his own understanding to be the equal of his friends' and, in a diffusing comic turn, waxes sarcastic: *No doubt you (speak for the) people, and wisdom shall die with you.*³⁰⁷

Chapter thirteen proves the efforts of Job's friends to have been in vain: He persists in his desire to reason with God³⁰⁸ and be made aware of his sin³⁰⁹ and in an attempt to discomfit the Creator, Job states that he will requite good for evil: *Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him.*³¹⁰ Finally, in a desire to be done with the remonstrance of his friends, the tables turn and it is now *Job* who tells *them* to maintain silence: *Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come upon me what may!*³¹¹

As the ultimate insult to his friends, Job returns to his former narrative, lamenting the life of Man that is *few of days and full of trouble.*³¹² This is very nearly the motif over which our protagonist was brooding in chapter three, when he cursed the day of his birth, and the vituperation against which Eliphaz took his first stand. Job has by the end of "the opening round" called the three antagonists *forgers of lies* and *physicians of no value.*³¹³ They have done a

303. *ibid.*, v. 20. Here the JPS version has been left intact.

304. We account verses 7 and 8 a foreshadowing of "the answers of nature" as expressed by God in chapters 38 and 39.

305. 12:10,13,14,15,16,19,21,23, and 24. Anent 42:2, see note 140.

306. 12:13,16, and 22. Regarding the penultimate verse: Since no hypocrite may come into His presence, Job proves he is still pious if he would but gain permission to speak with God.

307. *ibid.* 12:2

308. 13:3

309. *ibid.*, verse 23

310. *ibid.*, v., 15. Job means hereby to substantiate his professed righteousness. He accepts God's actions. This statement constitutes a tacit nod to God's unwillingness to allow for Job's death. Though to God belongs the sanction to slay, He has refused the full exercise of His power.

311. *ibid.*, v, 13

312. 14:1

313. 13:4

poor job of defending God: *Will you speak wickedly for God, talking deceitfully for Him?*³¹⁴

It has been demonstrated that the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are thematically correlated, representing the voice of the conventional theist who seeks to censure the blasphemies of a man whose heavy personal losses have benumbed his soul. One hears the echo of Eliphaz in the words of Bildad, and Zophar draws water from the wells of both his precursors. The commonest thread that seems to exist between the three friends is the rejection Job makes to each. Against Job's attack on all things sacred, namely, human life, the Divine justice and a profound if unsearchable meaning to Man's turmoils, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite stand, as it were, as brothers in arms.

By the fourth century, there emerged another view based on the idea of *mazal* as the source of merit.³¹⁵ "Rava taught: Life span, children and sustenance depend not on merit but on *mazal*."³¹⁶ The theological implications of Rava's doctrine are wide and vast. God cannot be called to task for the infelicities of early death, froward offspring, or poverty. It is rather His servants, the constellations and astral bodies, which strengthen or impact human life. It is equally conventional yet diametrically opposed rabbinic theology that "The Holy One, blessed be He,

314. *ibid.*, v, 7

315. According to such reasoning, Job's gripe should be not with God but with the constellations.

316. (ca. 280—352 CE) Rava was a fourth-century Babylonian *amora*. This teaching is found in BT *Mo'ed Qatan* 28a. Cf. BT *Shabbat* 156a where the first-century *tanna* R' Yoḥanan ben Zakkai maintains that "Israel is immune from *mazal*". The word *mazal* connotes both planetary influence as well as one's fate as determined by the cosmic configuration at the time of his birth.

The Rashiistic rabbis from twelfth-thru-mid-fifteenth-century France and Germany known as the *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, the "Glossators," resolve the contradiction between the two aforementioned talmudic passages by stating *לפעמים משתנה ע"י המזל... ופעמים שאין משתנה* - "At times one's destiny may be altered by his *mazal* but not at other times." They then reference a passage from BT *Ta'anit* 25a that speaks of the third-century Palestinian *amora* R' El'azar ben Pedat who, caught like a broken-winged bird in straitened circumstances, was told by God: "If you acquiescence, I shall destroy the world and create it anew. Perhaps you will then be brought into being whilst the nutriments [of the planet] are plentiful [and be thus infused with the capacity for wealth]." This *gemara* as brought by the Tosafists implies three things. First, man's *mazal* is commensurate with the natural state of the Earth at the hour of his birth. Second, the alteration of but one man's *mazal* has ramifications for all humanity. And third, such an alteration can be made by God alone.

deals strictly with those round about Him even to a hair's breadth."³¹⁷ From the first, it must be conceded that the conduct of the righteous is both highly scrutinized and greatly constricted by Heaven.

In speaking of the *sota*, the woman suspected of adultery,³¹⁸ the rabbis of the Mishnah state: "In the measure with which a person metes out to others, they mete out to him."³¹⁹ They go on: "She adorned herself for a sin; the Omnipresent made her repulsive. She exposed herself for a sin; the Omnipresent exposed her. She began the transgression with the thigh and afterwards with the womb; therefore she is punished first in the thigh and afterwards in the womb, nor does all the body escape."³²⁰

From its wording, the opening clause of the aforementioned *Mishnah* appears to have been a preexistent maxim with a mundane, intersocial meaning.³²¹ Generally speaking, society responds to the individual's conduct in kind. Still, to the rabbis of the late tannaitic and early amora'ic periods,³²² on a basic level the Divine justice is always at play.³²³ In a state of reasonable suspicion, the *sota* is forbidden to have relations with her husband, not to mention with the suspected adulterer.

317. BT *Yevamot* 121b

318. Num. 5:11-31

319. Mishnah *Sota* 1:7

320. *ibid.*

321. The plural מודדין לו or "they mete out to him" may indicate a social, rather than cosmic, meaning.

322. the third and fourth centuries

323. BT *Berakhot* 5a. "Rava (some say, R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said: *Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord* (Lam. 3:40)."

As per his method, R. Aqiva³²⁴ derives this law from Scripture.³²⁵ Believing strongly in the transformative power of suffering³²⁶ as well as the infallibility of God,³²⁷ and as evidenced by his own submission to kismet,³²⁸ Aqiva would consider Job to be under reasonable suspicion, suffering his ill fortune measure for measure. Like the third-generation Babylonian *amora* R. Ammi, Aqiva would hold that “there is no death without sin, and no suffering without a crime.”³²⁹ Most interestingly, the aforementioned section of the Mishnah³³⁰ concludes with a teaching of R. Yehoshua ben Hyrcanus.³³¹ “Job,” says Yehoshua, “served God out of love

324. 50—135 CE. A lifelong resident of Caesarea, Israel, Aqiva bar Yosef worked as a shepherd for Ben Kalba Savua when the latter's daughter noticed his modesty and refined character. She offered to marry him if he would agree to begin learning in a yeshiva, as at the time he was forty and illiterate.

According to *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 1:4: “What was the beginning of Rabbi Aqiva? They say that he was forty years old and had not learned a thing. One time, he was standing at the mouth of a well and said, ‘Who carved this rock?’ They said to him, ‘The water that consistently falls on it every day.’ They said to him, ‘Aqiva, did you not read *water wears away stones* (Jb. 14:19)?’ Immediately, Rabbi Aqiva reached a conclusion: Just as the soft sculpts the hard, words of Torah, which are as hard as iron, will all the more carve my heart, which is but flesh and blood! He thereupon returned to learn Torah.”

Aqiva rose to become one of the most prominent rabbis in history and in time became an outspoken supporter of Shim'on Bar Kokhba, boorish nephew of the saintly R. Elazar ha-Moda'i and leader of the failed anti-Roman revolt in the year 132. Suspecting that his uncle was harboring military secrets, Bar Kokhba kicked the old man in anger, causing his death. This episode caused the rebel and his followers to lose all support among the rabbis. Those prominents who had weighed in with Bar Kokhba, like Aqiva, became the implacable targets of Rome. Upon his wife's passing, Aqiva remarried the ex-wife of Turnus Rufus, governor of Judæa and member of the Roman senate, a woman of high intelligence who, inspired by the great sage, had converted to Judaism. In part for personal reasons, Turnus Rufus condemned Aqiva to death by torture, under the pretext of treason (for by his support of Bar Kokhba he did revolt against Rome). The Talmud says that, seemingly impervious to his pain and in a state of hopeful bliss, the old rabbi said the *Shema*, the Jewish declaration of faith, i.e., Deut. 6:4: *HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE*. Extending the final word “*Ehad*” (“One”), Aqiva gave up the ghost. A heavenly voice heralded: “Blessed are you, Rabbi Aqiva, that your life has ended with *Ehad*’.

325. Mishnah *Sota* 5:1 - וְאִיִּבָּא, וְאִיִּבָּא - כִּי הָיָה בְּדֹקֵן אוֹתָהּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בְּמִדְבַר ה': כ"ב, כ"ז) וְאִיִּבָּא, וְאִיִּבָּא.

326. BT *Sanhedrin* 101a-b: “When R. Eli'ezer was sick, four elders went to visit him... R. Aqiva said, ‘Suffering is precious (as it caused King Menashe to repent).’”

327. BT *Berakhot* 60b: “It was taught in the name of R. Aqiva: A man should always accustom himself to say, ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good’, [as exemplified in] the following incident. R. Aqiva was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused. He said ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good’, and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a cock, an ass and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the cock, a lion came and ate the ass. He said: ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good’. The same night some brigands came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. [Unseen by the brigands] he later said to his disciples: Did I not say to you, ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is all for good?’”

328. As did Rava much later. See note 323, end.

329. BT *Shabbat* 55a

330. Also BT *Sota* 27b

331. *tanna* of the early second century CE

alone.”³³² Amidst a tractate devoted to the meting out of Divine justice, the Mishnah wishes to dispel the notion that Job, the great questioner of God’s equity, was deserving of his fate. At any rate, Job’s *יראה*, his “fear” or “reverence,” must needs have been pure, at least according to the reasoning of R. Ḥanina. For he said: “All is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven.”³³³ If this is so, then the measure of Job’s spiritual connectedness could not have been a rationale for his trial at the hand of God, or, if you will, his trial by The Satan, permitted by God. Still, it must be borne in mind that Job’s trial was not a rational one. It was the result of a wager taken by the cosmic powers, a bet that predetermined a man’s fate.

According to one rabbinic teaching, it is possible to conflate the love of God with the fear of Him. After having rated the love-based service of God superior to that based on fear, an early Midrash implores us to bear God’s burdensome demands from a combination of both psychological states, and then says: “Love and fear are never found together except in relation to the Holy One, Blessed be He.”³³⁴ God’s invisibility is likely a factor in this misattribution of arousal. Job himself bemoans the incertitude caused by the Creator’s hiddenness.³³⁵

According to the Torah, the firstborn may be either the offspring of his father, who is entitled to receive a double portion of his inheritance (compared to the other siblings)³³⁶ or of his

332. Rashi, on Jb. 27:2, holds this idea as axiomatic and turns the complaint of Job on its head. The verse states: *As God lives, Who has taken away my right, and the Almighty has embittered my soul.* Rashi: “As God lives: I swear that indeed He took away my right. From here Rabbi Yehoshua inferred that Job served the Omnipresent out of love. No one swears by the king’s life unless he loves the king.”

333. BT *Berakhot* 33b

334. Sifrei, *Va-Ethanan* 32: *ואהבת את ה' אלקיך (דברים ו, ה). עשה מאהבה. הפריש הכתוב בין העושה מאהבה לעושה מיראה: 32: ואתה תירא את ה' אלהיך תירא, אתו תעבד ובו תדבק (שם י, ב). יש לך אדם, כשהוא מתירא מאהבה - שכרו כפול ומכופל. לפי שהוא אומר: אתה' אלקיך תירא, אתו תעבד ובו תדבק (שם י, ב). יש לך אדם, כשהוא מתירא מאהבה - כשהוא ממריחו, מניחו והולך-לו. אלא אתה עושה מאהבה, שאין לך אהבה במקום יראה ויראה במקום אהבה אלא במדת. הקדוש ברוך הוא בלבד.* - We note that the ancients considered that the God of War can also be the God of Love. See Isa. 45:7: *I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the LORD, that doeth all these things.* On making the dreaded God a loving one as a defense mechanism designed to annul the persecutory threat, see Mills, Jon. *Inventing God: Psychology of Belief and the Rise of Secular Spirituality.* London and New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 99.

335. Jb. 9:11 and 23:8-9

336. Deut. 1:17

mother.³³⁷ In his eventual receipt of a double restitution for the children and wealth he had lost, Job became God's firstborn, usually an attainment of high distinction,³³⁸ but in Job's case the mark of emotional blackmail.³³⁹ It seems that on an unconscious level the man from Uz knew the terms of the bargain. In the end, God used terror to bring Job to heel and declare Him perfect.³⁴⁰ Job's life was then restored. On some level, Job's eventual silence was his salvation.³⁴¹

The Theodicy of Job

The problem of suffering is a central theme in The Book of Job. Why does a God who is perfectly good permit evil? Further, why should He in His mercy permit the righteous to suffer? For thousands of years, every Abrahamic religion was in the business of constructing its own theodicy, concocting ways to vindicate Divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil. The rabbis used Scripture to deal with this conundrum, finding support for their ideas in the explicit and implicit reading of God's Word. It goes without saying that their inferences from Scripture, their *derashot*,³⁴² were highly subjective. Reflective of both psyche and environment, these homilies are expressed in a free, almost whimsical, manner. Ironically, the impressionistic world of *Midrash* is well-suited to bear the heft of the problem of suffering, one of the most serious issues of theology.

337. Ex. 4:22

338. See Ex. 4:22, Jer. 31:9, and Ps. 89:27

339. Isa. 61:7 speaks of a double portion of land given by God to a saved, everlastingly joyous Israel as compensation for the shame and confusion they experienced during their exile.

340. Yet it must be remembered that God often appears out of a wind. See II Sam. 22:11, Nah. 1:3, and Ps. 18:10. The very word for God's spirit, namely, רוּחַ, means "wind". See. Gen. 1:2.

341. BT *Megilla* 18a. "R. Yehuda... taught: What is the meaning of that which is written (Ps. 65:2): *For You silence is praise?* Silence is a cure-all."

342. expositions

Of course, he who searches out the word of rabbinic Judaism on theodicy will eventually meet up with the statements of pietists who, enfeebled by the question and exasperated by its irresolution, deem as impious any attempt to fathom God's purposes or to judge His actions by human standards. Still, the rabbis were bothered by senseless evil to the extent that they invented an ironic singsong term for the phenomenon: צדיק ורע לו רשע ומזב לו.³⁴³ The rabbis thus chaffed themselves about the state of beset humanity, a subtle yet effective coping mechanism for exiled Israel. The Talmud teaches:

Moses asked that He should show him the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He, and it was granted to him. For it is said: *Show me now Thy ways* (Ex. 33:13). Moses said before Him: Lord of the Universe, why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity? He replied to him: Moses, the righteous man who prospers is the righteous man the son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man the son of a wicked man. The wicked man who prospers is a wicked man son of a righteous man; the wicked man who is in adversity is a wicked man son of a wicked man.³⁴⁴

In his commentary on this passage, R' Josiah ben Joseph Pinto³⁴⁵ takes notice of the seeming injustice inherent in God's stated theodicy.³⁴⁶ Such temerity is well within the biblical tradition.

343. "The Righteous Man Who Suffers and the Wicked Man Who Prospers" (BT *Berakhot* 7a)

344. *ibid.*

345. ca. 1565 Damascus—ca. 1648 *in loco*. Known by the Hebrew acronym Ri"ף, Pinto was a talmudist and mystic who wrote halakhic responsa as well as bible commentaries while serving as chief rabbi of Damascus. Pinto's fame, however, rest on his *Me'or Enayim* or *Illuminator of the Eyes*, a commentary on *Ein Ya'aqov* (*Wellspring of Jacob*), a collection of the narrative and homiletic passages of the Babylonian Talmud compiled by talmudist R' Jacob ibn Ḥabib (ca. 1460 Zamora, Spain—1516 Salonica, Greece) and, after his death, by his son, the chief rabbi of Jerusalem Rabbi Levi ibn Ḥabib (ca. 1480 Spain—ca. 1545 Jerusalem). Pinto composed *Me'or Enayim* as a memorial to his son R' Joseph who died in 1626 at the age of twenty-four.

346. וקשה היכי ס"ד צדיק בן רשע הוא נענש ורע לו. והכתיב וְבָנִים לְאֲדֹמְתוֹ וכו' (דברים כד, טז). ואע"פ שכתוב אחר אומר פקד עון אבות על־בָּנִים (שמות לד, ז), זהו בזמן שאוהזים מעשה אבותיהם בידיהם. אבל לצדיק בן רשע אין - ראוי שיחיה נענש בעון אביו.

"It is difficult [to conceive] how one may think that a righteous man born to a wicked man should be punished with adversity. For behold the verse states 'neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers' etc. (Deut. 24:16). And although another verse states 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children' (Ex. 34:7), this refers to a situation in which the [wicked] sons follow the deeds of their fathers. But for a righteous man born to a wicked man, it is not proper that he be punished for his father's sinfulness."

In his discursive comment in the *Me'or Enayim* Pinto mentions the axiom from BT *Qiddushin* 39b שכר מצוה שבר מצוה - "No reward [is given] in this world to him who fulfills a Divine commandment." In view of

For Abraham,³⁴⁷ King David,³⁴⁸ and Habakkuk³⁴⁹ called God's justice into question and reeled at His apparent absence from the affairs of mankind. All of the aforementioned had learned the account of the Flood. All of them internalized the words *And God remembered Noah*.³⁵⁰ It stood to reason that He would continue to remember His afflicted children.

It is telling that in most editions of the Masoretic Text, Job is followed by the Song of Songs. For Solomon's grand ode is a romance with a sad subtext, an appropriate postlude to *Sefer Iyyov*. Most of the time in Solomon's work, the lovers are missing each other. Taken literally, *Shir ha-Shirim* (The Song of Songs) is a disquisition on the elusiveness and ephemerality of love³⁵¹ while The Book of Job, which precedes it in the canon, is understood by the rabbis as centering on the theme of punishment.³⁵² Thematically, the adjacent placement of these two books makes sense. For what is the absence of God if not a punishment?³⁵³

such a reference and taking into account other statements made by the rabbis of the Talmud that follow, I infer that the righteous man's earthly fortune is a matter, not of merit, but of *mazal*. I also suggest that the righteous man having been born to a wicked man is due to *mazal*.

347. Gen. 18:25

348. Ps. 44:23–25

349. Hab. 1:2

350. Gen. 8:1

351. The Song of Songs tells a story describing a rural family in ancient Israel. The family lived in a village and the daughter had been bereaved of her father. The girl's mother remarried and her sons from her second husband, envious of their elder step-sister's beauty and resentful of her status as first-born child to their mother, persecuted the girl to no end. As they grew to maturity, these evil sons devised cruel ways of persecuting her and of keeping her at a distance from home, from their mother. They set her as keeper of the vineyards (a sexual metaphor), forcing her to earn her wages in order to eat rather than partaking of meals at home, gratis, along with the family. Thus was this first-born child of the mother, beautiful and filled with God's grace, condemned to a life of solitude and boredom in the vineyards, removed from any social intercourse. Parched by the heat of day, her dove-white complexion turned black. Frozen by the cold of night, her once-smooth skin turned leathery. One day, this girl had occasion to visit Jerusalem, capitol of the kingdom of Yehuda. While walking along the lovely streets of the city, passers-by gawked at the strange-looking, dark maiden. A group of Jerusalemite girls, called "daughters of Jerusalem" by Scripture, spoke of her, suggesting that were it not for her dark, haggard state, she would have been quite beautiful. The girl answers, *I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon* (Cant. 1:5). It is this sad, lovelorn girl who, smitten with the king and taken unto his chamber (2:4), enjoys brief blissful encounters with him. She longs for their reunion, pining away from love (3:1-2, 5:6, and 6:1-2). This narrative underlying the patchwork of love songs in *Shir ha-Shirim* can be found in *Miqra Meforash*. Tel Aviv: Shlomo Sreberk Publishing House Ltd. and Maariv, 1955, v. 5, p. 2.

352. BT *Bava Batra* 14b למ"ד איוב בימי משה היה ליקדמיה לאיוב ברישא. אתחולי בפורענותא לא מתהליגין

353. Deut. 31:17-18 and 32:20; Isa. 8:17, 54:8, 57:17, and 64:7; Jer. 33:5; Ezek. 39:23-24; Mic. 3:4; Ps. 13:1, et al.

This is our own *midrash* by which we attempt to explain the juxtaposition of the two *megillot*.

Job too yearns for God's presence.³⁵⁴ Bereft of the heavenly grace, he is thrust into the whirl and rush of randomness. Still, the immediate absence of God is to Job no proof of His nonexistence. The great man from Uz is too much the believer to abandon his faith completely, and so he begins to concoct a theology of God's absence. "Though He slay me," says Job, "yet will I trust in Him."³⁵⁵ But Job's faith, at once attenuated and persistent, is far from innocent. "Still will I argue my ways before Him," he says proudly. "This also shall be my salvation, that a hypocrite cannot come before Him."³⁵⁶

Many a Jewish sage has followed suit. Rabbis from Moses ben Maimon to Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev³⁵⁷ have understood the existence of God as axiomatic while reconceiving, even

354. Jb. 23:3, 8-9. Cf. Ps. 73:28.

355. Jb. 13:15. Cf. Ps. 73:26, which states: צוֹרֵי לִבִּי וְחֶלְקֵי אֱלֹהִים לְעוֹלָם - *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the rock of my heart and my portion for ever.* See the Targum, which renders כְּלָהּ as אֲשֶׁת־יָצָא and the latter half of the verse לְעוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם אֱלֹהִים לְעוֹלָם. "My body and my heart are destroyed; God is the Mighty One who tries my heart and my portion forever." The Targumist, then, sees this verse as referring to theodicy and to Divinely ordained suffering.

356. *ibid.* and v. 16

357. b. 1740 Husakov, Ukraine, d. 1809 Berdychiv, Ukraine. Born to R' Meir, who later served as chief rabbinic judge of Zamosc, Poland. Levi Isaac, a genius, was known in his youth as "the Prodigy of Yaroslav". He became a disciple of R' Dov Bær ben Abraham of Mezeritch (b. circa 1700 Wolyn, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, d. 1772 Hanipol, Ukraine), most popular successor to the founder of modern-day Hasidism, R' Israel ben Eli'ezer Ba'al Shem (b. circa 1698 Okopy, Poland, d. 1760 Miedzybóz, Ukraine). R' Levi Isaac also studied under R' Schmelke of Nikolsburg (b. 1726 Chortkiv, Galicia, d. 1778 Nikolsburg, Moravia) and succeeded him as rabbi of Ryczywól, Poland. Dubbed *שַׁלְיָנוֹן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל - Israel's Defender*, R' Levi Isaac was a Joban personality who regularly remonstrated with God. As did *Iyyov* in the final chapter of his book, Levi sought by prayer to intercede in behalf of those he loved. The following story is illustrative of the Berditchever's eagerness to defend and bring relief to his fellow Jews:

"R' Levi Isaac asked an illiterate tailor what he did on Yom Kippur since he could not read the prescribed prayers. The Jew reluctantly replied: 'I spoke to God and told Him that the sins for which I am expected to repent are minor ones. I also said to Him: My sins are inconsequential; I may have kept leftover cloth or occasionally forgotten to recite some prayers. But You have committed really grave sins. You have removed mothers from their children and children from their mothers. So let's reach an agreement. If You'll pardon me I'm ready to pardon You.' The Berditchever rabbi angrily rebuked the unlettered Jew: 'You are not only illiterate but also foolish. You were too lenient with God. You should have insisted that He bring redemption to the entire Jewish People.'"

(Goodman, Phillip. *The Yom Kippur Anthology*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971, ch. 9.)

In addition to religious folk-songs, R' Isaac Levi of Berdichev composed *Beit Levi* ("House of Levi"), a commentary on the ethical Mishnahic tractate *Avot*. But his fame rests upon his *Qedushat Levi* (Holiness of Levi), a mystical-legal commentary on the Pentateuch.

deprecating, the manner of His governance of the world. After Auschwitz, such remonstrances with God no longer shock or confound as they once did. The ḥasidic-born, Conservative-ordained David Weiss Halivni,³⁵⁸ a critical talmudist who is also an halakhic traditionalist, calls the Holocaust, of which he is a survivor, a “revelation of God’s absence”.³⁵⁹ Halivni’s noticeable exclusion of any passages from *Sefer Iyyov* from the leaves of his book *Breaking the Tablets: Jewish Theology After the Shoah* seems a clear indication that he recognizes his approach to be something new, something for which the old, conventional theodicy has no relevance.

To the resentful theist, the Jew who holds onto his faith in high dudgeon, it is God who has slain Israel or who in the very least has allowed Israel to be slain. What then of *His mercy that endureth forever?*³⁶⁰ More pointedly, what evidence remains that God yet *walketh in the midst of the camp of Israel?*³⁶¹ According to several rabbinic authorities who unlike Halivni dwell not on the margins of Orthodoxy but within its mainstream, the perfection evident in the Torah and the genius inherent in the various systems of classical rabbinic interpretation are all that remain to us of God’s palpable presence in the world. It is now the Word of God that provides us with spiritual succor and assures us that the Lord lives still. God, in other words, lives in the Torah.

According to Rabbi Dr. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik,³⁶² talmudist of the classical school and one of the leading Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, revelation is a phenomenon with three

358. Rabbi Dr. David Weiss Halivni was born in 1927 in Kobyletska Poliana, Czechoslovakia. In July 2005, he retired from his position as Littauer Professor of Talmud and Classical Rabbis in the Department of Religion at Columbia University. He currently resides in Jerusalem and teaches at the Hebrew University as well as Bar-Ilan University. Halivni is the author of the ten-volume critical talmudic commentary *Meqorot u-Mesorot* (“Sources and Traditions”).

359. *Breaking the Tablets: Jewish Theology After the Shoah*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. p. 107.

360. Ps. 136:1 et al.

361. Deut. 23:14, adapted

362. b. 1903, Pruzhany, Belarus, d. 1993, Boston, Massachusetts.

components. The first component is mental. One must discipline his mind and channel its powers toward the analysis of Jewish Law, specifically of *Sha"as* and *Posqim*.³⁶³ The second part of revelation is physical, bringing one's passions to heel in the service of God. The third component of revelation consists in the active participation in the phenomenon of prophecy. When one engages in the traditional master-disciple relationship, he becomes a link in the chain of Tradition, receiving the knowledge and wisdom stretching across the generations and originating at Sinai. It is this system of spiritual exercise, religious study, and scholastic intercourse that leads to enlightenment or, as Soloveitchik terms it, דביקות or "cleaving to God".³⁶⁴

The Nazi Holocaust has cut the Jew's spiritual antennae. More often than not, he now finds it difficult to feel his God with the warmth and tenderness of his forefathers. The post-War Jew is bereft of a sense of sacred intimacy, that *je ne sais quoi*, which Haym Soloveitchik, son of Rabbi Joseph Ber, calls "now unattainable".³⁶⁵ He writes: "With the shrinkage of God's palpable hand in human affairs has come a marked loss of His immediate presence, with its primal fear and nurturing comfort. With this distancing, the religious world has been irrevocably separated from the spirituality of its fathers, indeed, from the religious mood of intimate anthropomorphism that had cut across all the religious divides of the Old World."³⁶⁶ Prolonged, punitive separation does not lead to an increase of love. It is rather the case of distance *not* making the heart grow fonder.

363. Talmud and Codes

364. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. "*U-vikashtem Mi-sham*: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Response to Martin Buber's Religious Existentialism," trans. Michael S. Berger. *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 18, No. 2. Oxford University Press: May, 1998, pp. 93-118. Note Soloveitchik's employment of the ḥasidic term דביקות or "cleaving". Though son of perhaps the most prominent rabbinical family from the milieu of the *Mitnaggedim*, the traditionalist scholastic opponents of the *Hasidim*, Soloveitchik received his early religious education from a ḥasidic *melammed* (teacher) belonging to *Habad*, a pseudo-intellectual cult of proselytizing spiritualists originating in late eighteenth-century Liozna, Belarus.

365. Soloveitchik, Haym, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," In *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, 1994, (28,4). 64-130.

366. *ibid.*

When Job comes to this realization,³⁶⁷ he beats his proverbial breast: *Even to-day is my complaint bitter; my hand is become heavy because of my groaning.*³⁶⁸

“Religious Jews,” Haym Soloveitchik rightly points out, “... seek to ground their new emerging spirituality less on a now unattainable intimacy with Him, than on an intimacy with His Will, avidly eliciting Its intricate demands and saturating their daily lives with Its exactions. Having lost the touch of His presence, they seek now solace in the pressure of His yoke.”³⁶⁹ Each in his own way, rabbis from various segments of Orthodoxy have thus tacitly acknowledged Hitler’s success in all but gutting the faith of Israel. In this they follow Job who retains his faith in God³⁷⁰ and admits he does not know.³⁷¹

Professor Halivni sees his scientific study of the Talmud as arising from an elemental longing satisfied through the interface between himself and God's word rather than His presence.³⁷²

According to Professor Ari Ackerman, “It as an act of faith and prayer, a *cri de coeur*, which represents the existential response of a person of faith to God's absence in a post-Holocaust world.” Ackerman acknowledges Halivni’s theology as constituting a sea change in the pantheon of Jewish religious thought, writing, “he views the revelation of the Holocaust as bringing about a reorientation in which we realize that God has been gradually withdrawing while augmenting human autonomy.”³⁷³

367. Jb. 23:8-9

368. *ibid.* v. 2

369. Soloveitchik, Haym, *Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy*, Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought, 1994, (28,4). 64-130.

370. Jb. 1:21-22, 19:25-26, 42:26

371. *ibid.* 42:3. Cf. Jb. 38:2, Ps. 131:1 and Ps. 139:6.

372. *Breaking the Tablets*, pp. xix, 62

373. Ackerman, Ari, “Reconceiving Talmud Torah: David Weiss Halivni on the Post-Holocaust Theological Justification of Historical-Critical Study of the Talmud,” *International Journal of Jewish Education Research*, 2016 (9), 63-82. Ackerman teaches at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.

Maimonides on the Problem of Evil

In response to specific temporal conditions, leading rabbinic scholars of various periods would change their theological positions from time to time. Maimonides evolved in his conception of the Divine role in evil. In his Mishnah commentary entitled *Kitab al-Siraj* or *Book of the Lamp*,³⁷⁴ he refers to certain injustices as “evils”. These include murder, theft, robbery, fraud, unprovoked assault, ingratitude, and contempt for one’s parents.³⁷⁵ In the *Mishneh Torah* or *Repetition of the Law*,³⁷⁶ the middle-aged Rambam³⁷⁷ states that the knowledge of metaphysics, attained by the most disciplined and determined scholar and bestowed as a precious boon by God, gives composure to the mind and promotes comity on Earth. Maimonides here lays the groundwork for a crystalized, final statement on the problem of evil, which can be found in his philosophical treatise *The Guide for the Perplexed*.³⁷⁸ There, he delineates three kinds of evil.

374. Maimonides published his work at the age of thirty, seven years after its inception, after he had taken up his residency in Egypt.

375. *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics*, trans. and ed., Joseph I. Gorfinkle. New York: Columbia University Press, 1912; reprint. 1966, 76-77. Maimonides calls these injustices “evils which the philosophers term such... things which all people commonly agree are evils”.

376. *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 4:13

377. Acronym for **Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon** (“Rabbi Moses son of Maimon”). Maimonides was born in 1135 or 1138. He completed his *Mishneh Torah* in 1180, at the age of 45 or 42.

378. III, 12. *Rambam* completed the *Guide* in about 1190, at the age of 52 or 55.

The following is an outline of his life:

Born in Córdoba, Andalus (Spain) in 1135 or 1138, Moshe was so named to memorialize the Passover for he was born on the eve of the festival. Moshe had three sisters and a younger brother David whose entrance into the world seems to have coincided with his mother’s departure. His father was R. Maimon ben Joseph, renowned jurist, moralist, and exegete. Maimonides’ early years were marked by memories of terror and bloodshed at the hands of the despotic Berber Almohads. Indeed, he bore witness to the forced conversion of many of his fellow Jews to Islam, including, it is possible, his own immediate family. In 1148, when Moshe was thirteen, the family fled Córdoba, wandering through southern Spain and northern Africa for the next ten years, finally settling in Fez, Morocco in 1158. For fear of persecution or death, they may have lived in Fez as Muslims (see Strousma, Sarah. *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 59). Moshe doubtless studied Judaic subjects in private with his father during these years.

Once in Morocco, Maimonides enrolled in the medical school of the University of al-Karaouine in Fez. There, at the age of twenty-three, the young student embarked upon his first major work of Judaic scholarship: *The Kitab al-Siraj* or “The Book of the Lamp,” a conceptual commentary on the Mishnah. Like most of his writings, he composed this work in Judæo-Arabic. The occasional imprecision one encounters in the *Kitab al-Siraj* relative to its author’s meticulous later productions is in part the result of the very trying circumstances under which it was written.

Upon graduating from medical school, Maimonides and his father made a sojourn to the Holy Land. There, over the course of a half-year, they went on a pilgrimage, prostrating themselves at various holy sites. The

purpose of this visit seems to have been propitiatory, seeking Heaven's pardon for their outward apostasy throughout the previous years in Fez.

Upon completion of this penitential tour, the small family settled in Fostat (Old Cairo) and resumed the regular observance of Judaism. The year was 1169. It was here that Maimonides, now aged thirty, published his work on the Mishnah, seven years after its inception. It was an instant success in the Jewish world and succeeded in distinguishing the young scholar as an innovative thinker among the rabbis who felicitously combined wide learning, economy of style, and good taste. In time, the large and wealthy Jewish community of Egypt appointed the young scholar *naggid*, or "prince," the final religious authority for rabbinic Jews in that land.

Some time after setting in Egypt, Moshe's younger brother David, merchant of fine stones and his main material support, drowned at sea on his way to India. The sudden, tragic death of David put Rabbi Moshe into a yearlong depression during which time he was hardly able to rise from his bed.

Even while writing his Mishnah commentary, the young Maimonides had authored scientific works, which would be used as textbooks in medical schools for centuries. He was a particularly expert infectionologist and would have preferred to remain a theoretician in the field until called upon by the Grand Vizier al-Qadi al Fadil, then by Sultan Saladin, to serve as chief physician to the royal court. At court, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon was referred to by the distinguished title "Abu Imran Musa bin Maimun bin Ubaidallah al-Qurtabi" ("Father of the Exalted Nation Moses son of Maimon, son of Obadiah, the Córdoba"). His Muslim hosts called him Abu Imran Musa for short. Maimonides' renown as a physician was so great throughout the world that he was offered the position of court physician by King Richard the Lionhearted, which he turned down (Rosner, Fred. *The Life of Moses Maimonides, a Prominent Medieval Physician*, 125–128, einstein.yu.edu/uploadedFiles/EJBM/19Rosner125.pdf). Indeed, Maimonides would stay on as physician to the Ayyubid dynasty even after Saladin's death.

That the *naggid* of Egypt was also the highly trusted, even beloved, personal physician to the Sultan and his family, made Maimonides the most influential Jewish personage of his day. His apical prestige and unquestionable genius inspired the jealousy of some other rabbis, including Shemu'el ben Ali (Ibn al-Dastur al-Baladi) of Baghdad (d. 1194) and Abraham ben David of Posquières (1125, Narbonne—1198, Vauvert). The former, a yeshiva dean and *poseq* (decisor), presided over the Babylonian community upon whom the sun had begun to set, for the glory of the Ge'onim was past. The latter was a talmudist and mystic of Provence who wrote at-times pettifogging *hassagot* or "critical remarks" on the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides' comprehensive digest of the Jewish religion and the finest specimen ever penned in Neo-Hebrew by a single individual. That Maimonides wrote this exceedingly great work in order to supplant the Talmud and streamline and simplify Judaism - and says so explicitly - succeeded in arousing the wrath of the aforementioned rabbis. For the Rambam writes:

"Therefore, have I named this compilation *Mishneh Torah* ["Second to the Torah"]; for, when one studies Holy Writ first and thereafter reads this Work, he obtains herefrom a complete knowledge of the Oral Torah, having no need to read any other book in between them" (*Mishneh Torah*, Introduction, "Transmission of the Oral Law").

Numbering fourteen books and exactly one-thousand chapters, the *Mishneh Torah* is Maimonides' distillation of the many complex accretions of the rabbinic literature. A Herculean undertaking of encyclopedic scope, only his extant handwritten drafts and revisions prove this literary wonder of the ancient world to be the product of one Olympian mind. Maimonides' Hebrew is a pleasure garden for the linguist, a unique, stylized version of the language of the Mishnah - limpid and lyrical, brimming with subtle, subatomic shades of meaning.

Though an avowed guardian of the rabbinic tradition and an implacable foe of the Karaites, the "Scriptural Jews," the Rambam had already evinced an iconoclastic streak early on in his literary career. For in his introduction to the Mishnah, he reveals the factors that impelled him to write the *Kitab al-Siraj*:

"This is what drove me to compose this treatise: I saw that the Talmud infers things from the Mishnah that logic could never dictate, deriving principles and making assumptions about the Mishnah's intentions; or claiming that some of the Mishnah's clauses are elliptical and suggesting all sorts of emendations; or ascribing various clauses to certain authorities and then positing their elucidation. Furthermore, the Talmud at times adds certain words to the Mishnah and removes others, and only then suggests an interpretation."

Maimonides did no less in the above statement than to disparage the ability of the *Amora'im* (the rabbis of the Gemara, ca. 200 CE—500 CE) to read the Mishnah correctly. Revolutionary statements such as this one aroused the crimson ire of certain scholars to whom critical thinking vis-à-vis the Talmud was inimical to religiosity. Men such as Shemu'el ben Ali and Abraham ben David of Posquières saw in such remarks the emergence of a

non-traditional approach to rabbinical scholarship that was indicative of an altogether new world-view.

Dalalat al-ḥairin (“The Guide for the Perplexed”) is Maimonides’ masterpiece of Jewish philosophy. It is in this three-section tome (modeled in form after *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* of Sa’adia Ga’on - 882 Fayum, Egypt—942, Baghdad, Iraq) that biblical idioms and metaphors as well as Jewish laws and beliefs are elucidated along Aristotelian lines. Indeed, to the wizen Maimonides of *The Guide* - the true Maimonides according to some - love of God finds its finest expression not in the study of Talmud (as held by communities like Babylonia and Provence) but in the study of physics and metaphysics. That he wrote *The Guide* with intentional prevarication lent intrigue and a transgressive mystique to his writings and made them suspect in the eyes of staunch traditionalists who had little or no training in metaphysics. Maimonides freely admits to purposeful obfuscation in the introduction to his great philosophical work. To his pupil R. Yosef ibn Akin, for whom he wrote his magnum opus, the master says: “I commend by way of hints”. He says further:

“My object in adopting this arrangement is that the truths should be at one time apparent, and at another time concealed. Thus we shall not be in opposition to the Divine Will (from which it is wrong to deviate) which has withheld from the multitude the truths required for the knowledge of God, according to the words, *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him* (Ps. 25:14).”

The Rambam admits to a degree of vagueness in his monumental digest of Jewish religious law, the *Mishneh Torah*, as well:

“In my larger work, the *Mishneh Torah*, I have contented myself with briefly stating the principles of our faith and its fundamental truths, together with such hints as approach a clear exposition.”

A modicum of perceptiveness on the part of the intelligent, learned reader is expected. The Rambam goes on:

“Your object should be to discover inmost of the figures the general idea which the author wishes to express. In some instances it will be sufficient if you understand from my remarks that a certain expression contains a figure, although I may offer no further comment. For when you know that it is not to be taken literally, you will understand at once to what subject it refers.”

Maimonides owes the systematic, precision, and uncluttered style he would perfect over time in part to the *Mutakallimun*, the scholastic theologians of Islam who had adopted the orderly approach of the ancient Greeks. It was their Arabic translations that enabled him to study and internalize the works of Aristotle, Plato, and many others. But as an assimilator of the linear, Hellenic approach into the rabbinic edifice, the Rambam did not work without precedent. If Yehuda Ha-Nassi (135 CE, Judæa—217 CE, Sepphoris) was the first to pattern a rabbinical tract on Greek literary modalities, then *Tosefta* co-authors Ḥiyya the Great (ca. 180–230 CE) and his pupil Hoshai’ah (d. ca. 350 CE) would be the second and third, and, nine-hundred years later, Maimonides would be the fourth.

Though in practice a traditional rabbinic Jew, as a thinker, Maimonides was almost purely Aristotelian. Nevertheless, the mistaken notion has persisted through the centuries among some pious admirers of Maimonides that he was in fact a closet mystic. For instance, in his commentary on the *Mishneh Torah* called *Migdal Oz* (“Mighty Tower”), on the section where the Rambam delineates the ten classes of angelic beings, R. Shem-Tov ibn Gaon (b. thirteenth-century Spain) writes:

זה הלשון מורה כי רבינו משה היה מקובל בנסתרות, אלא שקיים בעצמו מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה: יהו לך לבדך כבשים ללבושך.

“This kind of talk teaches that our master Moses was an initiate of the mystical sciences, but he abided by the admonition of the Sages of blessed memory, who said: ‘Let the mystic teachings be yours alone, as though they were woolen lining on the inside of your garment’.

(*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* - “Laws of the Foundations of the Torah” 2:7)

Maimonides’ personal theodicy and conception of God so offended some of his peers that in the year 1232, merely one generation after the master’s death, a group of unscrupulous Jewish zealots informed on the late *naggid*’s writings to the Church, denouncing them as heretical. The Dominicans confiscated all the manuscripts of the Rambam’s works and burnt them. A period of faith-based anti-Semitism, incited by Jewish zealots and taken to its logical yet absurd conclusion by their Catholic counterparts, had the unintended consequence of placing all Jewish sacred books in jeopardy. The book burning did not cease with the writings of the Rambam. In France, the Church began confiscating Jewish books across the land. In 1242, Louis IX, later St. Louis, had twenty-four cartloads of the Talmud set aflame, effectively ending Jewish life in France for many years. These precious volumes were lost to posterity. One of the book burnings occurred in the courtyard of the Notre Dame

The first is the degeneration to which we are subject as physical beings. The second is the evil men inflict on each other. The third is the evil man inflicts upon himself.

In the first instance, God is effectively cleared of responsibility.³⁷⁹ In fact He is denied agency, the active hegemony of Heaven having been supplanted by the passive natural process. In the second and third instances the onus is on Man. As maintained by the Maimonides of *The Guide for the Perplexed* - the true Maimonides to the mind of some³⁸⁰ - evil abounds in proportion to

Cathedral.

When Maimonides reconfigured or even left out of his books some otherwise major aspects of rabbinic theology, it raised the eyebrows of his more conservative rabbinic colleagues. One such omission is resurrection. For within the *Mishneh Torah*, the subject of God's revival of the righteous dead, a Messianic miracle prayed for daily by rabbinic Jews, is given short shrift. To mitigate this inconvenient situation, an unscrupulous Judaic scholar of the thirteenth-century forged an apologetic on the subject, attributing it to the master himself. The book's fevered tenor and inelegant style betray it as a fraud. See Goldfeld, Lea Naomi. *Moses Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection. An Inquiry into its Authenticity*. Ktav Publishing House, 1986.

Maimonides was to a certain extent an intellectual elitist who at times referred to mistaken scholars as "fools" or "drunkards". Yet he worked tirelessly to clarify and simplify the rabbinic tradition and render it the patrimony of every Jew. Highly concerned for the welfare of his People, he at times put his hard-earned position, even his life, at risk in so doing. For example, when the Yemenite rabbi Natan'el al-Fayyumi (ca. 1090–ca. 1165) wrote to the Rambam, begging his help in the wake of the Shia persecution of the Jews in his country, the *naggid* responded with what has become a classic of medieval Hebrew literature: *Iggeret Teiman* ("The Epistle of Yemen"). In the epistle, Maimonides counsels the people to gird up the loins of their faith and strengthen their confidence in Heaven.

But he did more than merely write a long letter. The Rambam interceded with his employer, the Sultan Saladin, in behalf of the beleaguered Jews of Yemen. Shortly thereafter, their persecution came to an end. The Yemenite Jews were so grateful for the *naggid's* help that they interpolated a righteous petition for his soul within the *Qaddish*, a Judæo-Aramaic prayer recited in the synagogue after a rabbinic text has been learned and, since the thirteenth century, by those in mourning.

Maimonides had one son, Avraham, who was nineteen years old at his father's death. A jurist of fine ability and, unlike his sober father, a mystic, Avraham was granted his father's position of *naggid* by the Egyptian Jewish community. For many generations thereafter, that august office would be inherited by the worthiest son of the Maimon family.

The following Hebrew expression has been spoken in praise of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon for centuries:

ממשה עד משה לא קם כמשה

"From Moses [son of Amram] until Moses [son of Maimon], none arose like Moses".

379. But in *Sefer Iyyov*, though the "why" of Job's suffering is not answered, God does accept responsibility. In Jb. 40:8, God refers to Job's lot as משפט, a judgment, and in 42:11, the narrator declares God the cause of Job's misfortune: *concerning all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him*.

380. "Yaakov Becker's picture of Maimonides seems in certain respects strikingly reflective of Leo Strauss... His Maimonides is an esoteric writer who has made a conscious decision to set forth in a single book two opposed systems of thought. One is a system of traditional Jewish beliefs intended for the consumption and protection of the untutored masses. The other is an Aristotelian philosophy that is the truth, representing Maimonides' actual views and contradicting the religious tradition at almost every crucial point... Becker goes on to show, at least to his own satisfaction, that for Maimonides the true philosophy was that of Aristotle." See Fox, Marvin. *Interpreting Maimonides*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 12-13.

the measure of God's presence in the world. For nearness to God and separation from him are to a large extent mental states, as "the Great Eagle" states:

If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents.³⁸¹

By implication, the more mature, so-called true Maimonides has cast good and evil as states of mind. This was necessarily so as the great rabbi became more and more involved "with matters as speculative as philosophy".³⁸² We extrapolate that as time passed and Maimonides became increasingly engrossed in metaphysics, his conception of things was carried aloft. He began to view emotions as subjective and the behavioral ideal to be *apatheia*, the stern indifference to pleasure and pain. Much like Zeno of Citium,³⁸³ complete self-control in moments of joy and suffering was the order of the day. For coolth and dispassion had been extolled by the ancient Stoics as great spiritual virtues that ennoble the soul with reason and virtue. Maimonides, it seems, tried to follow suit, positing that morality is not an end in itself but a way of controlling the passions, which serves to construct an atmosphere in which science and philosophy can flourish.³⁸⁴ Indeed, he holds that "all passions are evil".³⁸⁵

Mark how the God of the Rambam transcends emotion:

381. III, 51. This assertion of Maimonides stands in contradiction to some classic notions of suffering in the Bible and rabbinic literature. See Jer. 12:1, Mishnah Avot 4:15, BT *Berakhot* 5a and 7a.

382. Salomon, Gotthold. "Rabbi Moses ben Maimon," in *Sulamith* 1809, p. 407. See Kohler, George Y. *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: The Guide to Religious Reform*. (Part of the Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Philosophy, Book 15.) New York: Springer Publishing, 2011 edition (May 3, 2012), p. 41.

383. Athens, early third century BCE

384. *The Guide for the Perplexed* III:8. See also III:21 (ibid.), which recounts the ills of lacking control over one's anger: "For if a person is voluptuous or passionate, and, loosening the reins, allows his anger to pass the just limits, it makes no difference whether he is so from nature or from habit, he will blunder and stumble in his way, he will seek the theory which is in accordance with his inclinations." Cf. chapter three of *Sefer Iyyov*, actually a harangue, where Job's anger caused him later to fall into great theological error. Cf. Jer. 15:10 and see Jb. 35:16.

385. *Guide* I:54

Whenever any one of His actions is perceived by us, we ascribe to God that emotion which is the source of the act when performed by ourselves, and call Him by an epithet which is formed from the verb expressing that emotion... God is, therefore, said to be merciful; e.g., *"Like as a father is merciful to his children, so the Lord is merciful to them that fear Him";*³⁸⁶ *"And I will spare them, as a man spareth (yahamol) his own son that serveth him".*³⁸⁷ Such instances do not imply that God is influenced by a feeling of mercy, but that acts similar to those which a father performs for his son, out of pity, mercy and real affection, emanate from God solely for the benefit of His pious men, and are by no means the result of any impression or change--[produced in God]... there [also] occur inundations, earthquakes, destructive storms, expeditions of one nation against the other for the sake of destroying it with the sword and blotting out its memory, and many other evils of the same kind. Whenever such evils are caused by us to any person, they originate in great anger, violent jealousy, or a desire for revenge. God is therefore called, because of these acts, *"jealous," "revengeful," "wrathful," and "keeping anger"*³⁸⁸ that is to say, He performs acts similar to those which, when performed by us, originate in certain psychical dispositions, in jealousy, desire for retaliation, revenge, or anger: they are in accordance with the guilt of those who are to be punished, and not the result of any emotion: for He is above all defect!³⁸⁹

Maimonides paints himself into a corner here. For he ends his chapter on God's transcendence with a sanitized reference to a talmudic teaching that, when amplified by similar statements in the *Gemara*, seems to teach something of God's ways poles asunder from Maimonides' objectivist conception: "For the chief aim of man," says the Rambam, "should be to make himself, as far as possible, similar to God: that is to say, to make his acts similar to the acts of God, or as our Sages expressed it in explaining the verse, '*Ye shall be holy*':³⁹⁰ 'He is gracious, so be you also gracious: He is merciful, so be you also merciful.'"

The teaching in the Talmud to which Maimonides makes this shrewd, furtive reference states:

386. Ps. 103:13
 387. Mal. 3:17
 388. Nah. 1:2
 389. *ibid.* I:54
 390. Lev. 21:2

Abba Saul³⁹¹ interpreted the word *ve-Anveyhu* (“and I will adorn Him,” Ex. 15:2) as follows: Strive to resemble God: Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so be thou gracious and compassionate.³⁹²

In this teaching Abba Saul explains the Hebrew word **וְאֵתְּנֶהוּ** as though it were comprised of the two words **אֵת** (“I”) and **וְהֵא** (“Him”). This teaching is illuminated by another *gemara*:

Rabbi Ḥama son of Rabbi Ḥanina³⁹³ said: What means the text: ‘*Ye shall walk after the Lord your God*’?³⁹⁴ Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the *Shekhina*?³⁹⁵ For has it not been said: ‘*For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire*’?³⁹⁶ But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: ‘*And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them*’,³⁹⁷ so do thou also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: ‘*And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre*’,³⁹⁸ so do thou also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: ‘*And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son*’,³⁹⁹ so do thou also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: ‘*And He buried him in the valley*’,⁴⁰⁰ so do thou

391. A *tanna* of the third generation, Abba Saul lived in the mid-second century CE. He was a pupil of R’ Aqiva and had an abiding interest in the Temple rite. Although he worked as a gravedigger and held no official rabbinical title, Abba Saul, whose physical height was a marvel in its time, was revered for his wisdom and knowledge. He authored his own collection of oral laws, some of which was incorporated by R’ Yehuda ha-Nasi in the final redaction of the Mishnah.

392. BT Shabbat 133b

393. A Judæan *amora* of the third century, Ḥama bar Ḥanina was a contemporary of R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. Ḥama headed a yeshiva at Sepphoris, in the Galilee. An advocate of paired learning, he remarked:

“What is the meaning of the verse *Iron sharpeneth iron?* (Prov. 27:17) This is to teach you that just as one iron sharpeneth the other so also do two scholars sharpen each other’s mind by [toiling in the theory of] *halakha*, law.” (BT *Ta’anit* 7a).

Ḥama was respected as both a legalist and homilist. His ancestors were wealthy philanthropists who built grand, elegant synagogues. The Jerusalem Talmud (*Pe’ah* viii. 21b) relates that on one occasion, while visiting, with his colleague Hoshaiiah II (d. ca. 350 CE) the synagogues at Lydda, he proudly exclaimed, “Behold the vast treasures my ancestors sank into these walls!” To this Hoshaiiah responded, “How many lives have thy ancestors sunken here! Were there no needy scholars whom such treasure would have enabled to devote themselves entirely to the study of Torah?” See S. Mendelsohn’s entry on Ḥama bar Ḥanina in the Jewish Encyclopedia and J.D. Eisenstein’s entry on the same in *Ozar Yisrael: An Encyclopedia of All Matters Concerning Jews and Judaism, in Hebrew* (Judah David Eisenstein, ed.). New edition, New York: Pardes Publishing House, Inc., 1951.

394. Deut. 13:15

395. The Divine Presence

396. Deut. 4:24

397. Gen. 3:21

398. *ibid.*, 18:1

399. *ibid.*, 25:11

400. Deut. 34:6

also bury the dead.⁴⁰¹

It appears, then, that the rabbis of the Talmud conceived of a God intimately involved in human affairs and genuinely concerned for their wellbeing. Perhaps recognizing the discrepancy between the ideal and the real, Maimonides closes his chapter on Divine transcendence saying: “The principal object of this chapter was to show that all attributes ascribed to God are attributes of His acts, and do not imply that God has any qualities.”⁴⁰² God, then, could be said to be gracious, merciful, and compassionate, but only in the subjective sense. In other words (and we believe we have extrapolated Maimonides’ theodicy correctly), when faced with straitened circumstances, it is Man’s unshakable belief in the Divine Reality and in a perfect, ultimate destiny that buoys his spirit with a sense of the Heavenly grace. The lightness and serenity man feels when this belief blossoms and flourishes within his conscious may be interpreted as indicators of God’s mercy and compassion.⁴⁰³

Job is no Maimonides. He comforts himself to a degree when dwelling on his faith, which cosmic intrigue has been unable to destroy.⁴⁰⁴ Still, in his moments of anger,⁴⁰⁵ he loses sight both of God’s essential transcendence and of his own burden as a professed believer to yield in faith to unalterable, temporal circumstances. Yet he does find a way to co-opt an *apatheia*, albeit warped, even masochistic. After squarely placing the blame for his macerated faith at the feet of God,⁴⁰⁶ Job proclaims his potentiality for pious sufferance: *Then should I yet have comfort; Yea, I would exult in pain, though He spare not; For I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*⁴⁰⁷

401. BT *Sota* 14a

402. *The Guide for the Perplexed* I:54

403. Maimonides would have us believe this is the theology of the Talmudic rabbis but the plain manner in which they speak of God’s providential care belies this claim.

404. Jb. 6:10

405. Jb. ch. 3,

406. *ibid.* 6:4

407. *ibid.* v. 10. See p. 60 of *Das Buch Hiob nebst Einem Neuen Commentar* by Benjamin Szold: כלומר לא יאבה השם: [For I
לכלותני, כמו שאבקש ממנו, אז אביר ואדע כי גם אני לא מנעתי מעולם ממלאות אחריו דבר, והיתה לי זאת לנחמה.

Fielty to God, even when by His actions He seems *non compos mentis*, is commended strongly throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰⁸ Faith, portrayed in the Tanakh as supra-rational,⁴⁰⁹ transcends the understanding of the believer.⁴¹⁰ Faith is a wonder, an inscrutable, loving friend and an impregnable fortress, withstanding sword and famine, enduring through time and tide.⁴¹¹ And so, in the absence of the Divine mercy, Job finds solace in his own faithfulness to an (apparently) obtuse God.⁴¹²

Rabbi Yannai⁴¹³ said, “Neither the prosperity of the wicked nor the afflictions of the righteous is in our hands.”⁴¹⁴ This oft-mistranslated maxim, an indirect answer to the prophet Jeremiah’s exasperated cry *Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they secure that deal very treacherously?*⁴¹⁵ seems to express the idea that a man is not in a position to determine the justness of his neighbor’s lot in life. This is the lesson that follows from a story related in the Jerusalem Talmud about Elisha ben Abuya,⁴¹⁶ the Jewish People’s most infamous

have not denied the words of the Holy One] - “In other words, God would not be willing to destroy me as I requested. Still, I recognize and know that I have never balked at wholly following His word, and [this knowledge] gives me comfort.”

Benjamin Szold (1829 Zemianske Sady, Hungary—1902 Berkeley Springs, West Virginia) was a Conservative rabbi and scholar. His commentary on *Job* is a masterwork of patient, devoted scholarship and a viewing gallery overlooking a penetrating mind and a subtle yet ever-present Jewish pathos. Szold had what the Germans call *Sprachgefühl*, defined by the reserved and scholarly Reform rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal (1822, Münchweiler an der Alsenz, Germany—1908, Chicago) as “an innate grammatical tact, an unconscious feeling of what is in harmony with the spirit of the language, and what is foreign to that spirit.” See Felsenthal, B. *A Practical Grammar of the Hebrew Language*. New York: L. H. Frank, 1868, p. 4.

408. For example, see Is. 41:10-13, 40:29-31 and 61:1-3; II Chr. 20:15-17

409. Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17, 27; Ps. 18:2; Jb. 42:2

410. Pr. 3:5-6

411. II Sam. 22:33; Ps. 112:7

412. According to the text, God consciously allowed The Satan to despoil, bereave, and torture an innocent human being over a wager. He then scolds him with fury for finally lashing out at the injustice. “Obtuse” is but one way to describe Job’s Divine Tormentor.

413. A third-century *Amora*, R’ Yannai was of the first generation of Judæan *Amora’im*. He was very wealthy, planting hundreds of vineyards and building an orchard for public use. A man of considerable authority, the Jerusalem Talmud (3:1) records that he gave an order that even priests might attend Yehuda’s funeral. R’ Yannai studied under R’ Yehuda ha-Nasi, president of the Sanhedrin and redactor of the Mishnah, He later established his own yeshiva at Akbara in the Galilee, where the students were treated as members of his own family, working on the estate, retaining their share of the gross revenue, and living under his roof.

414. Avot 4:15

415. Jer. 12:1

416. Born ca. 70 CE in Jerusalem, Elisha ben Abuya was a *tanna* who, upon studying Greek philosophy, abandoned

apostate. The rabbis ask:

What was the moment that prompted Elisha's rebellion? They said that once he was sitting and learning Mishnah in the valley of Ginosar⁴¹⁷ and he saw a man who had gone up to the top of a palm tree on the Sabbath and taken the mother bird away from her chicks and he descended safely. At the end of the Sabbath he saw another man who climbed to the top of a palm tree and took the chicks having sent away the mother bird, but when he came down a snake bit him and he died. He said: It is written *'You shall certainly shoo away the mother and then take the chicks for yourself in order that it might go well with you and that you live a long life'*.⁴¹⁸ Where is the good for this man and where is his length of days?⁴¹⁹

The text portrays the young Elisha in one of his reclusive moments. He studies the Mishnah, not in a yeshiva in the company of other budding young scholars thirsty for knowledge. Rather, he sits alone in a valley, prone to the despondency that often accompanies isolation. Perhaps Elisha's solitude predisposed him to dyspepsia and contrarianism. In any event, he has seen someone following the law and suffering for this act. Analogously, Job's pain and resentment at the heavy hand of God⁴²⁰ were made worse by his sense of existential loneliness: *I am become a brother to jackals, and a companion to ostriches*.⁴²¹

rabbanism and became an antagonist to his brethren. Undermining traditional mores and ridiculing the rabbis for their ignorance of metaphysics, Elisha took to informing on the Jews to the Roman authorities. The Talmud refrains from quoting him by name, referring to him instead as אָהֵר (*Aher*, i.e., "That One"). The renowned R. Me'ir remained Elisha's disciple even after his apostasy.

417. Cf. Jb. 21:14 and 30:29

418. Deut. 22:7

419. JT *Hagiga* 2:1. Note the thematic similarity between this and the following passage from BT *Qiddushin* 40b:

"R. El'azar, son of R. Tzadoq, says: To what are the righteous in this world compared? To a tree that is standing entirely in a pure place and its branches hang over an impure place. If its branches are cut, it will stand entirely in a pure place. So too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings afflictions upon the righteous in this world to cleanse them of their few sins. He makes them suffer so that they will inherit the World-to-Come entirely, as it is stated: *And your beginning was in pain, your end shall greatly increase*" (Jb. 8:7).

The tree carries special meaning in the biblical and rabbinic literatures. It is the place where the choice between good and evil is both untrammelled and binary. It is the tower of the strong and impervious and the declivity of the weak and error-prone. Elisha ben Abuya is presented by the Talmudic text as one who gazed upon the tree from a distance and made his choice. The depiction of Elisha as having sat in view of but away from the palm tree is a subtle indication that his was an inherently unconventional, even iconoclastic, personality. This luminous teaching of R' Elazar's covers axiology, theodicy, and apologetics within its purview. See also *Avot* 3:17 and cf. Jb. 14:7 where Job ponders the regenerative nature of the tree, contrasting it with the finiteness of man (verses 10 thru 12).

420. Jb. 7:20 and 16:12

421. *ibid.* 30:29. See Ralbag who on "*I am become a brother to jackals*" states: שקולם קול נהי וכן קול בנות יענה - "For

The text then tries to discredit Elisha's alleged misgivings about the discrepancy between the biblical promise and the sad reality:

Now, he did not know that Rabbi Aqiva had given a public exposition: *'In order that it might go well with you'* means in the world that is all good; *'and you shall live a long life'* means in the world that is as long as eternity.⁴²²

R' Aqiva's exposition is untenable as the Torah promises long life both to him who carries out the commandment to send away a mother bird before taking her eggs⁴²³ as well as to him who fulfills the commandment to honor one's father and mother.⁴²⁴ That such a promise refers to life in the hereafter was not the intended meaning of "*in order that it might go well with you and that you live a long life*".⁴²⁵ As evident from Ex. 23:25-26 and Prov. 9:11, long life and health are two temporal blessings promised to those who keep Gods commandments. Still, as the Talmud says, "No reward [is given] in this world to him who fulfills a Divine commandment."⁴²⁶

Of Elisha's apostasy the Jerusalem Talmud goes on:

And there are some who say that the reason for his rebellion is that he had seen the tongue of Rabbi Yehuda the baker in the mouth of a dog. He said: If the tongue that labored in the Torah all of its days is treated like this, a tongue that is not cunning and does not labor in the Torah, how much more so. He said: If this is the case, then there is no reward for the righteous or for the scholars.⁴²⁷

In other words, it was the occurrence of unjust suffering that drove Elisha away from traditional

the cry of the jackal is a call of wailing. Likewise the call of ostriches." It should be noted that but for mating season, the jackal and ostrich often lead a solitary existence.

422. JT *Hagiga* 2:1

423. Deut. 22:7. This *mitzva*, commandment, is called *שליח הן* or "Dismissing the Nest". Maimonides states: "There is no difference [in the case of a mother's witnessing the death of her offspring] between the pain of man and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in man but in most living beings... The same reason applies to the law which enjoins that we should let the mother fly away when we take the young... when the mother is sent away she does not see the taking of her young ones, [and] she does not feel any pain." (*Guide* III:48)

424. Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16

425. *ibid.* 22:7

426. BT *Qiddushin* 39b

427. JT *Hagiga* 2:1

Judaism.⁴²⁸

Many years before the time of Elisha ben Abuya, the challenge to conventional theodicy was answered by Eliphaz the Temanite, who bethinks himself capable of keeping Job within the fold of complacent believers. He tells his grieving friend to confess his sin in exchange for God's forgiveness and blessing.⁴²⁹ In essence, Eliphaz suggests Job bargain with God for his welfare. Here we recall Abraham's attempt to bargain for the lives of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁴³⁰ In the end, the Patriarch's negotiations with God failed because there were not enough just people to protect the city. And so, the wrath of Heaven rained brimstone and fire upon those two city-states,⁴³¹ overturning them like gristle in a pan. In His righteous anger, God consumed those cities, *and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.*⁴³²

The passage in the Jerusalem Talmud concludes:

And some say that the root of his rebellion was that when his mother was pregnant with him she passed by idolatrous temples, smelled some of the sacrifices which they offered her and she ate and it spread through her belly like the venom of insects.⁴³³

This is a euphemistic way of suggesting that Elisha took after his impious mother. We note the damage this particular passage does to the idea of free choice, which texts such as *Avot* 3:17⁴³⁴

428. Cf. Jb 9:22

429. Jb 4:17; 5:6,8,11,16-26.

430. Gen. 16:22-33

431. *ibid.* 19:24

432. *ibid.* verse 25

433. JT *Hagiga* 2:1

434. *Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted, (And the world is judged with goodness; And everything is in accordance with the preponderance of works.)*

and BT *Qiddushin* 40b⁴³⁵ as well as *Avot* 2:1⁴³⁶ et al. seek to convey. Still, it may be argued that Man's power of rational speech⁴³⁷ is itself a manifestation of his freedom of will. The ability to communicate intelligent ideas separate and apart from the base and outside the sphere of the mundane is indicative of a unique capacity to transcend elemental patterns of behavior. No wonder the various Targumim interpret the Divinely infused "*living soul*"⁴³⁸ of Man as "a discoursing spirit".⁴³⁹

Of the pious the Psalmist says, *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand*,⁴⁴⁰ which Rashi interprets as "The high praises of God **shall be for them** a two-edged sword".⁴⁴¹ Man's exalted tongue possesses great power. Interestingly, the rabbis consider speech to be the singular capacity that inheres in the Jewish People, saying "Israel's only power is in the mouth".⁴⁴² Zophar the Naamathite reckons the praise of God a latent capacity within Man. Speaking of the ephemeral triumph and fleeting jubilation of the wicked,⁴⁴³ Zophar says: *Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue*,⁴⁴⁴ which Rashi interprets according to an obscure midrash: "His exaltation is ready under my

435. "The Sages taught: A person should always view himself as though he were exactly half-liable and half-meritorious. In other words he should act as though the plates of his scale are balanced, so that **if he fulfills one commandment he is fortunate, as he tilts his balance to the scale of merit. If he transgresses one prohibition, woe to him, as he tilts his balance to the scale of liability**, as it is stated: "*But one sin destroys much good*" (Eccl. 9:18), which means that due to one sin that a person transgresses he squanders much good."

436. "Rabbi would say: Which is the right path **for man to choose for himself**? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for other people."

437. a manifestation of an untrammelled intellect

438. Gen. 2:7 *Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

439. Onqelos: ננפה בנחיריהי נשמתא דחיי והוות נשמתא כגופא דאדם; PJ: ננפה באפוהי נשמתא דחיי והוות באדם לרוח ממללא. Neofiti: ננפה בנחירוי נשמי דחייין והוה אדם לנפש דחיייה ממללא לאנהרות עינין ולמצותות אודנין.

440. Ps. 149:6

441. והם להרב פיפיות בידם - The emphasis in the translation is our own.

442. ישראל אין כוחם אלא בפה - See *Tanḥuma (Parashat be-Shalah § 9)* and *Midrash Tehillim (Shoḥer Tov)* (on Ps. 22). The Midrash (*ad loc.*) states: מיה תולעת אין כוחה אלא בפה כך יעקב אין כוחו אלא בפה - "Just as the worm's power only inheres in its mouth, so is the case with Jacob."

443. Jb. 20:5

444. *ibid.* verse 12

tongue to be let out of my mouth”.⁴⁴⁵

It is Earthly Man, not the wicked man nor the righteous one, but Man - part and parcel of the Earth created by God, who is equipped with the power to articulate the grandeur of God’s creation. No wonder then that Job who, insisting on his rectitude, asserts his right to speak up no less than three times throughout *Sefer Iyyov*.⁴⁴⁶ Taking this idea to its logical conclusion, if the power of intelligent speech helps to distinguish Man as first among the creatures of the world, it is because *אל בְּרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים יְדַבֵּר*, because the Divine Word speaks through his voice.⁴⁴⁷ Ironically, it is Man’s godly capacity that renders him truly human.

We now come to a great paradox. According to The Book of Job, Man is both a worm as well as Divine. Bildad the Shuhite reasons: *Behold, even the moon hath no brightness, and the stars are not pure in His sight; How much less man, that is a worm! and the son of man, that is a maggot!*⁴⁴⁸ Yet Elihu says: *But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty, that giveth them understanding*⁴⁴⁹ and *The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty given me life.*⁴⁵⁰ God considers Man a sort of fleshly mimeograph of Himself,⁴⁵¹ though prone to sin.⁴⁵² Throughout the Tanakh, it is Man who denigrates his own stature.⁴⁵³ In general, on those occasions the Israelite God belittles human beings, He casts aspersions, not on individuals, but on errant or pathetic groups of human beings, be they ethnic or religious in nature, as the verse states: *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, And ye men of Israel; I help thee, saith the LORD, And thy*

445. רוממות שלו מוכן תחת לשוני להוציאו בפה כמו (איוב כ, יב) יְקַדְּדֶנָּה תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנִי

446. Jb. 7:11, 13:13, 21:3.

447. If exalted speech is indicative of man’s Divine capacity, did not Job affirm his status as a luminous being each time he insisted on speaking? We believe Job’s expressions *אֲדַבֵּר*, *אֲשַׁיְחָה*, and *אֲדַבֵּר* to be semiotic.

448. *ibid.* 25:5-6

449. *ibid.* 32:8

450. *ibid.* 33:4

451. Gen. 1:26

452. *ibid.* 8:21

453. Gen. 18:27; Ps. 22:6; Jb. 4:19, 7:17, 17:14 et al.

*Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*⁴⁵⁴

Among the rabbis, there are those who emphasize the view of the book of Genesis⁴⁵⁵ and that of Rabbi Aqiva,⁴⁵⁶ holding as prime Man's having been created in God's image, a sign that he is beloved of Heaven.⁴⁵⁷ According to R' Yehoshua ben Levi:⁴⁵⁸

"The Divine image accompanies him and the angels make proclamation. What do they proclaim?

'Make way for the image of the Holy One, Blessed Be He!'"⁴⁵⁹

In contrast to this view stands the fatalism of Ecclesiastes, which asks: *What profit hath man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun?*⁴⁶⁰ Likewise, Akavya ben Mahalal'eI⁴⁶¹ sets the human epoch in a dark frame, saying:

"Know whence you come, and whither you are going, and before whom you are destined to give an account and reckoning. Whence do you come? From a putrid drop [of semen].

Whither are you going? To a place of dust, of worms, and of maggots. Before whom are you destined to give an account and reckoning? Before the King of all kings, the Holy One,

Blessed Be He."⁴⁶²

"In his breathing life," says Rava,⁴⁶³ "Man is but dust."⁴⁶⁴ This notion, which to us borders on false humility, runs counter to the biblical assertion that the Creator elevated Man from the dust and breathed the Divine air into his being, transforming him from an earthen mound into a child of God.⁴⁶⁵

It seems that in the course of time, the Jewish People accepted equally both the positive and

454. Isa. 41:14. Note verses 8 through 13 et al. in which the prophet voices God's love for and encouragement of Israel.

455. 1:27

456. *Avot* 3:14

457. *ibid.*: חביב אדם שנברא בצלם. חבה יתרה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם, שנאמר (בראשית מ, 1) כי בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם.

458. early third-century Palestinian *amora*

459. Deuteronomy Rabbah § 4 (*Parashat Re'eh*). ומה הן. אריב"ל: איקוניא מהלכת לפני האדם והכרוזות מכריזים לפניו. אומרים? 'תנו מקום לאיקונין של הקב"ה!'

460. Eccl. 1:3

461. second-generation *tanna*

462. *Avot* 3:1

463. ca. 280 – 352 CE

464. BT *Berakhot* 17a. עפר אני בהיי ק"ו במיתתי.

465. Gen. 2:7

negative views of Man voiced by the ancient rabbis. For the *Siddur*, the traditional prayer book, contains a prayer, recited during each morning service, which states: “O my God, the soul that Thou gavest me is pure.”⁴⁶⁶ Just a few pages later, one reads: “and the pre-eminence of Man over the beast is nought, for all is vanity.”⁴⁶⁷ In practice, however, the Law demands that the Jew treat his neighbor with the utmost respect, even reverence, upholding an affirmative, commendatory view of humanity. As R’ Shime’on bar Yoḥai⁴⁶⁸ says: “It is better for a person to be cast into a fiery furnace than to embarrass his fellow in public.”⁴⁶⁹

Job’s final word on this subject is that God is exceedingly great and exalted⁴⁷⁰ while Man is pusillanimous and infinitely small.⁴⁷¹ That is to say, Man is lowly but only in a subjective sense, that is, only when compared to his Creator.⁴⁷² It is fitting that Man resign himself to this truth.⁴⁷³

The Personality of God

Exasperated with Job’s self-righteousness, Bildad the Shuhite angrily asks: *Doth God pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?*⁴⁷⁴ The Psalmist, drunk on the praise of God, prevaricates: *Come, and see the works of God; He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men.*⁴⁷⁵ Notice in this verse the use of the word עֲלִילָה, which can be translated as “a pretext”.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, in His relationship with humanity, God is understood to be vindictive. This

466. אלהי נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא.

467. רבון כל העולמים... ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין, כי הכל הכל.

468. R’ Shime’on is one of several possible sources for this quote.

469. BT *Sota* 10b. The Talmud and Midrash abound in similar cautionary statements concerning the safeguarding of the honor owed to every human being.

470. Jb. chs. 38-41; 42:2

471. *ibid.* v. 6 and 40:4

472. chs. 38 and 39; 40:8-14,25-29,31-32; 41:5-6.

473. 42:2-6

474. 8:3. Cf. Deut. 32:4

475. Ps. 66:5

476. Such is the meaning of the cognate noun עֲלִילָה.

connotation undergirds the comment of Rashi, who states: “[God is] feared by humanity lest He find them guilty of some crime, for all their deeds are revealed to Him.”⁴⁷⁷ In various religious quarters, catastrophizing vis-à-vis God was once considered not a mental illness but a virtue. But lest we forget, Eliphaz considers such a trait to be folly: *Surely, your fear was your foolishness, your [maladroit] hope and the [presumed] sincerity of your ways.*⁴⁷⁸

The notion of God’s retributive nature found its way into the Liturgy as well. The philosopher-poet Moses ibn Ezra⁴⁷⁹ composed a *piyyut*, a hymn, to be recited at *Ne’ila*, the “Closing Service” of the Day of Atonement, entitled **אל נורא עלילה** or *God, Awesome in Deeds*. “The people pour out their soul to Thee,” goes the second verse. “Erase their crime and falseness. Grant them forgiveness at this hour of *Ne’ila*.”⁴⁸⁰ And so, as the holiest day on the Jewish calendar comes to a close and the proverbial “gates of repentance” begin to shut, Moses ibn Ezra wishes the penitent to bear in mind that punitiveness is a foundational element in the Divine personality. His conception is not one of a compassionate God who is forced at times to mete out judgment. Rather, God is **אל נורא עלילה**, He is an Awesome Martinet, who deigns at times to grant forgiveness, grace, and mercy to the sons of men.⁴⁸¹

Which begs the question: Isn't punishment compassion and protection against evil? In the

477. **יראוּוּ עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם פֶּן יִמָּצֵא לָהֶם פֶּשַׁע, כִּי כָל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם גְּלוּיִם לָךְ.** - lit. “for all their deeds are revealed to Him”.

478. Jb. 4:6

479. born ca. 1055 – 1060 in *Garnata al-Yahud* (“Jewish Granada”), the autonomous Jewish province in Southern Spain ruled by the poet and general Samuel ibn Naghrillah, better known as Shemu’el ha-Naggid (“Samuel the Prince”). As a young boy in the year 1066, Moses ibn Ezra bore witness to the Granada Massacre when a Muslim mob stormed the royal palace and crucified the vizier Joseph ibn Naghrela, the learned but imperious son and successor of the late scholar-statesman. The mob proceeded to murder much of the Jewish population of the city, bringing the Golden Age of Jewish Spain to an end. Later, after the Muslim Almoravid conquest of Granada, Moses ibn Ezra had to flee for his life, leaving his family behind. He made his way to one of the northern Christian kingdoms of Iberia and died there after 1138.

480. **שׁוּפְכִים לָךְ נַפְשָׁם, מְהֵרָה פֶּשַׁעֵם וְכַחֲשָׁם, וְהַמְצִיאֵם מִחַיִּלָּה, בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּעִילָה.** - Moses ibn Ezra’s use of the noun **פֶּשַׁע** is a possible reference to Ps. 66:5.

481. See the fourth verse, which states **וְרַחֵם וְרַחֵם אוֹתָם וְרַחֵם** - “Grace them and grant mercy”.

Tanakh one meets with statements that understand the travails of the righteous as signs of grace⁴⁸² and fatherly love.⁴⁸³ In fact, in Psalm 103, which speaks of God’s kindness and redemptive mercy, the word רַחוּם or “compassionate” can be interpreted as a euphemism for “punitive” and this corrective compassion is framed as parental in nature: *Like as a father hath compassion upon his children, so hath the Lord compassion upon them that fear Him.*⁴⁸⁴

In *Midrash Tanḥuma*, three renowned sages of ancient times state that God’s accusations against human beings are עלילות, *pretexts*, used by Him to justify His various and sundry judgments of mankind:

“R’ Joshua ben Kor ḥa⁴⁸⁵ said: Come and see.⁴⁸⁶ When the Holy One Blessed Be He created the world, He created the Angel of Death at the outset, on the first day. Whence have we deduced this? R’ Berekhya said: From the scripture that states *and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*⁴⁸⁷ This is the Angel of Death who darkens the face of mankind. But Man was created on the sixth day, yet he was held responsible for bringing death into the world, as it is said: *for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*⁴⁸⁸

“To what parable can this be compared?

“To a man who wishes to divorce his wife. When he decided to go home, he wrote a *get*.⁴⁸⁹ He then entered his house with the *get* in hand, seeking a pretext for giving it to her. The man said, “Mix me a drink”. She mixed it for him. Upon taking the cup from her hand, he said to her, “Here is your *get*”. She said to him, “What wrong have I done?” He replied, “Begone from from my house, for you have mixed me a tepid drink!” She retorted, “You knew in advance I would mix you a tepid drink, and so you wrote up the *get* and brought it in hand!”⁴⁹⁰

482. Ps. 94:12 and 118:18; Pr. 3:12

483. Deut. 8:5, Pr. 13:24

484. Ps. 103:13

485. A *tanna* of the mid second-century, R’ Joshua ben Korḥa was sharp-witted and highly emotional. He shunned cooperation with Rome, rebuking Eleazar b. Shime’on for delivering the Jewish freebooters over to the Romans. He was well-loved among the people and lived to an advanced age.

486. בוא וראה - This hermeneutical device functions like the talmudic שמע אותם, which means “come and hear,” signaling the text’s answer to, or substantiation of, a previous assertion.

487. Gen. 1:2

488. *ibid.* 2:17

489. a bill of divorce

490. In his *peshat* commentary on *Midrash Tanḥuma* titled *Etz Yosef*, Russian-born talmudist Ḥanokh Zundel ben Yosef (d. 1867 Bialystok, Poland) writes: מזה שגזרה חכמתו יתברך שיהיה בעולם, אינו מביא אותם על בני אדם בדרך

“In a similar vein did Adam argue before the Holy One Blessed Be He: “Master of the Universe! Two-thousand years before You created the world, the Torah was with You as a confidant, as it is written: *Then I was by Him, as a confidant; a source of delight every day,* ⁴⁹¹ for two-thousand years, as it is written: *This is the law: when a man dieth in a tent [every one that cometh into the tent, and every thing that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days].* ⁴⁹² Had You not prepared [the phenomenon of] death for mankind, would You have written such a thing? Rather, You have come [with the intent] to put the onus on me. ⁴⁹³ “Such is the meaning of the verse *He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men.*”⁴⁹⁴

Job similarly accuses God of vindictiveness, according to the Talmud:

“Rava said: Job sought to exculpate the whole world. He said: Sovereign of the Universe... Thou hast created Paradise and Thou hast created Gehenna: Thou hast created righteous men and Thou hast created wicked men, and who can prevent thee (from making me righteous)?⁴⁹⁵ His companions answered him: Yea, thou doest away with fear and restrainest devotion before God. If God created the evil inclination, He also created the Torah as its antidote.”

“Samuel bar Nahmani⁴⁹⁶ quoted R. Jonathan:⁴⁹⁷ ‘A judge should always see himself as though he has a sword resting between his flanks and Gehenna gaping under him.’”⁴⁹⁸ One wonders if God was so careful when he condemned the righteous Job to his trials. Still, the message of this teaching is clear. Not just the layman but judges as well should live in a constant state of terror,

אלא מוציא אותם אל המציאות ע"י הפעולות האנושיות - “God does not materialize a man’s fate, which He in His wisdom has decreed, until that person’s actions make his fate necessary.” - מבלי שיזכרו בני אדם אל פעולתם כמו האשה ההיא לא הוכרחה - “Rather, it is human actions that reify God’s judgment, but it is not the case that the person [being judged by God] needs to perform the [confirmatory] action per se.” - למוזג בפושרין או בצונן מפאת מחשבת בעלה שכיון לגרשה - “Take, for instance, the case of this woman. She did not need to mix either a tepid or cold drink. [Her fate was] due to her husband’s decision. For he had [already] intended to divorce her.” - וענין מויתתה בפושרין לא היתה אלא עלילה בלבד - “And the issue of her mixing a tepid drink was merely a pretext.” - שאם לא נודמן כך לא נחכר סבה אחרת - “For if such a thing did not happen, another cause [for judgment] would not be wanting.”

491. Pr. 8:30

492. Num. 19:14

493. In other words, God decided to make Man mortal long before He created Adam. Yet He blamed Adam for having brought death into the world.

494. Ps. 66:5

495. So Schechter’s parenthetic interpretation. Schechter, Solomon. *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961. First published in 1909 by the Macmillan Company, p. 273.

496. Palestinian *amora* of the late-third and early-fourth centuries

497. *tanna* of the second century

498. BT *Sanhedrin* 7b

fearing Divine reprisal for any wrong they might have committed. Dread is to the rabbis a great motivator to proper conduct. Indeed, any religious system in which heresy is equated with haughtiness⁴⁹⁹ has placed a premium upon fear. Eliphaz thus accuses Job not just of presumptuousness but of sacrilege as well.⁵⁰⁰ Yet, as Rava teaches, Job cannot be held liable for the blasphemies he uttered whilst in pain.⁵⁰¹

Job might well have lived in a state of constant fear.⁵⁰² His offering up of mitigatory sacrifices, begun in earnest, might have degenerated into a ritualized action. If this is so, the action was possibly debilitating. Then again, it may be argued that Job's fear of God was not predicated on a fear of losing his fortune. As the Talmud says: "All is in the power of Heaven save for the fear of Heaven."⁵⁰³

One thing is certain: The God of Job neither cared nor understood that the fear He had inspired by terrorizing His servant displaced all traces of affection within them both. The fear that subdued the man from Uz and forced him into silent surrender could never again be tinged with love. As Martin Buber⁵⁰⁴ wrote:

"How is life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Oswiecim [Auschwitz]? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep. One can still 'believe' in the God who allowed those things to happen, but can one still speak to Him? Can one still hear His words? Can one still... enter at all into a dialogic relationship with him?... Dare we recommend to... the Job of the gas chambers: '*Call to Him, for He is kind, for His mercy endureth forever?*'"⁵⁰⁵

499. BT *Sota* 4b "Every man in whom is haughtiness of spirit is as though he denies the existence of God." This idea might have inspired Moses de Leon to accuse Job of spiritual haughtiness and elitism (*Zohar, Parashat Bo*, 33b).

500. Jb. 15:2-6,13

501. BT *Bava Batra* 16b "A man is not held responsible for what he says when in distress."

502. Jb. 1:5

503. BT *Berakhot* 33b - הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים -

504. 1878—1965. An Austrian-Israeli philosopher and bible translator, Buber gained world renown for his classic *I and Thou*, an original system of dialectic existentialism.

505. Buber, M. *At the Turning: Three Addresses on Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young; First Edition, 1952.

God's insistence upon His own honor in the face of the bereaved, emaciated Job, a behavior proscribed by the rabbis for its repulsiveness,⁵⁰⁶ is the final revelation of an oblivious deity,⁵⁰⁷ suffering from acute anosognosia.⁵⁰⁸ God knows everything, it seems,⁵⁰⁹ except what it's like not to be God. On that basis, any punishment of Man from on High is unjust.

Closing Remark: A Word on Job and Apophatic Theology

Before the theist poses the question of human suffering - indeed before he poses any questions relating to theodicy - he must ask questions of epistemology, ontology, and cosmology. Does God exist?⁵¹⁰ He must then make a foray into the unenviable field of theophany. Has man ever seen a manifestation of God? It must be acknowledged that the scientist is better equipped to answer questions of cosmology and theophany than is the theist who, in the realms of epistemology and ontology is - woe betide him - inferior to the mathematician. So then, the theist embarks on an odyssey for which he is not the best prepared. Like all people, he is bound tight to the yoke of his biases and preconceptions. If he possesses the instinct for self-preservation, he does not wish to prove himself duped by tradition or to discover that he has frittered away his years on a fool's errand. His findings, then, will likely be subjective and worthless.

This does not mean the theist is useless - quite the contrary, in fact. Indeed, I have been able to find two faculties he possesses to a higher degree than either the scientist or mathematician: He is able to reify an impressionistic sense of self and he is capable of articulating a transcendent,

506. JT *Hagiga* 2a: "R. Yossi said: He who increases his own honor through the disgrace of his fellow has no share in the World to Come."

507. God is heedless of Job's pressing need for mercy. For the very first time Job speaks, he refers to God by the name Yahweh, a title associated with the mercy of God.

508. Anosognosia is a deficit of self-awareness, a condition in which a person with a disability is unaware of having it. It was first named by the neurologist Dr. Joseph Babinski in 1914.

509. Jb. 28:23-24, Jb. 31:4, 34:21, and 42:2

510. See American moral philosopher Susan Neiman's *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 2002.

lyrical way of being. For after having struggled for years to define religion to my satisfaction, I have come up with the following postulate: Religion is the collective, impressionistic adaptation to past environment manifesting in specific reinforcing, solacing behavior patterns that nourish the ego with an animating spirit.

Just as it has taken many years filled with storms and sunshine for me to uncover the essence of religion, God learned from Job that Man is not inherently evil as He had once thought.⁵¹¹ Rather, he is sensitive, fragile, and breakable.⁵¹² God is perturbed by this revelation.⁵¹³ His oration⁵¹⁴ may thus be less an exercise in self-aggrandizement and more a cry of exasperation over the weakness of His creation and His erstwhile obliviousness thereto.

The heart and mind are locked in battle in our search for the Eternal. The body suffers as a result and the soul is left in a state of constant yearning for a blinding yet unknowable light. This is the quintessence of the ennobled human experience⁵¹⁵ and the way I understand Genesis 5:1⁵¹⁶ in view of the story of Job. For his book's very elasticity of meaning and proteanility of scope (of character, philosophy, even of language) is evidence that the author wished not, or better dared not, proffer any hard and fast answers to life's most compelling questions. He did not set out to resolve such conundrums from the epistemological, ontological, or cosmological points of view. Even his theophany,⁵¹⁷ awe-inspiring though it may be, is not framed in an objective manner.

God appears to Job not because His nearness to Man is axiomatic, but because, in his sorrowful

511. Gen. 6:5, 8:21, et al.

512. Jb. 14:1. In 6:11, 7:14-16, et al., Job proclaims his own frailty

513. So implied by *ibid.* 40:7 and 10,

514. *ibid.* chapters 38-41

515. Rabbi Alexandri, Judæan homilist of the late third-century, infused mystic meaning into the paradox of Man who, striving toward his God, is buffeted by the rarefied winds and atomized in the exosphere as he scales the ladder to Heaven. He said: הקב"ה בלי תשמישיו שבורים הם - "The personal belongings of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, are broken." (Leviticus Rabbah 7:2)

516. *This is the book of the generations of Adam.*

517. God's speech (chs. 38 to 41)

indignation, Job had forced the Divine hand.

What *Sefer Iyyov* succeeds in developing is that the author believes Man to be a participant in a vast cosmic drama. Even if he is but a marionette, strung along by a maladroit puppeteer yet sentient enough to feel the pain and strain of being jostled about, life is more than the mere preservation and reinforcement of cellular existence within a given environment - it is Commedia dell'arte, as the verse states: *I am as one that is a laughing-stock to his neighbour, a man who calleth upon God, and He answereth him; the just, the innocent man is a laughing-stock.*⁵¹⁸ Verily, even the blighted, plundered Job, source of amusement to cruel passers-by, crushed by The Satan in confutation of his vaunted righteousness,⁵¹⁹ he, even he, longs for the Divine wrath, as that too is capable of demonstrating that God, after all, does exist: *Would that God were willing to crush me; that He would let loose His hand, and cut me off!*⁵²⁰

The theist's yearning for a glimpse of Eternity is so deep, even Sheol would suffice. That we play a role in the dramedy of life and yearn for the world to acknowledge our presence here - these are basic truths that even the most theodically-challenged deity could not confute. Man's role on Earth is central and whatever impels him to seek after his Lord In Heaven, be it a Father Complex or an inner spirit,⁵²¹ has the potential to set his sights on a higher plane of being, for *Look unto the heavens, and see; And behold the skies, which are higher than thou.*⁵²² The Divine transcendence aside, if the Talmud is right and "The glory of God is Man, the glory of Man, his attire,"⁵²³ then to the Rabbis of old, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, wears the tattered raiment of

518. 12:4

519. See Sa'adia Ga'on, *Emunot Ve-De'ot*, ch. 5.

520. 6:9

521. 32:8

522. 35:5

523. BT *Shabbat* 113b and *Hullin* 84b - הדר אלהים אדם הדר אנשים כסותם -

ravaged Job, bewildered yet stout-hearted bearer of His Spirit on Earth.⁵²⁴

Summation

In this discussion, I have taken initial steps in demonstrating that important issues of exegesis and theology encountered in *Sefer Iyyov* can find at least partial resolution in unexpected biblical and rabbinic texts. Basing myself on certain rabbinic leitmotifs, I have tried to suggest an altogether new *peshat* for various verses and sections in the book. I have endeavored hereby to find the many elusive strands of thought flung pell-mell unto the far reaches of the Judaic Academy and to thread them with care into a canopy of wholeness and peace, ornamented here and there with nonnative stones. It is my fervent hope that I have met with a measure of success. If so, much credit must be given to my teachers.

524. To me, such an anthropocentric framing of the Joban God is true to the spirit of the rabbinic view.

Appendix 1: An Eccentric Exegesis

We briefly mentioned John Bloch⁵²⁵ earlier in this study, whose thoughts on the wife of Job are brilliant and original. Bloch was a proponent of what might be called traditionalist *peshat*,⁵²⁶ an approach to Bible exegesis spearheaded by R. Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Mikhel Wisser.⁵²⁷ He praises Wisser, whom we will henceforth call by his popular acronym, the Malbim, for having elucidated the plain meaning of the Scriptures in the spirit of traditional Judaism⁵²⁸ and for asking deep questions, precipitating answers according to the rules of Hebrew grammar, logic, parallelism, non-synonymism and non-pleonasm as opposed, so he says, to all the other commentators.⁵²⁹

A presentation of John Bloch's discussion of Job allows us to adumbrate the history of rabbinic exegesis, most appropriate to an introductory biblical study such as this one. Additionally, his *peshat* methodology, which gives to existing ideas a vote rather than a veto, complements my own method of exegesis, which aims toward a sound meaning of the text in light of narrative context, literary patterns, and the nuances of Ancient Hebrew, whose poetic nature remains insufficiently appreciated.

Bloch possessed wide-ranging knowledge of *Tanakh* and contemplated many ideas both explicit and implicit in Sacred Writ over the course of many years. He was doubtless aware that

525. Yoḥanan Bloch was born in Lithuania in the mid-nineteenth century, and died in London in the early twentieth century. Some background information will help to identify and linearize the strata of intellectual currents that inhere in his peculiar approach to Bible research. A graduate of the *yeshivot* of Mir and Volozhin, John Bloch was a man of business and Religious Zionist. Businessmen are pragmatists, inclined to the frank and unobtrusive. Hence Bloch's penchant for *peshat*. His preoccupation with *Tanakh* study as well as his Zionism worked in tandem to produce an eccentric style of Hebrew, occupying a midpoint between Maskilic and Early Modern.

526. "plain meaning"

527. acronym Malbim (1809—1879)

528. בהגרו מתניו באזור האמונה המהורה לבאר את כל כתבי הקודש רק על דרך הפשט הישר והמוכן לכל בר בי רב.

529. ועוד יתרה עשה, הוא העמיק שאלה להוציא פנינים יקרים מעמקי תהום החכמה, בנגוד לכל המבארים, בהראותו אשר אין כל כפול במלות שונות בדברי הנביאים, וכל מליצותיהם אשר נראו לכאורה ככפולות אינן כפולות כלל, והן מוכרחות להיות במקומן עפ"י הוקת הדקדוק וההגיון, וכל הכפולים מקבילים לעומת הפסוקים שלפניהם או הבאים אחריהם.

the Rabbanism-upholding *peshat* approach to Bible study has its origins in the school of Rabbi Yishma'el, an early first-century rabbi in Judæa, who abided by the seven מִידוֹת or “hermeneutical principles” of Hillel the Elder, קל וחומר (Argumentum a fortiori), גזירה שוה (an inference from identity of expression), and בנין אב (a general law derived from special cases) to name three. Hillel, the renowned president of the Sanhedrin,⁵³⁰ formulated those rules for the

530. b. circa 110 BCE Babylon, d. 10 CE Jerusalem. As with Aqiva, the Talmud casts Hillel as a Mosaic archetype and sets his life span at one-hundred and twenty years. This luminary of post-biblical Judaism was born to an eminent but poor family. His father was descended from the tribe of Benjamin while his mother could trace her lineage back to King David (BT *Ketubot* 62b). A woodcutter to the age of forty, Hillel then left for the Holy Land, where he devoted himself to study for the next four decades. Finally, at eighty, he became president [*nasi*] of the Sanhedrin. The Talmud relates:

“They said about Hillel the Elder that each and every day he would work and earn a half-dinar, half of which he would give to the guard of the study hall and half of which he spent for his sustenance and the sustenance of the members of his family. One time he did not find employment to earn a wage, and the guard of the study hall did not allow him to enter. He ascended to the roof, suspended himself, and sat at the edge of the skylight in order to hear the words of the Torah of the living God from the mouths of Shemaya and Avtalyon, the spiritual leaders of that generation.”

(*ibid. Yoma* 35b)

Hillel led an ethical, benignant life of unextravagant piety. He taught his so-called “Silver Rule” as a first step toward self-actualization:

“There was another incident involving one gentile who came before Shammai and said to Shammai: Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot. Shammai pushed him away with the builder’s cubit in his hand. This was a common measuring stick and Shammai was a builder by trade. The same gentile came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.” (*ibid. Shabbat* 31a)

Hillel passed on his broad-minded, tolerant spirit to his disciples, known as *Bet Hillel* (“The House of Hillel,” i.e. The Hillelites). Like him, they were known to be liberal in matters of ritual law, always placing a premium on the needs and sensitivity of their interlocutors. (See Tosefta *Sukka* 2:3, BT *Eruvin* 13b, and B. Z. Bacher, *Tanna'im*, 15).

Hillel’s chief antagonist was the far younger, more rigid, and highly irritable Shammai. Shammai served as Hillel’s adjutant in the Sanhedrin and his disciples followed his example of exclusionism and ritual stringency. (BT *Bei’a* 20a; *ibid. Sukka* 37b; Mishnah *Para* 12:4-6; Mishnah *Yadayim* 4:6). The Shammaites constituted the majority in the Sanhedrin from about 20 BCE (when Hillel was ninety years of age and Shammai was thirty) until 70 CE. The aged, peace-loving Hillel was averse to controversy and may thus have capitulated to the young Shammai, permanently losing legislative authority and political leverage to his ambitious young colleague.

Hillel was a dove and humanist who believed in spreading knowledge of the Torah to all humanity, saying:

“Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and drawing them close to the Torah.”

(Mishnah *Avot* 1:12)

His ethical amalgam of self-reliance, altruism, and decisiveness is unique in the annals of religious thought:

“He used to say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for my own self [only], what am I? And if not now, when?”

(*ibid.* 1:14)

He held self-promotion and intellectual apathy in low esteem, saying:

purpose of expounding the Written Torah (תורה שבכתב) and broadening its provisions, perhaps basing himself on an existent tradition. Yishma'el subdivided one of the rules, omitted another, and added one of his own. The resultant thirteen principles are now known as the י"ג מדות דרבי

"He who makes his name great causes his name to be destroyed; one who does not add [to his knowledge] causes [it] to cease; one who does not study [the Torah] deserves death; one who makes [unworthy] use of the crown [of learning] shall pass away"

(Mishnah, Avot 1:13).

Possessed of an approachable, kindly demeanor and an even temper, Hillel's patience was legendary. His keen insight into the human condition bordered on clairvoyance:

"The Gemara related: There was an incident involving two people who wagered with each other and said: Anyone who will go and aggravate Hillel to the point that he reprimands him, will take four-hundred zuz. One of them said: I will aggravate him. That day that he chose to bother Hillel was Shabbat eve, and Hillel was washing the hair on his head. He went and passed the entrance to Hillel's house and in a demeaning manner said: Who here is Hillel, who here is Hillel? Hillel wrapped himself in a dignified garment and went out to greet him. He said to him: My son, what do you seek? He said to him: I have a question to ask. Hillel said to him: Ask, my son, ask. The man asked him: Why are the heads of Babylonians oval? He was alluding to and attempting to insult Hillel, who was Babylonian. He said to him: My son, you have asked a significant question. The reason is because they do not have clever midwives.

They do not know how to shape the child's head at birth.

"That man went and waited one hour, a short while, returned to look for Hillel, and said: Who here is Hillel, who here is Hillel? Again, Hillel wrapped himself and went out to greet him. Hillel said to him: My son, what do you seek? The man said to him: I have a question to ask. He said to him: Ask, my son, ask. The man asked: Why are the eyes of the residents of Tadmor bleary [*terutot*]? Hillel said to him: My son, you have asked a significant question.

The reason is because they live among the sands and the sand gets into their eyes.

"Once again the man went, waited one hour, returned, and said: Who here is Hillel, who here is Hillel? Again, he, Hillel, wrapped himself and went out to greet him. He said to him: My son, what do you seek? He said to him: I have a question to ask. He said to him: Ask, my son, ask.

The man asked: Why do Africans have wide feet? Hillel said to him: You have asked a significant question. The reason is because they live in marshlands and their feet widened to enable them to walk through those swampy areas.

"That man said to him: I have many more questions to ask, but I am afraid lest you get angry. Hillel wrapped himself and sat before him, and he said to him: All of the questions that you have to ask, ask them. The man got angry and said to him: Are you Hillel whom they call the Prince of Israel? He said to him: Yes. He said to him: If it is you, then may there not be many like you in Israel. Hillel said to him: My son, for what reason do you say this? The man said to him: Because I lost four hundred zuz because of you. Hillel said to him: Be vigilant of your spirit and avoid situations of this sort. Hillel is worthy of having you lose four hundred zuz and another four hundred zuz on his account, and Hillel will not get upset."

(BT *Shabbat* 30b-31a)

The part-contemporaneous, part-late supplement to the early third-century Mishnah known as the *Tosefta* (lit. *Addition*) states:

"Once the sages were gathered together in the upper chamber of the house of Guria in Jericho, when a heavenly voice came out and said to them: 'There is one here among you who is worth of receiving the holy spirit (prophecy), but his generation does not deserve it'. They all looked at Hillel the Elder. When he died they said: So humble; so pious – a true disciple of Ezra."

(ibid. *Sota* 13:3)

ישמעאל - *the Thirteen Rules of Rabbi Yishma'el*. In addition to his endorsement of Hillel's hermeneutical approach to biblical research, Yishma'el held that דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם - "the Torah speaks in human language".⁵³¹ Yishma'el thus admits that Scripture might employ words and sounds that are technically superfluous.

Yishma'el is opposed to the methodology of Rabbi Aqiva, his contemporary who, basing himself upon the revolutionary and controversial ריבוי ומיעוט ("Extension and Limitation") system developed by his master, Naḥum Ish Gamzu, held that the Torah speaks in the Divine language and that various prepositions, conjunctions, word repetitions, verbal forms, and demonstrative pronouns as well as personal pronouns, pronominal suffixes, the definite article, the direct object marker, or any noun or verb occurring in the wording of a Divine commandment - even the crowns of the Hebrew letters - at times include the additions of Tradition and at other times exclude what the Tradition excludes.⁵³²

Although Rabbi Yishma'el's system was generally adopted as authoritative, Rabbi Aqiva's methods remained popular, especially among those heavily inclined toward Midrash. In fact, as is implied by BT Bava Kamma 84a and BT Qiddushin 43a, some of Yishma'el's own pupils applied Aqiva's methods.⁵³³ Interestingly, the *peshat* method of the Malbim, lauded by Bloch, combines elements from the schools of Yishma'el and Aqiva.

It is likely, though, that Bloch was unaware that our knowledge of parallelism as a function of biblical prose and poetry was greatly enhanced by Robert Lowth, Anglican bishop and professor

531. *Sifre*, Num. 112

532. Aqiva states: כל היכא דאיכא למדרש דרשינן - "Wherever one can expound, we expound" (BT *Pesahim* 24b).

533. Mielziner, Moses. *Introduction to the Talmud*. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc. 1925 reprint of the original 1902 edition, pp. 123-127.

of Poetry at Oxford.⁵³⁴ Both Moses Mendelssohn⁵³⁵ and his compatriot Naphtali Herz Wessely,⁵³⁶ the *Halakha*-upholding fathers of the *Haskalah*,⁵³⁷ studied and made use of Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* as is clear from the *Be'ur*,⁵³⁸ which Mendelssohn edited and for which Wessely contributed a learned, if prolix, commentary on Leviticus, as well as from Mendelssohn's *Qohelet Musar*⁵³⁹ commentary on Ecclesiastes and Wessely's as yet unedited *Imrei Shefer*⁵⁴⁰ notes on Genesis.

Finally, the Malbim applies Wessely's unique method of utilizing Midrash, especially Halakhic Midrash, as a foundational pillar of the *peshat*, a method Wessely innovated and laid out in his proem *Mahalal Rei'a*⁵⁴¹ and in *Gan Na'ul*,⁵⁴² his philological investigation of the Hebrew root חכּם (*wise*) and its synonyms, a huge work of great scope and a monument to its author's noble, undying labors toward the advancement of Hebrew belles-lettres. Indeed, the Malbim quotes Wessely in his own commentary to Pr. ch. 1 as well as to Isa. 5:18 and 17:14.

In summation, the method of exegesis employed by John Bloch more or less originated with Hillel, calls upon the methods of Yishma'el as well as Nahum Ish Gamzu and Aqiva, makes use of the ideas and suggestions of Robert Lowth, and utilizes the system of Naphtali Herz Wessely, expanded and popularized by the Malbim. The *peshat* masters Rashbam⁵⁴³ and Abraham ibn

534. 1710-1787

535. 1729-1786

536. 1725-1805

537. השכלה - lit. *intellect*. This is the term for the European Jewish Enlightenment, commenced in Berlin ca. 1770 with the coalescence and organization of the Jewish intelligentsia. The *Haskalah* came to an end in 1881 with the rise of proto-Zionism, a reaction to massive pogroms, government-sanctioned anti-Jewish riots, in Czarist Russia.

538. "Scriptural Explanation"

539. "Preacher of Morals"

540. "Words of Beauty"

541. "In Praise of a Friend"

542. "Locked Garden"

543. 1085-1158

Ezra,⁵⁴⁴ though not principal actors within Bloch's approach, form essential building blocks of his edifice. Rashi is mentioned by Bloch but once throughout his work,⁵⁴⁵ a glaring indication that the method of that most renowned of all non-Sephardic medieval exegetes, oriented neither toward *peshat* ("plain meaning") nor *derash* ("homiletic exposition") exclusively but rather constituting a conflationist, almost symbiotic, approach, is incommensurate with Bloch's homely, distillatory, and instinctual method of interpretation. Ironically, it may have been Bloch's years at Volozhin, most selective and rigorous of the East-European yeshivot, which attenuated his fidelity to the Scriptural commentary of Rashi.⁵⁴⁶

John Bloch's Commentary to Job 2:9

"Then said his wife unto him: 'Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? blaspheme God, and die.'

"It is hard to understand the intention of Job's wife. For if she intended that he give thanks to God for all the good he previously enjoyed, why should he die? And although the term בָּרַךְ is [also] an expression of insult and scorn, as in וַיִּצַע בָּרַךְ (and the covetous vaunteth himself),⁵⁴⁷ and her intention would then be to say, "Give insult to God and then die as a result," even in the case of such sins we have not seen [in Scripture that] men die immediately as a consequence. Verily, they shall be punished from on High, but not when they themselves desire, as Job says later in the text: הַמְּוֹתִים לְמָוֶת וְאֵינָנִי - *Who long for death, but it cometh not,* etc.⁵⁴⁸

"I therefore contend that Job's wife was quite modern,⁵⁴⁹ and that she meant to convey the following sentiment: "Why should you bear hard sufferings such as these? Bless God - give thanks to Him for the good you enjoyed prior to the sufferings - and die." In other words, [she advised him to] commit suicide.

"Job's response appears to provide support for my contention: He did not pose queries to her as to how he should end his life for he well understood her words. Therefore did he say to

544. 1089-1167

545. p. 38

546. See the two links below, which confirm that Moses Mendelssohn's *Be'ur* commentary was an official and compulsory subject at Volozhin. No wonder, then, that many of the graduates of Volozhin became *maskilim*.

<http://www.aishdas.org/asp/the-curriculum-at-volozhin>

<http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2010/10/impressions-of-volozhin-yeshiva-and-its.html>

547. Ps. 10:3

548. Jb. 3:21

549. By מוֹדֵרְנִית (lit. "modern") Bloch means "liberal," "irreverent," and "audacious".

her that it is easier for him to bear the suffering than to commit such an evil act, for **גַּם** אֶת־הַטּוֹב נִקְבֵּל מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים, וְאֶת־הָרָע לֹא נִקְבֵּל? [Shall the day arrive when]⁵⁵⁰ *'We receive good at the hand of God, and not receive evil?'* [Job here echoes the sentiment of King Solomon who said] **כִּי־לֶבֶב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת** - *for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*⁵⁵¹ [Indeed,] Job tells his wife: **כַּדְבַּר אִהָּת הַנְּבִלּוֹת תִּדְבְּרִי** - *'Thou speakest as one of the impious women speaketh.'*⁵⁵² "Whenever I speak of Job's wife, who approximates Solomon's Woman of Strife,⁵⁵³ I wax jocose about [our present] Eternal Question: Behold, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, gave leave to The Satan to afflict everything Job had, the flocks of sheep and beeves, the man-servants and maidservants, his sons and daughters. The Satan had power over every conceivable thing [in Job's possession] save for his wife. She was thus a wondrous person over whom even The Satan's hands shook [at the prospect of] touching her.

"By her advice that he commit suicide, Job's wife did not have his welfare in mind. However, an indirect result of The Satan's refraining from smiting her is that Job was not blessed⁵⁵⁴ with yet another smart-alecky wife later on. For after the Holy One, Blessed Be He, found Job [in the Roaring Storm],⁵⁵⁵ the man from Uz spoke properly [of God and His ways] and God reproached his three friends who had perverted the Divine justice and blamed Job [for his sufferings]. Indeed, after Job was healed from his afflictions, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, restored all he lost, giving him twice as much as he had before. And had The Satan taken Job's wife from him [along with everything else], he would have been blessed with another smart-alecky wife like the first one, and one alone sufficed him."⁵⁵⁶

Job's wife is often maligned as insensitive to his suffering, indeed a hindrance to his welfare.

In fact, his suffering was hers as well. After all, she was mother to their ten slain children. Does not Rav teach that a woman is especially sensitive and given to the shedding of tears?⁵⁵⁷ Does

550. Bloch adds the words **כִּי יִבֹּא יוֹם וְגַם** to emphasize that Job and his wife have kept the Pure Faith throughout the years of their wedded life. He then shortens the actual verse (2:10), in the manner of Jewish exegetes writing from memory.

551. Eccl. 9:4. Here too Bloch shortens and adapts the verse, brought into our discussion to illustrate that suicide was anathema to the Israelite culture, of which he believes Job to have been peripherally a part.

552. Jb. 2:10

553. *It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than in a house in common with a contentious woman* (Pr. 21:9 and 25:24); *It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman* (ibid. 21:19); *A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike* (ibid. 27:15). Pr. 17:1 makes an implied reference to the Woman of Strife: *Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than a house full of feasting with strife.*

554. **נְתִבְרַךְ** is a euphemism.

555. 38:1-42:8

556. This final statement is a recapitulation of Bloch's main point. His secondary point is that Job's wife was both a blessing and curse for him.

557. BT *Bava Metzi'a* 59a. "Rav said: One should always be heedful of wronging his wife, for since her tears are

she not feel humiliation more acutely than he?⁵⁵⁸ Yet nowhere in *Sefer Iyyov* do we bear witness to her grief.

According to one rabbinic maxim, Bloch's notion that Job's wife was smart-alecky or impious is untenable. For the very blessing he was later to receive came about in her merit, as can be deduced from the Talmud: "R. Ḥelbo⁵⁵⁹ said: One must always observe the honor due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man's home only on account of his wife, for it is written: *And he treated Abram well for her sake.*⁵⁶⁰ Thus did Rava say to the townspeople of Maḥuza,⁵⁶¹ Honor your wives, that you may be enriched."

What is more, and credit for this idea must go to my teacher Dr. Saul Troen, Job's wife is the only character in our story, apart, presumably, from his children, who truly loves him. She cares not to prove a point to the prosecutor or to assert her omnipotence throughout the world. She has no self-interest. When she looks upon her once vigorous, wealthy husband sitting on the ash heap, reduced to a mass of sores, she sees the pathetic remnant of a once prosperous and happy family - and she cannot bear to see him suffer. If he dies, she will be left alone in the world, alone to nurse her gaping, unhealable wounds. Yet this she is prepared to do so that he might suffer no more. As such she is "a wondrous person over whom even The Satan's hands shook [at the prospect of] touching her." She was, in the words of Ben Sira,⁵⁶² "a precious gift... put in the bosom of the God-fearing man."⁵⁶³

frequent she is quickly hurt."

558. BT *Ketubbot* 67b. "A woman's humiliation is greater than a man's". Yet in the story of Job, it is a frivolous God, and not an abusive Job, who was the ultimate cause of such humiliation, of such weeping.

559. late third-century *amora* of Babylonia and Israel

560. Gen. 12:16

561. A large town located on the Tigris river, Maḥuza was a thriving center of commerce. Rava headed a yeshiva there.

562. Shime'on ben Yeshua ben Eli'ezer ben Sira was a scribe of Palestine who wrote his apocryphal work in Hebrew around 180–175 BCE. This and many other maxims from his work, known as "Ecclesiasticus," are quoted in the Talmud, for the most part without attribution.

563. Ecclesiasticus 26:3. This statement is found in BT *Yevamot* 63b.

Appendix 2: Esoterica

The Tanakh implores the Israelite to live by the word of the Hebrew God with an eye toward the practical: The regular obedience to His commandments will result in a wholesome, prosperous life and provide continuous energy and vitality to the body politic. As an old yet still vigorous Moses tells Israel:

*For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances; then thou shalt live and multiply, and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest in to possess it.*⁵⁶⁴

King Solomon speaks of the practical benefits of yielding to the will of God: It will bring one good physical health,⁵⁶⁵ length of days, riches, honor, comfort, and peace.⁵⁶⁶ His charmed life will be recognized as having resulted from sound wisdom and discretion, and will be a tangible sign of the Divine grace.⁵⁶⁷ He will have security,⁵⁶⁸ fearlessness,⁵⁶⁹ confidence,⁵⁷⁰ the power to give aid to the less fortunate,⁵⁷¹ and a good home-life.⁵⁷² His shall be the blessings of counsel,⁵⁷³

564. Deut. 30:11-16

565. Pr. 3:8

566. *ibid.* verses 16-17. Cf. Deut. 22:7, as well as Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16, and Ex. 23:25-26 and Prov. 9:11.

567. verses 21-22

568. v. 23

569. v. 24-25

570. v. 26

571. verses 27-28 (implied)

572. v. 33

573.v. 32

grace⁵⁷⁴ and honor,⁵⁷⁵ provided he remain upright,⁵⁷⁶ humble,⁵⁷⁷ and wise.⁵⁷⁸

Knowledge of the Great Divine Mystery is granted to a precious few.⁵⁷⁹ Num. 11:26-27, Joel 3:1-2, and Jb. 42:5 represent rare instances in which righteous but otherwise ordinary people are given the power of prophecy. An exacerated Elihu says:⁵⁸⁰

*I said: 'Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' **But it is a spirit in Man, and the breath of the Almighty, that giveth them understanding.** It is not the great that are wise, nor the aged that discern judgment. Therefore I say: 'Hearken to me; I also will declare mine opinion.'*⁵⁸¹

Not aged men⁵⁸² but those human beings possessing a correct knowledge of the ways of God are animated by the Divine essence. Thus does the Divine Author employ the term אנוש for “Man” rather than the more commonplace אדם or איש.⁵⁸³ According to Maimonides, the nature of

574. v. 34

575. v. 35

576. v. 32

577. v. 34

578. v. 35

579. Gen. 32:30 and Ex. 33:20 and 23. See also Jdg. 6:22 and Isa. 6:5.

580. Elihu resented Job's self-justification in the face of God's transcendence and sublimity (Jb. 32:2) and he was angered by the three friends' failure to provide a definitive answer to Job's grievances (ibid. verse 3).

581. ibid. verses 7-10

582. On 32:9 Shlomo Sreberk explains לא־רַבִּים as בשנים. (*Miqra Meforash*. Tel Aviv: Shlomo Sreberk Publishing House Ltd. and Maariv, 1955.)

583. ibid. v. 8 (אָבֵן רִוְחֵי־הָיָא בְּאֵנוֹשׁ). So we infer from a comment of the courtier-scholar Don Isaac Abravanel (1437 Lisbon—1508 Venice). In an exposition on Genesis, he first mentions the conventional understanding of the generation of Enosh as having been the first idolatrous one (Rashi subscribes to this view):

ואמנם אמרו ששת הוליד את אנוש ושאו הנהל לקרא בשם ה' (בראשית ד:כו). פי' הו"ל הוהל מלשון הולין שהתחילו לקרא את שמות בני אדם ואת שמות העצבים בשמו של הקב"ה לעשותם ע"ג ולקראן אלוהות וכמו שהביא רש"י בפירושו.

He then brings the comment of exegete and polymath Abraham ibn Ezra (1089 Tudela, Spain—1167 Calahorra, Spain), who views Enosh positively, as having led and inspired (so implied) a mass spiritual revival. The True Faith, with its concomitant features of prayer and petition, spread across the world. Abravanel concurs with ibn Ezra and then dismisses the objection of philosopher-talmudist and physician Levi ben Gershon (also known as Ralbag, Gersonides or Magister Leo Hebraeus: 1288, Bagnols-sur-Cèze, France—1344, Perpignan, France) who points out that Enosh's ancestors Adam, Abel, and Seth already knew God:

והראב"ע פי' לשבחה שבימים האלו החלו בני אדם להזכיר את יוצרן ולכוין מעשיהם ותפלותיהם לשמו. והוא באמת הנראה ממשט הכתוב. ואין מענה על זה ממה שכתב הרלב"ג שכבר היו מכירים מציאות האל אדם והבל ושת.

Abravanel then clarifies that the Sacred Text refers to prayer. It was in the days of Enosh that men began to pray and to call upon the name of God [for aid] in all their undertakings:

ואיך יאמר כי בימי אנוש התחילו לשער ולהכיר מציאתו כי הנה לא אמר הכתוב אז הוהל לדעת את ה' כי אם לקרא בשם ה'. שר"ל שבימי אנוש התחילו להתפלל ולקרא בשם ה' בכל מעשיהם לפי שעם היות שקודם לכן בימי אדם והבל ושת היו משערים במציאות האל, הנה לא היו קוראין ומתפללים אליו. כי בימי אנוש התחילו בזה.

one's love [of any object] is commensurate with the nature of one's knowledge thereof. A small [amount of knowledge arouses] a lesser love. A greater amount of knowledge arouses a greater love.⁵⁸⁴ A connection may be drawn from this concept of intellectual love⁵⁸⁵ to the Hebrew verb ידע or “know,” which in the Hebrew Bible can function as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Thus does the Text say *And the man knew* [יָדַע] *Eve his wife*⁵⁸⁶ and *Bring them out unto us, that we may know* [וְנִדְעָה] *them*.⁵⁸⁷

To Elihu, it was inconceivable that Man could truly love God.⁵⁸⁸ Yet God’s understanding is

Abravanel believes that a minority of the ancient rabbis held this view. As recorded in the Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 23, 6 and *Yalqut Shime’oni* on Gen. 4:39): “Abba Kohen Bardela was asked: '[Why does Scripture enumerate] Adam, Seth, Enosh, and then become silent?' 'Hitherto they were created in the likeness and image [of God],’ he replied, 'but from then onward were created *qantranin* i.e. disputatious beings [whose theological misgivings had been aroused] by Kenan.’” It is halakhist-talmudist Abraham Abelè ha-Levi Gombiner (1633, Gabin, Poland—1683, Kalisz, Poland) who in his *Zayit Ra’anan* commentary on the *Yalqut* clarifies the word *qantranin*:

אנשים מכעיסין לפני המקום ומאנוש נמשך לקינן וכן מדור אל דור. וצדקו דברי הראב"ע כפי הפשט. וכבר הבינו קצת הז"ל הדבר הזה בזה האופן עצמו. אמרו בב"ר וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֱנוֹשׁ (בראשית ד:כו). בעאן קמיה אבא כהן ברדלא: אדם שת אנוש ושתק. א"ל עד כאן בצלם ודמות מכאן ואילך נתקלקלו הדורות ונבראו קְנַטְרָנִין. קינן קנטרנין.

Abba Kohen Bardela (a *tanna* of the early third century) has made clear that Enosh was in the same gestalt (lit. “in the image and likeness”) of his father Seth who was not an idolater. Abravanel now seeks a resolution between the majority opinion among the Sages that Enosh oversaw the beginnings of idolatry and the minority opinion, represented by Abba Kohen Bardela, that Enosh received and maintained his family’s tradition of fidelity to God. “It may be posited,” so he writes, “that the Sages thought Enosh a pious, God-fearing man but that his generation commenced to call upon God with idolatrous practices.” This, Abravanel states, is his conclusion:

הנה ביאר אבא כהן ברדלא שהיה אנוש בצלם ודמות אביו, כשת אביו לא עובד ע"ג. אולי יאמרו הז"ל שהיה אנוש חסיד וירא שמים ואנשי דורו החלו לקרא בשם ה' לעבוד ע"ג. זהו מה שראיתי בפ"י הפרשה הזאת כפי פשוטה.

Abravanel believes the Enosh account as he reckons it to be helpful to the right-minded religionist in manifold ways:

והספור הזה מועיל לבעלי האמונה האמתית מכמה צדדים

It should be noted that Maimonides held the view that Enosh was a star-worshipper, writing (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry and its Statutes 1:1):

“Enosh himself was one of those who erred”.

בימי אנוש טעו בני האדם טעות גדולה, ונבערה עצת חכמי אותו הדור; ואנוש עצמו מן המועים.

584. *ibid.* Laws of Repentance 10:6 and *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 51.

585. Heterodox Jewish philosopher and critical biblicalist Baruch Spinoza (1632, Amsterdam—1677, The Hague) refers to this psychological state as *amor intellectualis Dei*, the intellectual love of God (*Ethics*, Part Five, proposition 15), a narrower concept than the traditional השם יראת, which comprises both fear of God (יראת) and love of the Torah (אהבת תורה). See the *Birkat ha-Hodesh* (Prayer for the New Month).

586. Gen. 4:1

587. *ibid.* 19:5

588. 36:26 *Behold, God is great, beyond our knowledge.* (הִן־אֵל שְׁגִיָּא וְלֹא נִדְעָ.)

mighty and His love beyond question.⁵⁸⁹ For (conceptual) sinners like Job, implies Elihu, God’s punishment is proof of His concern: *He delivereth the afflicted by His affliction.*⁵⁹⁰ Here Elihu uses the verb *הִלִּיץ*,⁵⁹¹ meaning “to draw out,” which has a connection both to *הַלְיָצָה* or “armor” as well as *הַלְצִימִים* or “loins”. “Gird on thine armor!” is the subliminal message. By yielding to the Divine rod, Job will come to accept his own culpability and develop the power to withstand the pangs of earthly life with neither hue nor cry.⁵⁹² Two chapters later, an irritated God breaks in on Elihu’s pious diatribe. The narrator depicts the Almighty as ignoring the young exhorter,⁵⁹³ referring to him only in the third person.⁵⁹⁴ The irony seems to have been lost on most commentators that in declaring the young man bereft of knowledge, God deems Elihu particularly incapable of achieving the love of his Maker. Additionally, God’s own statement *אֶזְרֶנָּה כְּנָבֵר הַלְצִיךָ* (*Gird up now thy loins like a man*)⁵⁹⁵ seems in part an ironic repudiation of Elihu’s theology of pious suffering.

As by the rabbinic conception the love of God is proportional to, even reflective of, one’s knowledge and dread of Him,⁵⁹⁶ Job cannot be dismissed as a fatalist or catastrophizer.⁵⁹⁷ Rather, he is a truly liberated personality. For fearing God sets free the mind, releasing it from the fear of

589. *ibid.* v. 5 *He is mighty in strength of mind.* (בְּבִיר כֶּה לֵב) - This is my translation, the word *לֵב* being the seat of both thought and feeling in Classical Hebrew. See also Jer. 1:5, which states *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee.* God’s love of Man, it is implied, is unfathomable because His knowledge of us is perfect.

590. *ibid.* v. 15

591. *הִלִּיץ עָנִי בְּעָנָיו*

592. As Modern Orthodox theologian David Hartman (1931, Brooklyn—2013, Jerusalem) writes: “The liberating influence of knowledge on Job (*Guide*, III, 23) was not due to his acquiring a philosophical answer to the problem of suffering. Job’s new knowledge of being gave him a new perspective which enabled him to bear his suffering.” Hartman, David. *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. Second Impression: 1976, p. 264, note 55.

593. Jb. 38:1 *Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind...*

594. *ibid.* v. 2 *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?* (מִי זֶה מְחַשֵּׁב עֲצָה בְּמֵלִין בְּלִי־דַעַת)

595. *ibid.* v. 3

596. See notes 334 and 585.

597. Jb. 1:5 and 3:25-26

Man. Thus does the narrator call Job **יִרְאֵ אֱלֹהִים** or “God-fearing”.⁵⁹⁸ Indeed, Job ends his “Ode to Wisdom”⁵⁹⁹ with an endorsement of what must have been an age-old maxim by the author’s day, namely *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*⁶⁰⁰

In his *Behinat ha-Olam*,⁶⁰¹ an ethical prose-poem along Maimonidean lines, the Provençal physician-philosopher Yedaya Bedaressi⁶⁰² deems the illuminated mind⁶⁰³ capable of holding infinity in her grasp:

“Can the mind contain the heavens? Can it hold the seas? The very walls of the heart comprise inmost depth.”⁶⁰⁴

Bedaressi then asks whether such a mind may rise higher than the highest heaven:

“Still, could physical phenomena be stirred up higher than the psychological flights of a man whose mind is serene and fluid?”⁶⁰⁵

Enter a great paradox: Bedaressi asks whether the universe, virtually infinite in its scope, might ever comprise the depth of a [lofty] thought, despite the physical smallness of the human brain:

Could the circumference of the earth ever comprise thought, whose seat is but a nook as small as the human palm?⁶⁰⁶

The “nook” (עליית קיר) is the heart, seat of thought and feeling in the opinion of the

598. *ibid.* 1:1

599. ch. 28

600. *ibid.* v. 28

601. “An Examination of the World”

602. ca. 1270—ca. 1340. As a poet he preferred the moniker *ha-Penini* or “Dispenser of Pearls”. A masterful Hebrew wordsmith, Bedaressi was also known as *ha-Melitz* or “The Orator”.

603. And only the illuminated mind (possessing high intelligence, a moral orientation, and broad knowledge in the natural sciences). For Bedaressi commences his work in praise of the keen man (נבון) who is eager to trace the basic origin of his human essence (אזהב התחקות על שורשי מחצב אנושותו). He then lauds the just man (צדיק) who loves righteousness and [like the keen man also] has many thoughts in his mind (צדקות, בלב צדיק, צדקות). Such a one feels compelled to dedicate his speech to the glory of God (בקרבו יקדש קדוש ישראל ובשפתו יכבד). The author goes on to extol the man of science (רועה) who can examine all life-forms other than his own, such that they are submitted before him completely (מי משפלים בלעדי השלם יתכחשו לו?).

604. ch. 1 (היכל לב שמים? היכל לב ימים? מחקר כיללוהו קירות לב).

605. The author employs *the wind* as an exemplar of physical phenomena, and borrows the idiom *spirit of wisdom* from Isa. 11:2 to express the idea of psychological flights.

606. היקפו רחבי ארץ מחשבה, מושבה עליית קיר קמנה ככף איש?

medievals.⁶⁰⁷ This idea, so sublimely articulated by the author, brings to mind the ancient Indian *Veda Khândogya-Upanishad*,⁶⁰⁸ which states:

“*Brahman* (i.e. ultimate and basic reality)... is myself within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a canary seed or the kernel of a canary seed. He is also myself within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds.”

In his pain, Job longs to reason with God like a man with his neighbor. On the surface this may seem yet another taunt to Heaven. Look deeper, though, and you find Job’s inkling, caked in the dross of pain and resentment, that a commonality inheres between God and Man. An essence shared by both, imperceptible yet undeniable, joins the two in fellowship, brother partakers of the abundant, expanding life of the universe. For notice the language employed by Scripture: The Lord speaks to Job out of the סְעָרָה, “the raging tempest,” “the scattered turmoil,” “the roaring storm”.⁶⁰⁹ God too is tossed upon the whirling winds of space. Jostled like an ash twig on the cold, shrieking gusts of the universe, He is flayed, undone, maddened. Job’s incessant demands for His presence and His presents has heeled the Divine pleasure craft⁶¹⁰. How could we expect God to remain in a state of calm? Job has pulled Him through the silicate chute separating the looking glass and the sensate realm. He has squeezed the Exquisite, Prismatic Jewel Coruscating with Resplendent Love and Knowing Empathy through the narrow, interdimensional wormhole and into the Here and Now. Job marinates in a mephitic soup of sorrow, but God’s woe knows no bounds!

The Lord is further anguished by the contrast between the glory of Paradise and the hell of

607. See note 589.

608. 3.14:1,3

609. Jb. 38:1

610. See II Sam. 22:11, Ps. 18:10, et al.

Earth.⁶¹¹ Thus does His speech⁶¹² bristle with a grief that jolts and edifies the reader with each passing verse. The sparks of the Divine shoot forth in piqued defiance of this ordinary realm. God is crying out! For He has at last taken notice, conscious, aerial notice, of the privative, incomplete nature of earthly life.

It was not Job but God's young defender Elihu who dropped a match into the powder barrel and set God's teeth on edge. He proclaims that Man, though lacking in wisdom, should revere God who is at the same time inscrutable and beyond reproach:

*The Almighty, whom we cannot find out, is excellent in power, yet to judgment and plenteous justice
He doeth no violence. Men do therefore fear Him; He regardeth not any that are wise of heart.*⁶¹³

God lashes out in anger, both at the unyielding Job and the presumptuous Elihu.⁶¹⁴ For by letting The Satan have his way with His servant, God *was* unjust. Elihu remains blind to this fact but Job has come to accept it. And so, a tormented God hews out flames of fire and casts them at both men, demurring to false notions of His perfect righteousness. The sentient reader cannot help but sympathize with God's feelings of profound loss. Drawn into the farcical tangle of human travail, He is now dispossessed of His equilibrium and sacrosanctity, a King dethroned, a God misconceived. Mired in a pit of depression, His rage has turned inward. The Divine Id inflamed, God salves Himself with frantic expressions of self-affirmation.⁶¹⁵ Who among us is so unfeeling as to overlook the beautiful sadness in His words, a sadness that memorializes the cleaving of the crude and the exalted?

611. Jb. 38:19

612. *ibid.* chapters 38-41

613. *ibid.* 37:23-24

614. Still, in 42:7, God condemns not Elihu but Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. For according to Rashi, the latter three erred in accusing Job of outward sin when he had merely spoken "because of the severity of the pains that burdened him and overwhelmed him" (ואם הוסיף לדבר, מפני קושי ייסורין אשר כבדו וחזקו עליו דיבר). They should rather have consoled him as did Elihu (והיה לכם לנחמו כאשר עשה אליהו). Elihu's comfort seems to lie in the fact that he accused Job of nothing beyond self-righteousness and fatalism. See *ibid.* 32:2; 34:5,9; and 35:2.

615. *ibid.* 38:4-5, 9-11, 17-20, 22-23, 25-29, 31-37, 41; 39:1-2, 5, 10, 19-20, 26-27; 40:8-11, 15, 24-29, 31; 41:3-6.

God is the first effulgence of light out of the dark.⁶¹⁶ He is disappointed, nay, enraged, by the fact that He cannot give Job an inkling of the gradient diamond sky that lies on the outer rim of the tellurian plane.⁶¹⁷ But if not light, then at least peace. In this musty alcove of creation, God hungers for the nourishment of peace,⁶¹⁸ for an emptiness reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of *Sunyata*.⁶¹⁹ It was Jacques Derrida⁶²⁰ who said that the name of God “is the empty place, beyond any name”.⁶²¹ But emptiness is very far from nothingness. The Inner Sanctum is not in the same vein as the void Jean Paul Sartre fancied tongue-in-cheek.⁶²² Twice Job demands to be left alone⁶²³ just like God.⁶²⁴ Both writhe in the pain of loneliness and both yearn for solitude “like a swallow in the void”.⁶²⁵ *Tel père, tel fils*. Our grand epic takes Heavenly Father and earthly son from *mise en abyme* to *mise en abyme*. For Job would not ask God to humanize Himself, or at least to empathize with His suffering servant,⁶²⁶ were it not possible on some level, even as he

616. Rosenberg, Roy A. *The Anatomy of God*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1973, p. 4.

617. Jb. 38:15,19,24,29.

618. Job well understands this. See *ibid.* 23:13 where he says וְהוּא בְּאֵדוֹד וְכִי יִשְׁכְּנוּ וְנַפְשׁוֹ אֵינֶתָּה וְנִגְעַשׁ - *But He is at one with Himself, and who would dare to turn Him off-kilter? For this is what His soul desires, and the way He functions.* (Our own *derash*-oriented rendering.)

619. lit. “clear void”

620. 1930, French Algeria—2004, Paris. Born to a Sephardic Jewish family, Derrida was a philosopher who touted deconstruction, the theory that to concretize an idea is to denude it of something vital. He believed uncertainty to be a necessary ingredient of learning, social intercourse, and faith.

621. Caputo, John D., et al., “Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart. London: Routledge, 2004, 37. According to Derrida’s conception, the God of Job had in His erstwhile silence treated His suffering servant qua objective truth. For Derrida said: “To perceive the object as such implies you perceive the object as it is or as it is supposed to be when you are not there... So to relate to an object as such means to relate to it as if you were dead. That’s the condition of truth... the condition of objectivity” (Brannigan, John, and Robbins. “As If I Were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Applying: To Derrida*. London: Macmillan, 1996., p. 216). It is God’s intervention that disturbs the natural order.

622. 1905, Paris—1980, Paris. Sartre was a philosopher, writer, and political activist. He asked: “What is life but an unnecessary interruption in pleasant nonexistence?” It was in his 1946 essay *Anti Semite and Jew*, where Sartre wrote the famous line: “If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him.”

623. Jb. 7:16 and 10:20

624. Ex. 32:10 and Deut. 9:14

625. Stickney, J.T. *Prometheus Pyrphoros*. Joseph Trumbull Stickney was born in Switzerland in 1874 and earned his doctorate from the Sorbonne. A professor of classics at Harvard, he died of a brain tumor in 1904 at the age of thirty. Stickney was a brilliant and original poet.

626. Job at times believes God to be mindful of his pain, even moved by it (Jb. 31:4 and 14:16; cf. II Kgs. 20:5). At other moments, he denies God’s concern for him (Jb. 9:11 and 23:8-9). Fluctuations in mood bring about these changes in attitude, much like with King David (cf. Ps. 39:13 and 56:9 with *ibid.* 13:1-3).

would never remonstrate with Heaven were he to doubt his own eternal place in the cosmos.

Thus does Hillel the Elder declare: “If I am here, everyone is here; and if I am not here, who is here?”⁶²⁷ For each man occupies a *mundis minor*, a sovereign world, distinct to him yet luxuriant with the capacity to totalize all existence. The most famous of the early rabbis goes on: “To the place that I love, there my feet take me.”⁶²⁸ Thought is isomorphic. It inspires, and is therefore a cause of, change in the physical world. Deep in the soul of Man lies the power to impress mind upon formless substance and to give birth to the new. His mere thought can penetrate the interspaces of the universe and bring about a tangible effect imaged by the wetware of the human brain.

So did Job curse the day of his birth.⁶²⁹ A bereaved father and refugee of the wars of Heaven, he was now caught like a dust cloud in the midst of the entropy.⁶³⁰ If he is destroyed, the world is destroyed too, along with God.⁶³¹ We can in this wise understand the statement of the Mishnah:

627. BT *Sukka* 53a

628. *ibid.*

629. Jb. 3:1

630. *ibid.* 2:2 *And the LORD said unto Satan: 'From whence comest thou?' And Satan answered the LORD, and said: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.'* On BT *Bava Batra* 16a the third-century rabbi Shime'on ben Laqish explains: הוּא שַׂטָן הוּא יֵצֵר הָרַע הוּא מְלַאךְ הַמוֹת - “The Satan, the base inclination, and the Angel of Death are all one.” This statement is made clear by the following tannaitic teaching (*ad loc.*): יוֹרֵד וּמְתַעֵה וְעוֹלָה וּמְרַגֵּז נוֹמֵל רְשׁוֹת וְנוֹמֵל נְשָׁמָה - “The Satan comes down to earth and seduces, then ascends to heaven and awakens wrath; permission is granted to him and he takes away the soul.” It is inferred that by שַׂטָן Tradition means a kind of oppositional energy that induces men to unwholesome conduct and overtakes the physical body in its senescence. This satanic energy is sanctioned from on High, as Rashi elucidates: מִכֵּאן שֶׁנִּתְּנָה רְשׁוֹת דְּכַתִּיב וְקָסִיתָנִי בּוֹ (אִיּוֹב ב, ג).

By his circuits The Satan is contracting the positive energy within the cosmos, causing a disturbance in the anarchic vitality of the material realm. We thus reside in a state of entropy. (Cf. *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2: “O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.”)

631. *Midrash Tehillim* (Buber Ed. 90, 10): “*Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place* (Ps. 90:1). R. Yitzḥaq said: “That which the verse said: *The eternal God is a dwelling-place* (Deut. 33:27), we knew not if the Holy One, Blessed be He, is the dwelling-place of the world or vice-versa, until Moses came and explained the matter [by saying] *Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place*. R. Yossi ben Ḥalafta said: We knew not whether the Holy One, Blessed be He is subordinate to His world or vice-versa, until He Himself came and explained the matter, saying: *Behold, there is a place by Me* (Ex. 33:21). **For He is the very place of His world, and the world is not His mere location.** (שהוא מקום עולמו ואין העולם מקומו) Therefore, the world is subordinate to Him and not vice-versa.”

“He who saves one life is considered to have saved the world”.⁶³² Also, if the glory of God is

632. Because this maxim is so often quoted yet so seldom studied, I felt compelled to place it in its proper context, aided by the scholars of yore. The elucidations of Jerusalem chief rabbi Obadiah De Bertinoro (1445, Bertinoro, Italy—1515, Jerusalem), Kraków chief rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (ca. 1579 Wallerstein, Bavaria—1654 Kraków, Poland), and Talmud professor Hanoach Albeck (1890, Lowicz, Poland—1972, Jerusalem) appear in brackets. The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 4:5) states:

בִּיצֵד מֵאֵימִין אֶת הָעֵדִים עַל עֲדֵי נַפְשׁוֹת?

“How did they admonish witnesses [not to testify falsely] in capital cases?

הָיוּ מְכַנְיִסִין אוֹתָן וּמֵאֵימִין עֲלֵיהֶן. שָׁמָּה תֹאמְרוּ מֵאִמֵּד, וּמִשְׁמוּעָה, עַד כּוֹפֵי עַד וּכְפֵי אָדָם נִאֶמְנוּ שְׁמִיעֵנוּ. אוֹ שָׁמָּה אֵי אֲתֵם יוֹדְעִין שְׁסוֹפְנוּ לְבִדּוֹק אֶתְכֶם בְּדִרְיֶשָׁה וּבְחִקְיָרָה. הָיוּ יוֹדְעִין שְׁלֹא כְדֵינִי מְמוֹנּוֹת דִּינֵי נַפְשׁוֹת. דִּינֵי מְמוֹנּוֹת, אָדָם נוֹתֵן מְמוֹן וּמֵתְכַפֵּר לוֹ. דִּינֵי נַפְשׁוֹת, דָּמוֹ וְדָם זִרְעֵיזְתֵינוּ תִלְוִינָן בּוֹ עַד סוֹף הָעוֹלָם.

“They brought them in and admonished them: ‘Perhaps you will say something that is only a supposition [i.e. a rational conclusion drawn by you] or hearsay [i.e. you have heard something said by a source unknown to you], or secondhand [i.e. you have heard the witness testify before another court, and this witness might] even [be known as] a trustworthy man. Or perhaps you do not know that we shall check you with examination and inquiry? Know, moreover, that capital cases are not like non-capital cases: in non-capital cases a man [who has falsely testified that his fellow owes him money] may pay [back the] money and so make atonement, but in capital cases the witness is answerable for the blood of him [that had been condemned due to false testimony] and the blood of his descendants [that should have been born to him] to the end of the world.’

שָׁבַן מִצֵּינּוּ בְּקוֹן שֶׁהֵרַג אֶת אָחִיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בְּרֵאשִׁית ד) דָּמֵי אָחִיךָ צִעֲקִים, אֵינּוּ אוֹמֵר דָּם אָחִיךָ אֲלֵא דָּמֵי אָחִיךָ, דָּמוֹ וְדָם זִרְעֵיזְתֵינוּ.

“For so have we found it with Cain who murdered his brother, for it says, *The bloods of your brother cry out* (Gen. 4:10). It doesn’t say, “The blood of your brother,” but rather “The bloods of your brother,” meaning his blood and the blood of his descendants.

דָּבָר אַחֵר, דָּמֵי אָחִיךָ, שֶׁהָיָה דָּמוֹ מְשֻׁלָּה עַל הָעֵצִים וְעַל הָאֲבָנִים.

“Another [Aggadic] saying [not related by the judges to the witnesses for cautionary purposes but rather brought here by the Mishnah to clarify the aforementioned verse] is, *The bloods of your brother*: that his blood was cast over trees and stones.

לְפִיכָה נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי, לְלִמּוּדָה, שֶׁכָּל הַמְּאֻבָּד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כִּאֲלוֹ אֶבֶד עוֹלָם מְלֵא, וְכָל הַמְּקִים נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כִּאֲלוֹ קִים עוֹלָם מְלֵא.

[The judges’ words of caution to the witnesses are hereby resumed. They emphasize the cruciality of human life for from out of one man alone was the Earth filled to capacity.] “Therefore but a single person was created in the world, to teach that **whosoever destroys a single life from Israel, Scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed the world entire; and whosoever preserves a single life from Israel, Scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved the world entire.**

וּמִפְנֵי שְׁלֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שְׁלֹא יֹאמֵר אָדָם לְחִבְרוֹ אֶבֶד גְּדוֹל מֵאִבִּיךָ. וְשֵׁלֵא יְהוּ מִיִּנְיָן אוֹמְרִים, הֲרַבְתָּ רְשׁוּיּוֹת בְּשָׂמִים, וְלִהְיִידְגְּדִלְתָּו שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁאָדָם מוֹבֵעַ כְּפֹה מִמְּבֻעוֹת בְּחוֹתֵם אֶחָד וְכֵלֶן דּוֹמֵן זֶה לְזֶה, וּמִלְּךָ מִלְּכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹבֵעַ כָּל אָדָם בְּחוֹתֵמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הִרְאִשׁוֹן וְאִין אֶחָד מִהֶן דּוֹמֵה לְחִבְרוֹ. לְפִיכָה כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד חָיֵב לֹאמֵר, בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, וְשָׁמָּה תֹאמְרוּ מַה לָּנוּ וְלִצְרָה הוּאֵת, וְהֵלֵא כְּבָר נֶאֱמַר (וַיִּקְרָא ה') וְהוּא עַד אוֹ רָאָה אוֹ יָדַע אִם לֹא יִגִּיד וְגו'. וְשָׁמָּה תֹאמְרוּ מַה לָּנוּ לְחַוֵּב בְּדָמוֹ שֶׁל זֶה, וְהֵלֵא כְּבָר נֶאֱמַר (מִשְׁלֵי יא) וּבָאֵבֶד רְשָׁעִים רָבָה:

Another [Aggadic] saying [not related by the judges to the witnesses for cautionary purposes but rather brought here by the Mishnah to clarify the aforementioned verse] is:

“Again [but a single person was created] for the sake of peace among humankind, that one should not say to another, ‘My father was greater than your father’. Again, [but a single person was created] against the heretics so they should not say, ‘There are many ruling powers in heaven’. Again [but a single person was created] to proclaim the greatness of the Holy Blessed One; for humans stamp many coins with one seal and they are all like one another; but the King of kings, the Holy Blessed One, has stamped every human with the seal of the

Man,⁶³³ and God's glory fills the world,⁶³⁴ His existence is constitutive of, indeed the hypostasis of, the Divine Glory on Earth. Verily, the number of references in *Sefer Iyyov* to God's seeing greatly preponderate over the instances of man's seeing, one of the objects of the book being to convince us that man's sublime potentiality is of far greater import than the momentary health of his material form, which by its fragility hangs always in the balance. It was toward life that Job had long tended, ever expanding, regenerative life, toward God in His basic essence. Filled against a macramé of woe, Job was now partaking, as it were, in the undoing of his Maker.

Yet despite his lament, Job knew the universe to be in flux. He could never see the epoch of life in its full expanse, let alone attune the nodes of his thought to the mind of God.⁶³⁵ A foaming bubble on the scallop-edged waves of human existence, his sight was short and ever so fleeting. Still, as Job says in the Ode to Wisdom, *There is a mine for silver, and a place for gold which they refine.*⁶³⁶ Man can, nay, he must, feel himself compelled to find out why. He goes on: *As for the earth, out of it cometh bread, and underneath it is turned up as it were by fire.*⁶³⁷ The

first man, yet not one of them are like another. Therefore everyone must say, 'For my sake was the world created.' And if perhaps you [witnesses] would say, 'Why should we be involved with this trouble,' was it not said, *He, being a witness, whether he has seen or known, [if he does not speak it, then he shall bear his iniquity]* (Lev. 5:1). And if perhaps you [witnesses] would say, 'Why should we be guilty of the blood of this man?' was it not said, *When the wicked perish there is rejoicing* (Pr. 11:10)."

Note that this is the recension of the Mishnah as it appears in the Babylonian Talmud (ibid. 37a). The Jerusalem Talmud (ibid. 4:9 or 23a-b), sans the operative word מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל ("of Israel"), preserves a more universalistic version of the Mishnah, stating:

שכל המאבד נפש אחת, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו אבד עולם מלא. וכל המקים נפש אחת, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קים עולם מלא.

"Whosoever destroys a single life, Scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed the world entire; and whosoever preserves a single life, Scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved the world entire."

633. BT *Shabbat* 113b and *Hullin* 84b - הדר אלהים אדם הדר אנשים כסותם -

634. Isaiah 6:3 - מְלֵא כְּלֵי־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ - See also Num. 14:21; Ps. 33:5 and 72:19; Isa. 11:9; Jer. 23:24; Hab. 2:14 and 3:3. In *El Adon*, a Judæan hymn from the 2nd century CE at the earliest, we read: מְלֵא עוֹלָם עוֹלָם - "His greatness and goodness fill the world".

635. It is not for man to know the heart of God: See Isa. 55:8 - *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.* See also Pr. 25:2 - *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*

636. Jb. 28:1

637. ibid. v 5

violence of evolution yields life and sustenance to the world. *Man setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out to the furthest bound the stones of thick darkness and of the shadow of death.*⁶³⁸ Man not only tries, but he succeeds, in extricating himself from ignorance and obscurantism, and in vanquishing his own mortality. Evolution cannot and must not be denied. It is Man's destiny. What is more, it should be his greatest joy. As Solomon says:

*I have seen the task which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. **He hath made every thing beautiful in its time... I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to get pleasure so long as they live. But also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy pleasure for all his labour, is the gift of God.***⁶³⁹

Job knew that an end to his enjoyment of the expanding, abundant life constituted a death whose pall covered all creation. It is in this vein that he repents of his birth. For better to have never been than to be thrust from the light, *au courant*, into the outer darkness. As Rav Hamnuna said: "Oh Lord, before I was formed I had no worth, and now that I have been formed, I am as though I had not been formed."⁶⁴⁰

The man from Uz has caught the Wriggling Sprite of Indiscriminate Woe in his careworn hands. He stares into Its anode eyes and his mind buds like the lotus.⁶⁴¹ There, in the presence of a shapeshifting, chameleonic God,⁶⁴² Job accepts his loathsome vulnerability at last.⁶⁴³ He can no more alter his position in the universe than stay the Mighty Hand.⁶⁴⁴ This hard-won knowledge

638. *ibid.* v. 3

639. Eccl 3:10 to 13

640. BT *Yoma* 87b and *Berakhot* 17a.

641. Jb. 42:5

642. *ibid.* verse 2. The writer of the palliative denouement to *Sefer Iyyov* did not anticipate my examination: If God is so adaptable that He can do anything, and if He is so competent as to know every purpose, then He is variable and unstable.

643. *ibid.* verse 6

644. 42:10 states: *And the Lord changed the fortune of Job, when he prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.* In other words, Job has the capacity to direct his positive energy toward a given object but the tangible effect of such action is wrought by God alone. As Job says (21:16): *Lo, their prosperity is not in their hand.* See also Eccl 2:19.

secure in the trove of his heart, Job has outmaneuvered his cosmic tormentors.⁶⁴⁵ He has attained the God-cleaving of the mystical rebbes,⁶⁴⁶ has been infused with the Active Intellect of Maimonides,⁶⁴⁷ and stands illumined by the Grace of the ancient Hebrews.⁶⁴⁸ Life has broken the veil on his inner eye and it dilates like a saint in bliss, rapt with wonder. Job knows the intractability of good and evil and grasps the absurdity of fate and fortune.⁶⁴⁹ Aware of his nakedness in the biting cold of cellular existence, now sighted, he is become like God.⁶⁵⁰ And though cowed by Heaven into silence,⁶⁵¹ in his heart Job may declare: “*Veni, vidi, vici!*”

645. *ibid.* verse 3. Job’s mimicry of God’s rebuke in 38:2 seems to be a knowing verbal irony. Job *does* understand his inappreciable place in the cosmos relative to that of his Creator. Note: The Targum, Rashi, ibn Ezra, and Ramban are in accord that Job is speaking at 42:3. But to Benjamin Szold, the subject and tone clearly indicate that God has broken into Job’s confessional at this point (ולא נסמנו המאמרים בשם מי שהיה אומרם - אמנם עניניהם) (השונים מוכיחים כי מי שאמר זה לא אמר זה. וגם נכיר בנקל פי המדבר מענינם ומצורתם של המקראים). In His reproachful way, God asks Job why he should be aggrieved. For everything is enabled by and conforms to the Divine will. And besides, Job would obscure and fail to absorb God’s rationale for having created a functioning, dynamic universe (למה זה תחלה? הכל בכחי ובחפצי ותעלים ולא תזכור גם העצה אשר על פיה נתקנו ויתקיימו היצורים כלם). The depth and comprehensiveness of Szold’s commentary on *Sefer Iyyov* at the macro and micro levels render him the greatest of all Joban scholars. And though my understanding of 42:3 is different from his, I must paraphrase the Gemara (BT *Bava Metzi’a* 119a) and borrow the encomium of the third-century Sasanian emperor, Shapur the Great: אפריינ נמטי לרבי בנימין - “Let a palanquin be put up for Rabbi Benjamin!”

646. See note 364.

647. Last of the ten incorporeal Intellects, the Active Intellect (שכל הפועל in the language of Hebrew translators of Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* from the Arabic) is the transmissive functionality within the Godhead that operates in the sublunar realm. It gives light and reason to the *nous* of the prophet and philosopher and enables them to receive what Maimonides terms a “Divine overflow” (שפע אלהי) that brings about the actualization of their cognitive potential. The basis of this concept can be traced to Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Book III.

648. To the ancient Hebrews, the word חן connoted more than its *grundbedeutung* of “grace”. Depending on the context, it can signify favor, generosity, mercy, pardon, spiritual healing, beauty, attractiveness, or seductiveness. See Gen. 6:8; Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 6:3, 30:11, 41:11, 57:2, and 86:3,15,16; Pr. 11:16, 17:8, 22:11, 31:30; and Esth. 8:5.

649. Jb. 21:7-15. In *ibid.* 2:3, God declares the whole-hearted and upright Job’s trials to be unmerited. Job revered God and shunned evil, and he was made to suffer without cause. Cf. Eccl. 7:15 and 8:14.

650. Jb 42:5. See also Gen. 3:5,7.

651. Jb. 40:4-5

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EPILOGUE

מזמור לתודה. ברוך המקום הזקנו ומעוננו
יעל פעל ידנינו ויצלח דרכו על-קצוי-ארץ

התראינו-פנים לפנים ולא-במרחב
ויהי פינו ריק ויבש ומים אין לנגנו

ויתקע איוב בשופר ונעמד שגינו דומיה
ולא-יספנו עוד הלחם ואהבים התנינו

לא יעשה אדני דבר כי אם-יצרונני תם-וישר
בשוכה אנצל בהשקט תהיה לי תושיה

ואזרני אלהים נחליאל באזור-חלקה
אל-התקף הזה ערנתי ונכספתי

שומר מצוה לא-ידע לעג-ובוז
ולא ימוט לעולם נצר ברית-שלוס-יה

רוחי מתערה באזרח-רענן ארינה דמעתתי
ואפקח את-עיני ובלב נהר-צרי נמצאתתי

הנה שכלי ובונן בדת-נפש-משיבת
את מי-הישועה מגלת-הזהב שאבתי

אה"ב כ"ח כסלו תש"פ למבנ"י