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## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JOB

### INTRODUCTION

The basically enigmatic character of the relationship of God to man insofar as its implication for the problem of suffering is concerned is emphasized in the Book of Job<sup>1</sup> when the curtain is drawn upon the scene in the heavenly court. What actually took place on high is never again referred to in the book. Nor does the unique purpose of the suffering visited upon Job ever expose itself to the ken of the sufferers as well as the disputants. If man were to know God's plans and intentions the problem of Job would have been solved. But man does not and cannot know total reality. What takes place in heaven is altogether obscure to man. The prelude thus does not in any way stand in conflict with the book as a whole, but rather confirms its main thesis of the unknowability of God's transcendent purposes. For even what is known by Revelation is not the ultimate truth, and that too is made known only to those to whom God wishes to communicate His will within the confines limited for man by God's decree.

### 1. JOB

The days of silence have come to an end. The friends had been unable to speak to Job, for the pain was too great. They had to wait till Job opened his mouth.<sup>2</sup> What did Job have to say? Job does not pray to God. So far he has refused only to blaspheme God. He did not sin with his lips.<sup>3</sup> The good has come from God. The evil has also come from Him. We must

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

accept both as the expression of His will. Yet something had occurred in the heart of Job. Job began to question not his own righteousness, nor the intrinsic value of righteousness, but he began to ponder over — and question — the Divine order. Is the Divine order just? His questionings lead him to accept some kind of fatalism ordained by an impersonal entity. The astrological beliefs current at the time may have swayed him into rejection of Divine Providence. It was the position of the stars on the day of birth that determined one's fate.<sup>4</sup> Hence the terrible imprecations hurled by Job at the day of his birth:

Let the day perish wherein I was born,  
And the day wherein it was said: "A man-child is brought forth."  
Let that day be darkness;  
Let not God inquire after it from above,  
Neither let the light shine upon it . . .  
Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark;  
Let it look for light, but have none.<sup>5</sup>

Even the great prophet in a moment of despair fell victim to such troubling thoughts:

Cursed be the day  
Wherein I was born;  
The day wherein my mother bore me,  
Let it not be blessed.<sup>6</sup>

In the bitterness of his anguish Jeremiah even curses the man who did not kill him while in the womb, instead of announcing his birth.<sup>7</sup>

This day had given Job life and light.<sup>8</sup> Why did it have to be so? All his sorrow and grief could have been avoided had he never been born. God is apparently unaware of what has taken place. He has built a hedge around Himself, so what befalls the hapless victim is unknown to God on high. If he could but achieve rest — the peace of death. Here Job rises to universal heights in his reflections on the fate of humanity, and the inequalities and injustices to which human beings are subject. All the strivings of princes for power and wealth end in the silence of the grave where the sound and fury of the wicked

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

are heard no more and where the servant and master finally achieve equality.<sup>9</sup> Why should a man destined for a life of pain and anguish be allowed to see the light of day? Together with the disconsolate suffering masses of humanity Job yearns for the unending tranquility of extinction.<sup>10</sup>

Job had constantly been afraid that his dream-world would prove to be an illusion, and so it had turned out. He now has no prayer in his heart, no hope for the future, complete and bleak despair, only a curse for his own peculiar and inexplicable fate. He hardly utters a complaint against God, except insofar as He has permitted the way of man to be hidden from Him.<sup>11</sup> But perhaps, Job may have thought, He himself is powerless, a victim of a fate that is stronger than all. And who can tell but that perhaps in hurling his terrible curses against his fate he may have had God as his subconscious target.

### 2. ELIPHAZ

Eliphaz the Temanite is the first to undertake the task of answering Job. He could no longer control himself. Who can refrain from speaking when one hears impiety? Job who had himself been the exemplar of devotion to God and had always found words of comfort for the forlorn has now, in the midst of his own sorrows, become completely helpless and panicky. Had not his piety always given him comfort and assurance (rather than the fear and apprehension intimated by Job)?<sup>13</sup>

At this juncture Eliphaz breaks in with a terribly disturbing note — undoubtedly a source of unspeakable anguish to Job:

Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent?  
Or where were the upright cut off?  
According as I have seen, they that plow iniquity,  
And now sow mischief, reap the same.  
By the breath of God they perish,  
And by the blast of His anger are they consumed.<sup>14</sup>

Eliphaz's doctrine was presumably intended to fill Job with hope for a better future. But did it not imply that the untimely destruction of his children came about because they were evil-

doers? The callousness of Job's friends to his suffering begins to manifest itself, as well as their unbounded arrogance and self-righteousness. Eliphaz in his omniscience knows that *no innocent* man has ever perished (presumably, violently or prematurely). How does he know? He speaks of knowledge derived from his own experience,<sup>15</sup> which he apparently believes Job will verify if he will search his memory.<sup>16</sup> He speaks of the researches which have confirmed his dogmas.<sup>17</sup> But above all he attributes to himself prophetic illumination. He has been privileged to receive a communication from on high. In a singularly remarkable passage he describes the experience that revealed to him the truth of the Almighty:

Now a word was secretly brought unto me,  
And my ear received a whisper thereof,  
In thoughts from the visions of the night,  
When deep sleep falleth upon men,  
Fear came upon me and trembling,  
And all my bones were made to shake.  
Then a spirit passed before my face,  
That made the hair of my flesh to stand up.  
It stood still but I could not discern the appearance thereof;  
A form was before my eyes;  
I heard a still voice.<sup>18</sup>

What was the great truth revealed to Eliphaz in this apparition? It was that God places no trust in His angels, that all men are sinful in His eyes, that man is a short-lived creature who can never find justification in the eyes of the Almighty.<sup>19</sup> Job was constantly in a state of fright because of his inherent sinfulness. Eliphaz is frightened when the Divine apparition presents itself before him.<sup>20</sup> The implication of Eliphaz's vision is that were Job to recognize his sinfulness (even if not his sins), and admit that he is unjustified in the eyes of God, he could call upon God and get an answer. It is this recognition apparently that in the eyes of the "existentialist" Eliphaz makes a man innocent (*naki*, 4:7) and upright (*yashar*, *ibid.*) in the eyes of God and saves him from doom. It is the better part of wisdom to recognize this truth and call upon God.<sup>21</sup> God, who, in the introduction, is seeking the justification of man in whom

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

He takes pride, is, in Eliphaz's view, asserting man's inferiority and lack of worth.

In line with his theory, Eliphaz directs Job's attention to his proper task at this time: not to rant against the world and fate, but rather to recognize his frail humanity and call upon God. No higher spiritual being will take up his cause.<sup>22</sup> Job is angry. He is envious of men living in tranquility of body and spirit as well as of the dead and the unborn infant.<sup>23</sup> He is thus acting like the "fools" (*evil*, 5:3), who have been observed by Eliphaz to wax rich and suddenly fall from their high estate, so that even their children became poverty-stricken, deprived of rights, with none to help. Suffering does not come in vain:

For affliction cometh not forth from the dust,  
Neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.<sup>24</sup>

Suffering is not inherent in the natural order. Man brings it on himself. Sparks fly upward only because a smith strikes on the anvil. Troubles come on man because he has brought them on himself.<sup>25</sup>

Eliphaz is indeed presenting a sound theodicy, one that is ideally true,<sup>26</sup> but not necessarily universally applicable. Other possible factors are not taken into consideration at this point. Eliphaz is a very great man, a prophet, an inspired poet, a man of profound piety, but he is also self-assured and uncompassionate. Perhaps unintentionally he is identifying Job with one of those "fools" whose families are visited by dire penalties because of God's wrath. But does he not know Job? Has he not been Job's friend for so many years? Did he not rend his clothes upon seeing Job and learning of his calamities? The friends had come to comfort him. What happened now? Their philosophy is getting the best of them, and in its name they make brutal insinuations on their beloved friend, the true man of righteousness. Sincere piety and a devotion to God Who must be right at all costs has allied itself with justification of a fellowman's suffering in which unfortunately all men find secret satisfaction; a fellow's calamity presumably reveals the companion's own supposed superiority as well as the fellow's fallibility, especially

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

when he had been placed on so high a pedestal.

Eliphaz, however, rises above himself, or perhaps to his truer self, when he encourages Job to call upon God. He does not directly ask Job to pray; he rather declares what he would do were he in Job's place:

But as for me, I would seek unto God,  
And unto God I would commit my cause;  
Who doeth great things and unsearchable;  
Marvelous things without number.  
Who giveth rain upon the earth,  
And sendeth water upon the fields;  
So that he setteth up on high those that are low,  
And those that mourn are exalted to safety.<sup>27</sup>

The poetic ecstasy to which Eliphaz was lifted up in singing his exultant paeans to the Almighty opened up a new vista of thought for Eliphaz. He sees the possibility of suffering as a mark of God's concern. God not only punishes. He also chastises. The man who is chastised by God should consider himself blessed:

Happy is the man whom God correcteth;  
Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.<sup>28</sup>

Eliphaz fails to speak of the paternal relationship of God Who chastises man as a loving father,<sup>29</sup> but he reveals a new dimension in viewing the problem of suffering and its meaning in the life of Job. If he will take the Divine admonishments to heart and will call upon God He will bring to him deliverance and healing:

For He maketh sore, and bindeth up;  
He woundeth, and His hands make whole.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, He will lift him above all earthly vicissitudes. He will grant Job happiness, many children, longevity, and peace with his surroundings.<sup>31</sup>

The nobility and idealism of Eliphaz's words of consolation, which he has finally succeeded in bringing forth, are vitiated

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

once again, at the close, by his didactic and arrogant tone:

Lo this, we have searched it, so it is;  
Hear it, and know thou it for thy good.<sup>32</sup>

Eliphaz seems to be totally unaware of areas of ignorance in God's relationship with man, in spite of his affirmation:

He doeth great things and unsearchable.<sup>33</sup>

The implications of his all-encompassing conception of God's character remain unknown to the sublime poet himself. He has not yet discovered that there are vast, unconquerable vistas that lie outside of man's purview.

### 3. JOB (2)

At this point Job is once more constrained to speak. He apologizes for his words that sound impious. They are the product of his unbearable suffering.<sup>34</sup> He no longer speaks of the day of his birth as responsible for all his troubles. It is the arrows of the Almighty that arrayed themselves against him. Apparently his original astrological affirmations had been superficial and short-lived. He cannot truly liberate himself from his pristine, deep-set conviction that God rules the world. But God had made his life intolerable. It has become so meaningless and futile that he no longer holds any hope in his soul. All he can look forward to is that the Lord would strike him down and bring his sufferings to an end. Even at his last moment, he would expire with the consoling thought that he has not failed God and had never denied God's truth. Does Job here imply that he has not failed God, but God has failed him? How long can he still go on? Has he perhaps lost his capacity to think rationally, so that everything appears like in a crooked mirror distorted and out of perspective? Is he unable to help himself any longer?

Is it that I have no help in me,  
And that sound wisdom is driven quite from me?<sup>35</sup>

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

His best friends have failed him. They have proved deceitful and faithless. Showing no consideration for a stricken friend (since Eliphaz apparently had spoken for all of them, and very likely they had nodded approval of his words), they can hardly be taken as exemplars of God-fearing men. They are not honest, but are merely cringing before God, fearful of a visitation of God's terror on them. He has no request to make of his friends who have now made themselves God's accomplices but to point out to him wherein he has erred. He would not ask them to redeem him from trouble were he but to know that he is not the victim of causeless hostility. Their generalities are of no avail to him. Their words are mere wind.<sup>36</sup>

The futility of his own life leads Job to reflect once again on the common fate of humanity. He agrees with Eliphaz's general estimate of the tragic character of man's lot. His life is brief. He has no hope for anything after he dies.<sup>36</sup> Why should God make his life so unbearable during the brief span that has been allotted unto him? Should he not, rather than concerning himself with the trivial faults of mortal man, be more tolerant and forgiving? Are man's deeds really significant? They certainly cannot affect God Himself that He should be so attentive to them. Even in sleep He allows man no peace. Is it not He Who is terrifying him with nightmares? Is he a danger to the security of the world like the waves of the sea that seek to flood the dry-land? Is God finding it necessary to strike down on him as he does when he quells the fury of the onrushing waters?

Am I a sea, or a sea-monster,  
That Thou settest a watch over me? . . .  
What is man that Thou shouldest magnify him,  
And that Thou shouldest set Thy heart upon him,  
And that Thou shouldest remember him every morning,  
And try him every moment? . . .  
If I have sinned, what do I unto Thee, O Thou watcher of men?  
And why dost Thou not pardon my transgression,  
And take away mine iniquity?  
For now shall I lie down in the dust;  
And Thou wilt seek me, but I shall not be.<sup>37</sup>

Job admits he may have transgressed, he may have sinned,



## *A Study of the Book of Job*

but being unaware what his sin was he cannot confess. Then why does not God forgive him now? Wherefore wait till he will no longer be here to enjoy God's clemency. Having moved away from his astrological position, Job is ready to accept God as just, were man only to know why he was suffering and in recognizing man's frailty God would temper his rigorous judgment with compassion. Since man can do no harm to God, then why is God so concerned and why is He so severe? But then we might ask, why expect Him to be gracious to man? Man's good deeds can no more benefit God than his evil deeds harm Him.

### 4. BILDAD

Job's bitter outpourings against God as well as his acerbic rejection of his friends' "consolations" prompt Bildad the Shuhite to take up the burden. Bildad does not claim to be the recipient of Divine revelation, as did Eliphaz. Nor like him does Bildad claim to know the truth as a result of his personal experiences and observations. He calls attention to the tradition of generations. We ourselves are but as yesterday. The experience of the human race leads to the conviction that God is just. The prosperity of the evil-doers does not endure. Experience merely confirms the intuitive truth implanted in the human soul that God is righteous. The mind revolts against the contradictory of this proposition:

Doth God pervert judgment?  
Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?<sup>88</sup>

On the basis of this *a priori* conception buttressed by experience one must necessarily conclude that Job's children perished because of their transgression. Job's suffering, Bildad implies, may not necessarily be the product of his sinfulness. He does not offer any explanation as to what might have brought it on. Perhaps he accepts Eliphaz's theory of chastisement,<sup>39</sup> or man's general unworthiness in the presence of God.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps he takes Job's suffering as a test to which he is put by God: would Job

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

still trust in God and call upon Him in his trouble? Eliphaz may have had this thought in mind when he urged Job to pray and not to despise the chastening he was living through. Bildad's urging Job to prayer may have been stimulated by the same thinking:

If thou wouldest seek earnestly unto God,  
And make thy supplication to the Almighty.<sup>41</sup>

Prayer will restore Job to God's favor if he is truly righteous and troubles would no longer come his way:

And though thy beginning was small  
Yet thy end should greatly increase . . .  
Till He fill thy mouth with laughter  
And thy lips with shouting.<sup>42</sup>

The great believers in the efficacy of prayer, however, entertaining doubts as to Job's uprightness, never themselves offer up prayers in behalf of their afflicted comrade.<sup>43</sup>

### 5. JOB (3)

To the exhortation of his colleagues that he turn to God in prayer Job retorts that he would rather know why he was suffering than be relieved of his travail. But he knows that it is impossible to contend with God, for God will not answer him. He is wise and powerful beyond searching. His Presence is manifest in all aspects of nature:

He removeth the mountains, and they know it not,  
When He overturneth them in His anger.  
Who shaketh the earth out of her place,  
And the pillars thereof tremble.  
Who commandeth the sun and it riseth not;  
And sealeth up the stars.  
Who alone stretcheth out the heavens,  
And treadeth upon the waves of the sea.  
Who maketh the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,  
And the chambers of the south.  
Who doeth great things past finding out;  
Yea, marvellous things without number.<sup>44</sup>

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

Job apparently is speaking of the mighty acts of God in creation. Already in the early stages of creation God was manifesting His anger, which, according to Job at this juncture of his life, is more characteristic of Him than any other attribute in His relations with His creatures. This wise and powerful Being is arrogant and amoral. He slays the wicked and the innocent and mocks at the calamities of the guiltless. Job reaches the nadir of his despair when he declares the Wise and Omnipotent a demonic power devoid of moral considerations and without responsibility to anyone. He has no common language with man. He can only overpower man with His terror. Eliphaz's theory that man is unrighteous in the eyes of God is interpreted by Job as meaning that even if man is righteous God will brand him unrighteous:

Though I am righteous, mine own mouth shall condemn me;  
Though I be innocent, He shall prove me perverse . . .  
I know that Thou wilt not hold me guiltless.  
I shall be condemned;  
Why then do I labor in vain?  
If I wash myself with snow water,  
And make my hands never so clean;  
Yet wilt Thou plunge me in the ditch,  
And mine own clothes shall abhor me.<sup>45</sup>

Man, by implication, is more just than God, because man has moral standards. Out of the depths of his spiritual travail, Job sees only the bleak side of the world and life. In his tortured state of mind, joy and blessing are non-existent or meaningless. In a state of depression one is incapable of seeing anything but gloom and the shadow of death.

Having given vent to his unfathomable resentment, Job achieves a modicum of inner tranquility. As though against his own will, his speech is modulated into a prayer; not the prayer of a humble, submissive soul, but of a soul, tortured, agonized and rebellious — but still a prayer in which the terror of evil is contrasted with signs of Divine beneficence in the world. He now faces God directly and addresses Him in supplication,<sup>46</sup> his words at times being impassioned and moving. First of all, he asks why he is condemned. Why does the Almighty act dif-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

ferently from a human judge who certainly does not keep from the defendant the reason why he is standing trial?

Do not condemn me;  
Make me know wherefore Thou contendest with me.<sup>47</sup>

Is not man God's handiwork? Does the artist despise his creation? Does he not treat it lovingly and gently? Why does God then mishandle the work of His hands?<sup>48</sup>

Job is aware of another possible answer, namely, that there is no God to complain to or complain about. But this answer is completely unacceptable to Job, as it would be to any devout person, to whom the denial of God could be only the thought of the "wicked man" (*rasha*), who seeks thereby to reject responsibility. And yet is not the Almighty Himself fostering the very thoughts of the deniers?

Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress,  
That Thou shouldest despise the work of Thy hands,  
So that dost shed light upon the counsel of the wicked?<sup>49</sup>

Is God like man? Man delights to find fault with his neighbors. He spies them out and enjoys exposing their weaknesses. Men engage in this kind of behavior because of their limited concerns, their pettiness and meanness, since they seek to aggrandize themselves by belittling their fellows. Life is brief, and within this brief span every man tries to achieve something for himself and is not always discriminating in his methods.

Hast Thou eyes of flesh,  
Or seest Thou as man seeth?  
Are Thy days as the days of man,  
Or Thy years as a man's days,  
That Thou inquirest after my iniquity,  
And searchest after my sin?<sup>50</sup>

Job's God is not anthropomorphic. No human frailties may be attributed to Him. How is it that He is unaware of the true nature of Job's character? Job would not allow one misstep to lead him into a permanent departure from God and His law,

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

even if true that he had sinned.

God is free of human weakness. But he cannot be less kind and concerned than man. Is there not evidence for this proposition in the very creation of man?

Thy hands have framed me and fashioned me  
Together round about; yet Thou wouldst destroy me!  
Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast fashioned me as clay  
And wilt Thou bring me unto dust again?  
Hast Thou not poured me out as milk,  
And curdled me like cheese?  
Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh,  
And knit me together with bones and sinews.  
Thou hast granted me life and love,  
And Thy Providence hath preserved my spirit.<sup>51</sup>

The Divine ambivalence is incomprehensible to Job. The God Whose love creates is the God Whose anger destroys. Moreover, God's pedantic over-scrupulousness is unintelligible. If the Almighty is troubled by man's sins or his sinfulness, why does He not cleanse man from sin? After all, man's guilt redounds to his own harm rather than to God's? But even righteousness does not save. Why then was he sent upon the earth to lead a miserable life in a world in which man's existence is so "brief, nasty and brutish," from which the exit is only into a land of bleakness, everlasting darkness and disorder?

### 6. ZOPHAR

Zophar the Naamathite assumes the task of answering Job at this point. Like his companions, Zophar remonstrates against Job's self-righteousness and pride, from which, to be sure, all of Job's friends suffer in no mean degree. Job wants God to speak to him and tell him what sins he has committed. Did it occur to Job that were God to reveal His truth to him, he would be overwhelmed by the mysteries of Divine wisdom which are not patent to the human mind? He would then realize that God was not dealing unjustly with him but very mercifully. By implication, God does not answer Job because he wishes to spare him the pain of self-discovery. This argument seems rather keen,

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

but it loses its force in the face of its vagueness, and its failure to answer the question: Then of what avail is man's agony, if no reason for it is given? Nevertheless, Zophar continues to pursue his line of thought. Job is disturbed over God's exacting scrupulousness. Is it proper for God to be so watchful and zealous about everything that man does? Is not this, Zophar implies, a presumptuous question? If God would explain, could man understand?

Canst thou find out the deep things of God?  
Canst thou attain unto the purpose of the Almighty?  
It is high as heaven; what canst thou do?  
Deeper than the nether-world; what canst Thou know?  
The measures thereof is longer than the earth,  
And broader than the sea.<sup>52</sup>

The least effect of God's watchfulness is that foolish men take their deeds to heart. Man is fundamentally a savage and requires God's chastisements to keep him from straying:

But an empty man will get understanding  
For man is born as wild as a colt.<sup>53</sup>

Or is perhaps Zophar intimating that God is setting Job as a vicarious example for wicked men? If the righteous is dealt with so severely, then what should the wicked expect?<sup>54</sup>

Let Job, Zophar continues, cease to be so sure of himself. Let him adopt the proper attitude, pray to God and purge his hands and house of all evil:

If thou set thy heart aright  
And stretch out thy hands towards him—  
If iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away,  
And let not unrighteousness dwell in thy tents.<sup>55</sup>

Just as in Zophar's speech there is already an intimation of the incomprehensibility of God's ways with man, so there is also a groping on the part of Zophar to find a specific wrong to which Job's sufferings might be attributed. Job may never have directly caused injury to anyone. Perhaps indirectly he

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

may have abetted evil deeds. Perhaps he received ill-gotten goods into his possession or harbored evil-doers in his tents. He might have tolerated acts of injustice on the part of the inmates of his household. The fruits of violence may still be in his hands. Let Job look into himself carefully and make the corrections necessary for reconciliation with God.<sup>56</sup> For then, his light will shine again as in days past.

### 7. JOB (4)

Job, of course, is very little impressed with these arguments. He considers himself the target of his friends' mockery. They are righteous men, he says sardonically, who call upon God and He answers them. They can afford to laugh at the victim of God's wrath. They are tranquil. But so are robbers whom God gives good fortune and prospers in whatsoever they do. Job here, of course, is also unfair, because actually his friends are not mocking him. They are rather impatient with his self-assurance and his blasts at their conventional theology. Once more, Job continues to denounce the Creator as a destructive power. All of creation testifies to the wisdom and might of God. But His wisdom is not allied with compassion nor His power with goodness. His destructiveness manifests itself in nature, on a cosmic level. But it also reveals itself in history, in the affairs of mankind, in the confounding of kings and wise men, in magnifying nations and then destroying them. Job has seen all these things happen. These phenomena had been taken by him as evidence of God's justice. Now he questions this evaluation. Nevertheless, Job is above all still avid to bring his cause before the judgment throne of God. In his heart of hearts, despite all his overt protestations, Job believes in the justice of God, and he impatiently looks forward to the day when the mystery of his suffering will be made clear to him:

Yea, though He slay me,  
Yet will I wait for Him . . .  
He shall also be my salvation  
For a hypocrite cannot come before Him.<sup>57</sup>

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

But can his friends truly trust in God's favor? They are taking up for God not because He is just, but because He is powerful. They are all liars and flatterers. Are they not afraid that God Who knows their innermost thoughts will overwhelm them with His terror?

Job's service to truth is service to God. Then all the more reason why he wants God to call upon him, so that he might answer Him, or that he should call and God would answer him. Instead God treats him like an enemy. Is it for youthful sins that he committed? Perhaps, but could God continue to hound him for sins long atoned for? Is the punishment commensurate with the sin?

Light seems to be breaking through in Job's thinking, but he cannot free himself from his troubled preoccupations. What is man? he ponders, extending the full scope of his ruminations, as he generally does, not on his own suffering, but on the lot of mankind as a whole:

Man that is born of woman  
Is of few days and full of trouble.  
He cometh forth like a flower and withereth;  
He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.<sup>58</sup>

At this juncture, Job seems to have totally adopted Eliphaz's view of man. Like Eliphaz, he affirms that man is impure. But his corollary is different. Since man's life is brief, God ought not to be too concerned with this puny creature. He should let him live in peace for the brief span allotted to him, for he has nothing to look forward to after he dies. Man is like a flower which fades and withers, not like a tree which can go through a second birth:

For there is hope of a tree  
If it be cut down that it will sprout avain,  
And that the tender branch thereof will not cease . . .  
Yet through the scent of water it will bud,  
And put forth boughs like a plant.  
But man dieth and lieth low;  
Yea man perisheth and where is he?  
As the waters fail from the sea,



## *A Study of the Book of Job*

And the river is drained dry;  
So man lieth down and riseth not;  
Till the heavens be no more, they shall not wake,  
Nor be roused out of their sleep.<sup>59</sup>

A sudden flash races through Job's mind. Is it true that man shall not live again? The wish that God might hide him away from His own wrath till the appointed time for reconciliation arrive grows into a prayer and hope:

If a man die, may he live again?  
All the days of my service would I wait,  
Till my relief should come—  
Thou wouldest call, and I would answer Thee;  
Thou wouldest long for the work of Thy hands.<sup>60</sup>

But this glimmer of hope is dismissed by Job:

The waters erode the stones;  
The overflowings thereof wash away the dust of the earth;  
So Thou destroyest the hope of man.<sup>61</sup>

Job intimates that God could sustain the hope of man for a renewal of his life after he dies. But Job refuses to recognize this eventuality as valid. He is still too embroiled in his own bitterness to be able to accept the solution of survival. At this point, the rise of a new hope and its rejection, the first cycle of the dialogue comes to a close.<sup>62</sup>

### NOTES

1. See my articles on "The Book of Job and the Trial of Abraham," *TRADITION*, Vol. 4, No. 2 and "The Problem of Evil and the Book of Job," *Judaism*, Vol. 5, No. 1.
2. Job 2:13-3:1.
3. *Ibid.*, 2:10; cf. the Talmudic comment in *Baba Batra* 16a.
4. Cf. the commentaries of Gersonides and Malbim.
5. Job 3:3-9.
6. Jeremiah 20:14.

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

7. *Ibid.*, 20:17.
8. Job 3:20.
9. *Ibid.*, 3:12-9.
10. *Ibid.*, 3:20-22.
11. *Ibid.*, 3:23.
12. *Ibid.*, 3:4.
13. *Ibid.*, 4:1-6.
14. *Ibid.*, 4:7-9.
15. *Ibid.*, 4:8.
16. *Ibid.*, 4:7.
17. *Ibid.*, 5:27.
18. *Ibid.*, 4:12-16.
19. *Ibid.*, 4:17-21.
20. Cf. 3:25 and 4:14.
21. Job 5:8.
22. Job 5:1.
23. *Ibid.*, 3:16, 22.
24. *Ibid.*, 5:6.
25. *Ibid.*, 5:7.
26. That God is just is, of course, a Biblical axiom. But that other factors enter into play in the dispensation of justice seems to go unrecognized by Eliphaz. See *Berakhot* 7a, *et passim*.
27. Job 5:8-11.
28. *Ibid.*, 5:17.
29. Cf. Deut. 8:4; Pr. 3:11-12.
30. Job 5:18.
31. *Ibid.*, 5:19-29.
32. *Ibid.*, 5:27.
33. *Ibid.*, 5:9.
34. *Ibid.*, 6:2-7.
35. *Ibid.*, 6:13.
36. *Ibid.*, 7:1-2, 7-10.
37. *Ibid.*, 7:12-21.
38. *Ibid.*, 8:3.
39. *Ibid.*, 5:17.
40. *Ibid.*, 4:17-21.
41. *Ibid.*, 8:5.
42. *Ibid.*, 8:7, 21.
43. This offense may be implied at the end of the book, where Job prays for his friends with whom God is angry. See Job 42:8-10.
44. Job 9:5-10.
45. *Ibid.*, 9:20, 28-31.
46. Although he had already addressed God in his bitterness in Chapter 7:12-21.
47. Job 10:2.
48. *Ibid.*, 10:3.

## *A Study of the Book of Job*

49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 10:4-6.
51. *Ibid.*, 10:8-12.
52. *Ibid.*, 11:7-9.
53. *Ibid.*, 11:12.
54. See Pr. 11:31.
55. Job 11:13-14.
56. Cf. rabbinic interpretation of Job 11:14 in *Ketubot* 19a-b.
57. Job 13:15-16.
58. *Ibid.*, 14:1-2.
59. *Ibid.*, 14:7-12.
60. *Ibid.*, 14:14-15.
61. *Ibid.*, 14:19.
62. Job speaks of survival after death as the "hope of man" (14:19), just as the tree has "hope" through rebirth. Perhaps the references to the "hope" of the poor and the righteous in Eliphaz's speech (5:16), as well as in Zophar's (11:18; cf. also 20) are also to survival after death.