

# Job's Path to Enlightenment

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According to conventional wisdom, the philosophical issue at the heart of the Book of Job—the biblical text which describes the horrendous sufferings of a God-fearing magnate—can be summarized in a single question: *Why do bad things happen to good people?* This question is, of course, relevant only if the sufferer is a good person. Fittingly, commentators have tended to view the book's hero in a saintly light. Noted Bible scholar Yair Hoffman reflects the academic and theological consensus when he writes that: "Job's disaster does not come about because of his wickedness but, on the contrary, because of his outstanding righteousness."<sup>1</sup> Maimonides quotes a presupposition that: "a simple and perfect person who is upright in his actions... is afflicted by successive misfortunes."<sup>2</sup> Christian interpretations have taken a similar position. The Epistle of James, for instance, describes Job's endurance "as an example, brethren, of suffering and patience."<sup>3</sup> Catholic doctrine goes so far as to see Job as an anticipation of Jesus, a "pure, white lamb" whose suffering represents a redemptive sacrifice: "As a virtuous man who experienced suffering, Job became a type and prefiguration of the crucified

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and resurrected Christ.”<sup>4</sup> In all these traditions, Job is portrayed as a righteous soul whose torments are wholly undeserved.

Indeed, a casual reading of this most challenging book of the Hebrew Bible—and especially its short prose prologue and epilogue—is likely to yield a similar conclusion. At the beginning of the narrative, we are told that Job is respected by all who know him for his piety, which is evidenced by the burnt sacrifice he offers God as a penance for his sons’ wanton behavior. Skeptical about the wealthy Job’s apparent righteousness, Satan challenges God to put Job’s faith to the test. God grants Satan’s request and gives him power over all that Job holds dear. In short order, Satan does away with Job’s riches, livestock, house, and servants, and then, most cruelly, his children. Throughout, however, Job remains faithful, refusing to “curse God.”<sup>5</sup> Even when Satan afflicts his person with painful boils, Job continues to endure his tragedies stoically, as it is written: “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”<sup>6</sup>

Job is soon visited by three friends—Elifaz, Bildad, and Zofar—who intend to comfort him but nonetheless insist that his misfortune must stem from his own wrongful behavior. God, they argue, does not mete out suffering arbitrarily. Over the course of twenty-eight chapters, they urge Job to repent and thereby earn relief. Job, in turn, staunchly refuses. This impasse is broken by a long speech from a fourth character, Elihu, who condemns the three friends *and* Job, insisting—according to the standard interpretation—that man lacks the capacity to understand God’s justice. Finally, God himself enters the fray. While he rebukes the friends for vilifying Job, he also stresses Job’s shortcomings and ignorance in judging his Creator. Nevertheless, in the book’s epilogue, he rewards Job for refusing to be swayed, restores his family and health, and doubles his original riches.

The book’s epilogue would seem to reinforce the message of its prologue—that Job’s suffering was merely a satanic test of blind faith, one that he passed with flying colors. It is easy, therefore, to understand why Job is seen as a saint, completely undeserving of his torments. Be that as it may, if Job’s

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story is viewed in this light, it is equally easy to sympathize with readers who feel that the book is extremely drawn-out, monotonous, and repetitive. As a chronicle of a good man's sufferings, the continual condemnation by the three friends is excessive. In the same vein, researchers tend to view many of the book's speeches as superfluous, inserted into the text later. Such interludes as Elihu's speech and even God's own responses to Job sidestep the essential question of *why* God would subject a righteous man to such torments. The reader is understandably tempted to simply skim through the book and dismiss the role of many speeches in favor of the simple, trite message to be religiously steadfast in the face of cosmic injustice.<sup>7</sup>

Yet such an interpretation suffers from an inherent weakness. If we know from the beginning the purpose of Job's hardships, then the theological discussion within the book is moot. Indeed, we might rightfully ask, if the book's central question and its answer are evident in the terms of Satan's charter from God—i.e., a test of faith—what need is there for this book at all, let alone for such a long one? The wisdom literature of the ancient East, as well as the Hebrew Bible itself, is rich with such trials, but they are most notable for their brevity.<sup>8</sup> The binding of Isaac, for example, is described in a few verses. Even God's revelation to Abraham about his motive for demanding the sacrifice is delivered not in a fanciful monologue, but in a single sentence: "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son; that in blessing I will bless you."<sup>9</sup> Abraham is tested, Abraham is rewarded—end of story.

The Book of Job, by contrast, consists of forty-two chapters between the culmination of Job's misfortunes and his eventual reward. More important, these poetic chapters—Job's dialogues with his three friends, followed by the oration of Elihu, and finally God's revelation—consistently *reject* any interpretation of Job's suffering as a mere challenge. The idea they are assumed to express—that man cannot expect to fathom God's motives—is in direct contradiction to the prologue, which explicitly depicts Job's suffering as a contrived trial, a rationale we can easily appreciate. Furthermore, the claim that Job's faith remains unshaken over the course of the book is

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obviously incorrect. In facing his tragedies, the pious Job of the first chapter simply declaims: “Blessed be the name of the Lord,”<sup>10</sup> whereas later he lashes out rebelliously at God: “who has taken away my justice,”<sup>11</sup> and proclaims: “You have become cruel to me.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, the narrative does not describe Job’s resolute and unshakable conviction, but rather recounts the mounting *loss* of his reflexive belief in God’s justice. Indeed, his unavoidable surrender to God’s direct words notwithstanding, if patience and loyalty are the basic criteria of Job’s goodness, the longer we wait, the less Job seems to deserve his ultimate reward.

In order to propose a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of the Book of Job, one must be willing to look beyond the book’s prosaic opening chapter and the simplistic meaning it evokes. Moreover, we must credit the book’s author with a mastery of literary nuance, in addition to his universally acknowledged poetic genius. Only by peeling back the story’s superficial outer layer does the author’s intent—and the book’s true story line—emerge. Only then can we see that it is here, in the supposedly extraneous content of the book’s slowly unfolding plot, that the real meaning of the text can be found.

What is this alternate narrative? To begin with, it is defined by two extremes: Who and what Job is at the beginning of the story and who and what he is at the end. If we acknowledge as our starting point the radical idea that the early Job is *not* portrayed as a saint, but rather as a severely flawed individual, the tale of suffering that constitutes the book proves to be quite different from the accepted interpretation. It is not a story of sheer endurance and blind faith but one of existential awakening, leading to the attainment of prophecy in the book’s final scenes. The story, in other words, is about one man’s painstaking ascendance from a normative religious life to a deeply spiritual one. As this process takes place, the narrative also expounds on the biblical secrets of the cosmic order, the nature of man, and, above all, heavenly redemption through the light of wisdom.

Interpreted this way, the Book of Job deals with a very different question than the one we have likely been taught: not “why do bad things happen to

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good people?” but how a man’s honest response to worldly suffering serves as the basis for his awakening and enlightenment. Indeed, the forty oft-dismissed “interim” chapters of the Book of Job tell the story, step by excruciating step, of one man’s eventual direct experience of God. His suffering plays a critical role in his ethical, intellectual, and spiritual transformation, enabling him to move from egoism to morality, from ignorance to wisdom, and, finally, from alienation from God to a personal relationship with him. Over the course of the book, Job becomes a true *tzadik*, or righteous man; a *hacham*, or sage; and finally, a *navi*, or prophet. No transformation is more profound.

## II

**I**n order to understand the spiritual metamorphosis described in the Book of Job, we must first ascertain what kind of man Job is before his transformation begins. We must recognize that the early Job is hardly “good” in the full sense of the term. His attitude toward his faith is shown to be hopelessly shallow and naïve and conspicuously self-serving in relation to other people. It should not surprise us that just as Job initially views *himself* as a sinner, begging for pardon,<sup>13</sup> his escalating claims to virtue are disputed by his three friends, by Elihu, and, finally, by God.<sup>14</sup>

In the very first verse, Job is introduced as “innocent and straight, and one who feared God and turned away from evil.”<sup>15</sup> These traits are reiterated twice more in an identical formulation. Other verses never veer from these precise definitions.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that we are presented here with a picture of a dutiful religious man. But we must also pay attention to what is *not* being said about Job, because the exclusions are deliberate and telling. For example, while Job is said to *fear* God, he is not said to *love* him, as the author omits the second half of the commandment from Deuteronomy:

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“To fear the Lord your God... and to love him.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, while Job is said to turn away from evil, he is not said to *do good*, omitting the proactive side of another biblical directive, this time from the Book of Psalms: “Turn away from evil, and do good.”<sup>18</sup> There is also a conspicuous omission of the adjectives “wise,” “righteous,” and “good,” which, elsewhere in the Bible, are often paired with the terms describing Job. Significantly, we are left with strictly negative attributes, all of which describe a man whose piety is motivated by fear and compliance.

This analysis is reinforced through an examination of the specific words used to describe Job in the original Hebrew text. For example, his primary attribute, *tam*, is usually mistranslated as “perfect.” Literally, however, it means “innocent.” And indeed, just like “innocence” in English, *tam* can also carry the negative connotation of naïveté. That is, of virtue *devoid of awareness*. King Abimelech, for instance, is described in Genesis 20 as *tam*, even as he abducts Abraham’s wife Sarah—and deemed “a dead man” for this atrocity—simply because he was unaware of Sarah’s marital status. Likewise, in I Kings 22, *tam* is used to describe an archer who kills a person unawares. In both examples, the offenders are far from “perfect” in any positive sense of the word. Their innocence is technical, legally exculpatory, but nothing more. Likewise, regarding the four sons in the Passover Haggadah, the innocent simpleton is called *tam*. Like Job, he is, by definition, neither wicked nor wise.<sup>19</sup>

Job’s “unaware” psyche is most strongly portrayed in his approach to religious observance. There are several indications that Job follows God’s laws just to “be on the safe side.”<sup>20</sup> He makes his weekly offerings, for example, because “*It may be* that my sons have sinned”<sup>21</sup> (emphasis mine). The oblivious Job does not bother to gain firsthand knowledge of his children’s behavior, nor does he think that, for the offerings to take effect, his sons need to repent for their sins. Instead, he imagines that he is capable of sanctifying them, mechanically, from afar.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the book’s author takes care to suggest that the early Job’s ideas of faith and piety are little more than observed routine: “Thus did

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Job continually,” we are told in verse five—summarizing his character. But what of Job’s inner world? What of his prayers? What of his love for and knowledge of God? These are nonexistent. One recalls the words of Jeremiah: “You are near to their lips but far from their mind,”<sup>23</sup> and of God’s words in the Book of Isaiah: “With their mouth and with their lips they honor me, but have removed their mind from me, and their fear of me is as a commandment of men learned by rote.”<sup>24</sup> The Book of Job deals directly with this kind of rote, fear-driven observance. By repeating “and a day came” three separate times to mark the onset of the disasters that befall Job, the author punctuates how his protagonist’s comfortable routine is shattered by his ordeals, breaking the numbing cycle of his religious life.<sup>25</sup>

The shallowness of Job’s innocent faith is tellingly obvious in his initial response to the calamities that befall him. When Job says: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there: The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,”<sup>26</sup> we are hearing a conditioned response, a robotic reaction which appears all the more unnatural and problematic when contrasted with the response of other biblical figures to great loss and tragedy. Remember: Job has just lost ten children. Can anyone imagine Jacob responding similarly to the loss of Joseph? Or David to the loss of five sons? Hardly. Jacob “refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into Sheol unto my son mourning.”<sup>27</sup> King David, lamenting the loss of Absalom, “cried with a loud voice... my son, my son!”<sup>28</sup> Likewise, God glorifies Rachel for refusing comfort: “A voice is heard in Rama, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children... for they are no more.”<sup>29</sup> Judged by these standards, Job’s response is almost repulsive. Whereas true sages express desolation with rage and tears, Job’s lip service to God merely enacts the last of a series of rituals that begins with rending his mantle and shaving his head.<sup>30</sup> Mentally comatose, he does not know how to respond authentically to grief.<sup>31</sup>

Just as Satan predicted, Job’s mechanical stoicism begins to crack only after his own body is afflicted with a painful ailment. When his wife goads him, saying: “Do you still retain your innocence? Curse God and die,” Job

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again falls back on reflex, asking: “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive the bad?”<sup>32</sup> Yet this retort—as the text immediately reveals when Job curses life—is emotionally dishonest. Job is not being true to his inner devastation. Moreover, he is quick to insult his grieving wife, despite the immensity of their shared loss, shouting: “You speak as one of the degenerates!”<sup>33</sup> This response stands in stark contrast to the conciliatory tone adopted by Abraham and Isaac when confronted with their wives’ resentment of God in moments of crisis, and it reveals a deep contempt toward those “degenerates” beyond his social circle. The author expects the attentive reader to intuit that this is something a *tzadik* would never say. Thus, as Job snaps, he exhibits a deep-seated insensitivity toward the suffering of others, and sensitivity is an essential trait of spirituality.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, a careful reading of the text reveals that the early Job is *not* a spiritual man in any sense of the term. Job’s understanding of God is deeply flawed. His formulaic responses—“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away”; “shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive the bad?”—indicate a belief in a God who demands pure, unthinking obedience.<sup>35</sup> Job’s God evokes no feelings of wonder, love, and yearning; or of anger and bewilderment. He is defined by blind power and absolute authority and has no relationship with man, no presumption of justice, and no inner resonance with the conscience of humankind. For all intents and purposes, this God is no more than a pagan deity. And just as in pagan worship, this God can only be appeased.

The Job we have just described is no saint. His faith in God is shallow and unthinking. In his prosperity his observance is routine. In his grief he is selfish, unfeeling, and unaware of other people, including his own wife.<sup>36</sup> It is with this Job that the true narrative begins.



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### III

Job's first transformation results in his acquisition of compassion and social awareness, and qualifies him as a morally righteous man. Previously ruled by self-interest, and unmindful in his religious attitude, Job gains, in the course of this transformation, a positive, proactive attribute, namely empathy with the suffering of others and a sense of responsibility toward people in need.<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen, the early Job verges on emotional autism. When he laments the tragedies which have befallen him, it is almost as if the true victims—his slaves and his children—never even existed: “Naked came I... naked shall I return,” he utters in self-obsession.<sup>38</sup> Job's early actions are also at fault. His sacrifices for his sons were fear-driven and impersonal, while his daughters were ignored.<sup>39</sup> Elifaz, in attempting to compliment Job on his devoutness, can point only to pious words: the fact that he has “chastised many,” much as he has chastised his grieving wife.<sup>40</sup> Noticeably absent is any mention of a *positive* action, i.e., any generosity toward the less fortunate. Elifaz emphasizes these failings later in the text:

Is not your wickedness great? And your iniquities infinite? For you have taken pledges from your brother for naught and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have not given water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry.... You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken.<sup>41</sup>

Elifaz clearly goes overboard with his accusations, an offense that will, at the book's conclusion, require mild penance on his part. Nonetheless, given Elifaz's comfort with voicing such accusations in public, it is clear that the early Job was hardly a paragon of charity.<sup>42</sup>

The best way to appreciate the author's intent in portraying the early Job's iniquities is by following his unfolding changes. They begin to take

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shape when Job's old religious maxims start to fail him emotionally. Job's self-centeredness cracks with his second reply to his wife: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive the bad?"<sup>43</sup> While he still echoes religious formality, there is an important difference. Where before Job employed only a singular "I," he now discovers the plural "we," including his wife in his frame of reference. In literary terms, the introduction of her voice into the story is the spark of another voice within Job. Her words—and her possible suggestion of suicide—signify the instigation of an internal dialogue. This new voice breaks the spell of sleepwalking years, and creates the first rift between the Job of external appearances and the Job of internal contemplation. "In all this Job did not sin with his lips," says the text, hinting that while he is as yet unable to express it out loud, deep inside, *thank God*, "sinning" has begun.

This crack triggers Job's first great outcry. As we shall see, it proves to be a small step from cursing his wife to cursing his life—just a few verses later—in point of fact following her chided suggestion almost to the letter. In chapter 3, as "Job opened his mouth and cursed his day,"<sup>44</sup> we witness a visceral outbreak of emotion that signifies the true beginning of his transformation, sweeping away a lifetime of innocence.<sup>45</sup> This speech, authentic and empowering, replaces Job's earlier reflexive utterances. After a week of silent meditation with his friends—likely the first such introspective period in his life—Job's outcry represents an initial indication of genuine self awareness:<sup>46</sup>

And Job spoke, and said: Oh that the day had perished wherein I was born... Because it did not shut up the doors of my mother's womb nor hide the toil from my eyes... Why is light given to him who toils, and life to the bitter of soul?... For my sighing comes before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters.<sup>47</sup>

While the entire speech is obsessed with death, it is actually the moment of Job's mental rebirth. Indeed, the consideration of death has been the impetus for spiritual quests on the part of thinkers as diverse as the Buddha and

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Albert Camus. Psychologically, however, Job still has a long way to go, for the personality expressed in his first speech is clearly regressive:

Why did I not die from the womb? Why did I not perish when I came out of the belly? Why did a lap receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should suck? For now I should have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: Then had I been at rest.<sup>48</sup>

One cannot ignore the implications of Job's oral-stage mother attachment, or how his death wish constitutes a Freudian, infantile drive to return to the womb. In Job's fantasy, the desired "sleep" is the equilibrium of the womb to which he has already promised to return naked in chapter 1.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Job's grievances lack direction at this stage. He does not point a finger at wrongdoers or toward God.<sup>50</sup> Instead, he rants like a child, throwing a tantrum at abstractions such as his date of birth, or at fantasized body parts.<sup>51</sup>

Paradoxically, Job's despair leads his friends to introduce the subject of God's justice, which he himself did not raise. It is *their* insistence that suffering has meaning which will compel Job to shift his grievance from that of being born to that of being *wronged*. The heated debates between Job and his friends soon lead him to replace his stoic acceptance with righteous indignation. This anger is vital to his moral development, as the Book of Ecclesiastes states: "Anger is better than laughter, for as the face is grave, the mind turns pure."<sup>52</sup> It is Job's anguish, and his anger toward his friends, that catalyzes his next phase of development.<sup>53</sup> In this new and extroverted stage (chapters 6-19), Job leaves his symbiotic affair with the womb, and, at last, begins to notice those around him. In chapter 12, Job becomes aware of archetypal characters such as thieves and elders and begins to take note of animals and nature. Two chapters later he even mentions his children.<sup>54</sup> What Job projects onto the people around him, however, is hardly tender empathy. Job's first acknowledgment of his friends is "my brothers betrayed me,"<sup>55</sup> a sentiment he elaborates upon:

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My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my maidservants count me as a stranger... I call to my servant, but he does not respond... I am repulsive to my wife, loathsome to the sons of my own mother... All my friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me.<sup>56</sup>

These are ironic words coming from a man who has never mourned the loss of his children, consoled his grieving wife, thanked his friends for their support, or noticed his shepherds' demise. But as the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott explains, this reaction is an unavoidable and necessary step on the road to developing a sense of morality: "Simultaneous love-hate experience implies the achievement of ambivalence, the enrichment and refinement of which leads to the emergence of concern."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, despite Job's self-pity, his words could not better describe what psychology calls "Differentiation": a realization of the world and the people outside oneself. As Job both loves and hates his friends, guests, servants, wife, and children, he begins, at last, to acknowledge their independent existence and social significance.

As Winnicott would predict, concern does indeed emerge in chapters 24-27, in which we encounter a very different Job, one whose eyes have opened to the world. Suddenly, Job's expanding awareness acknowledges the misery of the less fortunate. Even as Job condemns Heaven for their state, conveniently leaving himself out of the picture, his tragic portrayal of social reality is worlds apart from the egocentric ranting that marked his previous self, just as his description of injustice is no longer theoretical in nature:

Men... drive away the ass of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the poor off the road... Behold, like wild asses in the desert they go forth to their toil, seeking prey in the wilderness as food for their children... They lie all night naked, without clothing... hungry, they carry the sheaves... they tread the winepresses but suffer thirst. From out of the city the dying groan, and the lifeblood of the wounded cries for help.<sup>58</sup>

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It is a small step from this to another breakthrough, when, for the first time, Job considers his own role in compassion and begins to re-invent himself anew. To do so, he employs the psychological device of reconstructing his identity by re-writing his history. A full twenty-nine chapters into the book, Job suddenly “remembers” to depict himself as a saint, describing proactive deeds:

I delivered the poor who cried out, The fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, And I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, And I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, And I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, And plucked the victim from his teeth.<sup>59</sup>

We have good reason to doubt this self-glorification. Maimonides dismisses it as “boasting.” At the same time, however, one must appreciate Job’s new grasp of his moral responsibility toward others.<sup>60</sup> Soon thereafter he internalizes the fact that it is not enough merely to act according to custom and routine—one must also *feel*. Therefore, the guilt-ridden Job cries out: “Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?”<sup>61</sup> We know that Job did not, in fact, weep or grieve for anyone, save himself. But in claiming to have done so, Job implicitly acknowledges that he *should have*.<sup>62</sup> The suffering of others has finally touched his heart.

In his last major speech, two-thirds through the book, Job displays a level of morality that few attain. He articulates a flash of insight into *why* he must respect the human rights of his serf: “Did not he that made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?”<sup>63</sup> This question asserts the basic principle of human equality. Note also how the previously fantasized womb, expressing Job’s regressive state, has now become concrete and realistic. Throughout this speech, Job articulates the *quid pro quo* that governs a just society. If I steal, he says, may my crops go to others; and of adultery: “If I lurk at my neighbor’s door, then let my own wife grind

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for another. . . . For that were a heinous crime!”<sup>64</sup> Having finally understood the core values of moral behavior, Job no longer desires to simply deflect punishment. Rather, he wants to do *what’s right*.<sup>65</sup> Job ends his speech with a series of oaths:

If [it be that] I raise my hand against the fatherless, because I saw help in the gate; then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. . . . If [it be that] I have eaten its yield without payment and caused the death of its owners; let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.<sup>66</sup>

This represents a revolutionary transformation for a man who was once completely oblivious to the world around him. He now embraces the desolate under caring wings of love. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas points out that: “For pure suffering. . . a beyond takes shape in the inter-human;” this “beyond oneself” has opened itself to Job.<sup>67</sup> Previously self-centered, Job has learned to empathize with the experiences and suffering of others. By the end of chapter 31, he has become a morally righteous man and has effectively exorcised Satan from both himself and the book as a whole.

#### IV

Job’s moral development runs parallel to another transformation, this one concerning his grasp of metaphysical, or cosmic, knowledge. Unlike Job’s evolution into righteousness, which requires him to change his oblivious approach to the here and now, his ascendance to wisdom demands a change of a very different sort: a new understanding of the afterlife.

This marks a shift in the dialogues as well. Initially concerned with the emotional world of a single man, they soon widen to encompass the plight of all mankind and the nature of immortality. Indeed, at its philosophical

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core, the Book of Job sets the historic stage for the epic battle between the cosmic forces of light and darkness. Each of these terms appears thirty-three times in the book, not counting synonyms, constituting over twenty percent of their usage in the Hebrew Bible—ten times their relative share. No other topic comes close to being as important to deciphering the text. To become a sage, Job must appreciate the place of these two opposing elements in creation. Only then can he grasp their existential dimension and achieve a renewed understanding of the meaning of life.<sup>68</sup>

This cosmic odyssey begins with a Job who knows only darkness. It appears prominently in his descriptions of death, which he views as a descent into a dark cosmic underworld:

I go where I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the Shadow of Death. The land of utter gloom, as darkness itself, of deep shadow without order, and which is manifest as darkness.<sup>69</sup>

Job perceives *Sheol*, or the world of the dead, as “darkness incarnate.” Sheol also evokes the oceanic Abyss: “Darkness that you cannot see, and an abundance of waters that cover you,” leaving no doubt that in its cosmology, Job’s cosmic pit is one of water, submerged in the deepest heart of the primordial Sea, beneath the plate of the earth.<sup>70</sup> God clearly points to this identity: “Have you entered into the springs of the Sea? Or have you walked in search of the Abyss? Have the gates of Death been opened unto you? Or have you seen the doors of the Shadow of Death?”<sup>71</sup> Thus, Job’s underworld is devoid of agonizing fires or eternal punishments. It is, instead, a place of unconscious sleep, utterly *lifeless*, where “dead things (*refaim*) whirl under the waters.”<sup>72</sup> Job sees the descent into Sheol as ebbing into nothingness.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the shade of man that is imagined latent in Sheol maintains no autonomy, identity, or consciousness, as Job tells God: “You will seek me, and I will be absent”;<sup>74</sup> “I will be as though I had not been.”<sup>75</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that the early Job sees death as an egalitarian destiny. To him, death is the great equalizer of men, a place to which both the righteous and the wicked, the mighty and the weak, go down

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together: “He [God] destroys the innocent and the wicked,”<sup>76</sup> Job says, and reiterates: “Together, on the earth they lie.”<sup>77</sup> Like the early Job’s pagan concept of God, his view of death is in keeping with primitive mythology; as Alice K. Turner writes: “The dead spirits in these early stories lead a... completely egalitarian existence. There is no division yet into privileged or blessed souls versus sinners or common folk.”<sup>78</sup> This is Job’s idea of death throughout the first half of the book. Clearly, this view of “the world to come,” lacking any posthumous reward and punishment, precludes the possibility of divine justice. Subjected to tragedy himself, Job becomes adamant that sinners may enjoy a better life than the worthy, and if all men are destined for the same fate after death, what motivation can there be for adhering to God’s way? As long as Job holds to this view he is unable to transcend his agony and despair.

Job’s emphasis on eternal darkness as a physical place reflects a vertical concept of the cosmos, with the Abyss of the underworld below, the heights of Heaven atop, and the Earth standing between them. This cosmology runs like a leitmotif throughout the book: “Higher than Heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?”<sup>79</sup> As Job deepens his investigation of the cosmic order, the true significance of this dichotomy is revealed. He begins to understand that the identification between death, Sheol, and the Abyss is rooted in the biblical story of creation. It recalls the primordial Sea of black waters that existed before the formation of Heaven and Earth, described in Genesis as “darkness upon the face of the Abyss.”<sup>80</sup> The Book of Job teaches that, over the course of creation, this monstrous Sea was “barred” or locked beneath the plate of the Earth and *became* the cosmic underworld. Nowhere else in the bible is this ever explained. The epic feat that created Sheol is evident from identifying Sheol with *yam*, the mythic Sea, and *tehom*, the Abyss: “By his power [God] stilled the Sea; by his understanding he smote Rahab. By his spirit Heaven was spread over it; his hand jabbed the copper bar”;<sup>81</sup> and “Who shut in the Sea with doors... When it emerges [to Earth] it exits from a womb... When I fixed my limit to it and set bars and doors. When



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I said, This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!”<sup>82</sup> Job recalls the same feat when he asks: “Am I the Sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me?”<sup>83</sup>

It is this picture of creation that establishes the element of light in the metaphysical equation, for as we are told repeatedly in the chapters that comprise Job’s cosmic inquiries, God’s ceiling of the Sea by erecting the canopy of Heaven is identical to a *sealing in* of its inherent darkness. This was accomplished through the creative act of “Let there be light!” Accordingly, the Book of Job states: “Behold, he spreads his light upon it and covers the bottom of the Sea”;<sup>84</sup> “He has compassed a circle upon the face of the waters, at the boundary between light and darkness”;<sup>85</sup> “He sets an end to darkness”;<sup>86</sup> “He binds the floods from overflowing; and he brings the latent into light.”<sup>87</sup> Since only the creation of light made possible the formation of life, the primordial darkness of Sheol is, by default, identical with death.

The idea of light soon marginalizes the egalitarian destiny of Sheol and offers a parallel, heavenly, destiny. For the brilliant, crystalline Heaven, with its sun, lightning, and stars, is not the only place in which light is located. According to the text, human beings also have an inner spark of light—variously conceived of as a “lamp” or “candleflame”—which is connected to this eternal, celestial element. This spark will constitute Job’s new, secret appreciation of man’s eternal nature. But his discovery is gradual and hesitant. It begins, tentatively, when he challenges the finality of Sheol. As Job concludes the first round of dialogues, he suddenly speaks of Sheol as a temporary hiding place rather than a permanent repose:

O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past... and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my shift I will hope, until my replacement comes.<sup>88</sup>

Here, Sheol is no longer a dead end. Previously, Job said he would be absent in death, but he now declares the exact opposite: “You will call, and I will answer you; you will long for the creation of your hands.”<sup>89</sup> As the next stage of his progression, Job expresses a revitalized desire for a *meaningful*

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immortality, the first time he has entertained such a possibility: "O that my words were now written! O that they were fixed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and with lead in the rock forever!"<sup>90</sup>

Job's breakthrough, however, occurs in a single statement: "The lamp of the wicked is put out."<sup>91</sup> Here the author imparts to us a crucial clue to the cosmic nature of man. He teaches us the positive from the negative. If the light of the *wicked* is extinguished, then by implication the light of the righteous *is not*. Indeed, under further scrutiny, we discover that the extinguishing of light is a dire fate that neither Job nor any debater ever attributes to the virtuous or to man in general anywhere in the entire book. The introduction of this novel idea pertaining to man's "lamp," or inner light, defines the differentiating factor between the souls of the good and those of evil—fate is no longer blind. Now Job can entertain the possibility of divine justice when, in chapter 28, he demands to be treated fairly by God for the first time, insisting, as Elie Wiesel puts it, that "man is not a toy."<sup>92</sup>

As with his moral development, Job's friends facilitate the process by which he arrives at this epiphany regarding the afterlife. Job's reference to man's "lamp" follows an image hinted at by Elifaz, regarding a sinner whose "flame will dry up."<sup>93</sup> Bildad as well adds to the sinner's fate in the underworld, which is common to all mankind, a further type of extinction:

The light of the wicked shall also be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his residence, and his candleflame shall be put out on him. . . . He shall be driven from light into darkness and chased out of the cosmos.<sup>94</sup>

Zofar, too, reiterates this idea: "Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures; an unlit fire will devour him."<sup>95</sup> With their help, Job comes to realize that the righteous man and the sinner do *not* share the same fate. The former's inner light shines on after his death, whereas the latter's is extinguished.

The "candleflame" light of man, conjured up in these quotes, is a spark of the cosmic light of Heaven. Both lights defy the darkness of the underworld, and both exist forever. They are beyond the reach of death. Indeed,

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Job's idea of a lamp, like Bildad's candleflame, correlates with the biblical idea of man's highest soul, or *neshamah*, which is "a candleflame of the Lord."<sup>96</sup> By stressing the importance of this component, Elihu and God finalize the differentiation between the virtuous and the sinful, as God states: "From the wicked, their light is withheld."<sup>97</sup> They introduce, in effect, an additional concept of eternal life, defined as an ideal existence. How does God relate to man? asks Elihu, and he answers: "He will deliver his lifeblood from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man. To save his lifeblood from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of life."<sup>98</sup> The preservation of one's lifeblood (*nefesh*) in this verse is merely a prerequisite to achieving a higher realization of oneself: "For with you is the fountain of life: in your light shall we see light."<sup>99</sup> In these quotes, just as in common English, the word "life" changes its meaning from temporal life on Earth to life eternal.<sup>100</sup>

But what, exactly is this light? What is the nature of this ideal and eternal existence? With these questions, we reach the heart of our ancient wisdom text, for the biblical concept of light, particularly in the Book of Job, proves to be the physical incarnation of Wisdom—what Wisdom is made of, and how knowledge is *seen*. The creation of light and the erection of Heaven imposed order on the primeval, dark chaos; light, as an element, is therefore perceived as the very substance of form, design, and consciousness. It established the luminous rule of Wisdom over God's created world.

We first learn this *gnosis*, or insight, through the book's identification of Wisdom and Heaven. In the pivotal Wisdom Poem in chapter 28, Job moves decisively from the sphere of morality and justice to that of metaphysics and cosmic learning. It is here that Job asks: "Where is Wisdom found?" and then rules out, methodically and twice in a row, any *alternative* place for its dwelling other than Heaven—crossing out, one by one, both the earthen domain and the underworld.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, in its final verse, Job's Wisdom Poem artfully re-invents our hero through the doctrine of Wisdom

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as Job deliberately flips the negative attributes that defined him initially, namely fearing the Lord and avoiding evil, into their positive counterparts: “Fear of the Lord *is a wisdom!*” he now asserts, “and avoiding evil *is an understanding!*”<sup>102</sup> Soon thereafter Job’s faculty of *tam* is also transformed by a literary nuance as he becomes: “Perfect (*tamim*) in *knowledge* with thee.”<sup>103</sup> (Emphases mine.)

God, in chapter 38, echoes Job’s question, “Where is Wisdom found?” when he asks: “Where is the way to the dwelling of light?”<sup>104</sup> In this manner he again identifies Wisdom with light. God then repeats the message that Wisdom is embossed in Heaven, when he asks rhetorically: “Who jeweled the sky with Wisdom and lay the orchestra of Heaven?”<sup>105</sup>

Many readers, scholarly and casual alike, often ask how God’s final “nature poems” relate to Job’s moral query. They assert that: “The Lord refers to absolutely nothing about himself except his power.... Might makes right, he thunders to Job.”<sup>106</sup> Such interpretations are deaf to the transcendent poetry of God’s words. The content of the first revelation does not reflect upon God’s omnipotence, but rather upon the mechanics of Wisdom at work in God’s creation. The prophecy of chapter 38 is prefaced by an explanation of Heaven’s dominion over nature: “Do you know the ordinances of the Heavens? Can you establish their rule on the Earth?... Who placed Wisdom in the kidneys (i.e., instincts), or gave perception to the mind?”<sup>107</sup> The rest of the poem is no less than a lesson in the effluence of cognition.

From Job 38:39 onward God urges Job to consider the cunning hunting skills of lions and ravens; the maternal sense of mountain goats; the instinctive learning methods of baby animals; and how a wild ass *knows* how to find food in barren salt deserts.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, God expounds on the wise design of domestic animals, such as the tamed ox that works the field, as well as the birds that provide man with eggs, and the useful valor of the cavalry steed upon which man rides.<sup>109</sup> God concludes his first nature poem by marveling at the wisdom embedded in birds of prey, especially their acute cognitive perception:

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Is it by your Wisdom that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south?... On the rock he dwells and makes his home in the fastness of the rocky crag. Thence he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it afar off...<sup>110</sup>

Obviously, the repeated talk of Wisdom throughout the entire revelation is deliberate and decisive, as God speaks of Wisdom as a character, a created power that is immured in nature's very fiber. This is what it meant for God to have created light.<sup>111</sup> In his own nature poem about the vocation of Wisdom, King Solomon writes: "The Lord made me as the beginning of his way.... When there was no Abyss, I was brought forth.... Before the mountains were settled.... When he established Heaven, then I was there!"<sup>112</sup> If we take Solomon's lesson to heart we can appreciate how God's first question to Job: "Where were you when I founded the Earth?"<sup>113</sup> was not, in fact, rhetorical. What is the essential *you* that he is referring to however, *that* is the challenge that he poses to Job.<sup>114</sup>

Now we can return and understand the nature of the eternal existence of the righteous. Man's "lamp" is of the substance of Wisdom; all that is cognizant in man, all that he learns and grasps, is a manifestation of that which is heavenly about him—his share of light. Indeed, just as angels are seen by Job as brightly lit stars, it is easy to imagine human souls in the same form.<sup>115</sup> Thus, Elifaz—Job's first (albeit inadequate) teacher—equates the extinguishing of a sinner's lamp with ignorance: "Their inner excellence goes away; they die without Wisdom."<sup>116</sup> The same Wisdom that sinners reject in life, as they "rebel against the light,"<sup>117</sup> is the very flame that is denied to them eternally: "they shall die without knowledge."<sup>118</sup> Since man's Wisdom in itself—his ideal being in knowledge—is the only thing that can exist forever as a self-aware entity, there can be no worse fate. By understanding the nature of Wisdom in the cosmic order Job gains this very Wisdom, qualifying him as a sage, or *hacham*.<sup>119</sup>

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V

God's address to Job not only opens him up to the majesty of Wisdom, but also marks his final and most significant transformation, as he becomes a prophet. Indeed, Jewish sources highlight Job's prophetic status. One midrash places Job together with Abraham, Ezekiel, and the coming Messiah as the four men who reached God on their own, through reasoning and contemplation. Another midrash counts seven gentile prophets, five of whom appear in the Book of Job.<sup>120</sup> Even Job's extreme suffering puts him in line with all the biblical prophets, practically marking him as one of them.<sup>121</sup> Tellingly, the editors of the Hebrew Bible placed the Book of Job in the order of the canon so that its heroes are the last to be addressed by God. The grand finale of prophecy is thus a teaching *about* prophecy. And it is not a coincidence that the only time Maimonides ever claims to be conveying a prophetic vision of his own, it is in regard to his analysis of Job.<sup>122</sup> This claim, in itself, is his deepest hint at the essence of this biblical work. At its heart, the Book of Job is nothing less than a "how to" manual for attaining such prophecy.

Job's existential and spiritual achievement of revelation transforms him from a man who sees a chasm between himself and God into a man who experiences the divine firsthand. This ultimate accomplishment is intertwined with his becoming moral and wise. In fact, just as deep morality relates to Wisdom, true Wisdom is the vehicle of a mind-expanding revelation; as Maimonides puts it, one who is "perfect as human intellect can be... will undoubtedly perceive nothing but things very extraordinary and divine, and see nothing but God and his angels."<sup>123</sup>

Fitting for a work whose purpose is to describe the attainment of prophecy, revelations are woven like a golden thread throughout the book, leading to the multiple accounts of divination by Job and Elifaz at its

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conclusion. Already in the first appeal to Job by anyone, Elifaz describes a vision:

In thoughts midst the visions of the night  
When deep sleep falls on men,  
Fear came upon me, and trembling...  
Then I heard a voice....<sup>124</sup>

Elifaz conveys yet another vision later on. Zofar too wishes prophecy on Job,<sup>125</sup> and Elihu reiterates how night visions are a normative way in which God answers man:

For God speaks in one way, and in another man does not perceive it.  
In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
When deep sleep falls upon men while they slumber on their beds,  
Then he opens the ears of men and brands them with warnings.<sup>126</sup>

Remarkably, these nighttime revelations, described by Elihu, have always been imploring Job's notice. At the very beginning of his first reply to Eliphaz, Job says: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me... the nightmares of God array themselves against me."<sup>127</sup> Semantically, these nightmares (*biutim*) are visionary dreams, as Job himself demonstrates: "You scared me with dreams and nightmared me with visions."<sup>128</sup> By his own account, we learn that prophecy was constantly knocking on Job's door. There is further proof of this: Even before the term "storm" (*se'ara*) dramatizes God's grand revelations at the end of the book, this singular word appears when Job first complains about his visionary nightmares: "[God] crushes me *with a storm*" [Emphasis mine].<sup>129</sup> The potential for prophecy, then, was always there; Job was simply unable to accept it.

The early Job, whose tormented nights were very different from his contented days, was indeed in a state of complete, hopeless isolation from God. One verse says it all: "I would not believe that he listens to my voice."<sup>130</sup> Thus, when Job talks about prophecy in the first round of debates, he is clearly being facetious, believing it does not exist.<sup>131</sup> His early, fear-driven piety does nothing to protect him from isolation; on the contrary, religious

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practice performed by rote exemplifies a remoteness from God. The early Job never prayed, never doubted, never meditated on the divine, and never considered himself or anyone else a creature of significance—a prerequisite to approaching the Almighty. In chapter 7, for example, as he requests to die, he describes himself as worthless: “I have sinned. What shall I do unto you, preserver of man? Why have you set me as a nuisance to you?”<sup>132</sup>

Yet this attitude changes gradually, bringing Job closer and closer to God, as we learn from reading his speeches straight through, skipping those of the other speakers. In chapter 10, he states: “I will say to God: Do not condemn me; show me why you contend with me.”<sup>133</sup> In these passages, Job is not actually addressing God, but he has begun to discuss the possibility. Only in chapter 13 does Job initiate a real dialogue with the divine: “I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God.”<sup>134</sup>

This is the point at which Job rejects his friends’ flattery toward God and begins to believe that a frank communication with his Creator is possible; and for the first time, he stakes a self-affirming claim to virtue: “I know that I am righteous,”<sup>135</sup> and continues to assert his goodness rather than mere innocence.<sup>136</sup> These claims, despite—or even because of—their demanding tone, demonstrate a new level of closeness to God. But even now Job is still skeptical about a reciprocal reply: “I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard,” he says.<sup>137</sup>

Parallel to Job’s sudden cry for immortality, his first hint at accepting divine revelation occurs in 19:26 when he says: “From my body I shall vision God.” The dramatic breakthrough, however, comes when Job is willing to accept the position of listener as well as advocate:

O, that I knew where to find him! That I might come even to his seat!  
I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I  
would know the words which he would answer me and understand what  
he would say to me.<sup>138</sup>

From this point on, love begins to complement and even replace fear. Abandoning his sycophantic religiosity, Job now claims a new relationship to God,



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one between a non-repressed self and a non-idealized Deus.<sup>139</sup> Propelled by Elihu's imploring: "Why do you contend against him, saying, 'he will answer none of my words,'" Job turns his focus inward and silently opens himself up to the climactic resolution of the book: hearing God's words out of the storm and learning the secrets of Wisdom directly from the divine.<sup>140</sup>

We should note that the standard translation that God "answered" Job from the storm is inaccurate, for no questions have been posed for many long chapters. It is more accurate to say that God "responded" to Job. The storm of prophecy is God's response to Job's altered state of being, to his inner call, and to the purity of mind which our hero has so painfully achieved.<sup>141</sup> Such revelation equals ultimate consciousness, or a qualitative change in one's awareness, similar to how James Norton describes the pained hero Ajurna of the Indian Gita: "His vision is, as it were, a welling up of his own inner consciousness."<sup>142</sup>

Job's long spiritual journey has come to a close. He began it by denying the very possibility of gaining God's attention, and he completes it by declaring with confidence: "I will question you, and you will respond to me."<sup>143</sup> The transformed Job then adds: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."<sup>144</sup> In the book's opening, Job's knowledge of God is mere hearsay; at its conclusion, his obtuse faith has been replaced by direct experience. According to the mystical teaching conferred in this book, such inner prophetic revelation is something we all must strive for.<sup>145</sup>

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## VI

We may conclude that the Book of Job is indeed about suffering, but not the suffering of injustice. It is, rather, about the agony of the human condition. Job's travails are not intended to test his acceptance of God's will, nor are they a punishment or a means of attaining merit. Job's suffering is meant to undermine his normative religious life and shatter the mental complacency that characterizes his early self. It shakes the foundations of his contented world. The author goes to great lengths to suggest that the early Job, however decent, lived in an inner world of oblivion. He deceives the innocent reader into thinking that Job starts out as a good man, the likes of which cannot be found, because this is exactly how we deceive ourselves, thinking we are good simply by avoiding sin.<sup>146</sup>

Job's painful journey heals the introverted autism which he has wallowed in all his life and connects him to the source of true, external reality. This transformation is the purpose of human existence and the universal goal of the spiritual seeker. The Book of Job, with its complex layers and secrets, teaches that such experience is always on the verge of our consciousness, resonating with the Song of Songs: "I sleep, but my mind is awake; hark, my beloved is knocking!"<sup>147</sup> Until we undergo Job's odyssey, however, we react to such revelations with fear and repression, and the light is rendered voiceless. Perhaps, for most of us, it is impossible to confront God—a terrifying prospect—until we have nothing left to lose.

Even after Job's inspiring achievements, the book that bears his name still ends in mystery. In 30:19, Job defines man's seemingly lowly state by saying: "[God] gave birth to me unto clay, and I am likened to soil and ashes."<sup>148</sup> Job ultimately returns to this metaphor in order to express an opposite sentiment:

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Then Job responded to the Lord and said: I know that you can do everything, and no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is that darkens counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, and I will speak; I will question you and you will respond to me. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Wherefore I retract and am appeased for “soil and ashes.”<sup>149</sup>

In his final words Job takes solace in the existential human condition, understanding its potential for divinity despite the impermanence and suffering of earthly life. Job does not rest his case, but he does rest. He no longer wants to rebel or to die. Many of his questions are unresolved. Details of his revelations are obscure. The reason for this is that Job’s prophecy is intended for his ears alone. The reader must pose his own questions to God and hear his own replies. All we are taught is that direct, personal communication with the divine is possible. When Job achieved it, he and God began with a clean slate. The new, knowing Job now re-states his inquiries using the future tense.<sup>150</sup> What did Job ask, and what replies did he get? That is between the two of them.<sup>151</sup>

The book leaves us with one, final secret. Prophet Job says that “man lies down and rises not again; until Heaven is not woken and not roused out of its sleep.”<sup>152</sup> Contrary to simplistic readings, the verse’s double negative states that man *does* rise again when Heaven *does* awaken. The root word for this waking, “*er*,” is also the semantic root of Job’s prophetic storm, *se’ara*, from which God’s crowning words were spoken.<sup>153</sup> The literal meaning of this heavenly “storm” is, in fact, “an awakening.”<sup>154</sup> Job’s ultimate experience, therefore, is the antithesis of his early craving for the darkness of sleep, signifying the completion of his epic transformation. Furthermore, the typical translation of *se’ara* as “whirlwind” is inaccurate, as the element of “wind” is absent from the Hebrew original. A *se’ara* is, rather, an erupting storm of fire and lightning.<sup>155</sup> Such storms appear throughout the prophetic literature: Isaiah uses this term as “the flame of devouring fire,”<sup>156</sup> Zachariah compares it to lightning,<sup>157</sup> and Amos to a kindled blaze.<sup>158</sup> In the Book

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of Psalms, it appears in the verse “As the flame sets the mountains on fire, so persecute them with your storm.”<sup>159</sup> And Elijah ascends to Heaven in a similar “storm” of fiery chariots.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the prophetic *se’ara* links the concrete manifestation of God with the motif of light associated with Wisdom—describing Job’s actual experience of enlightenment. As this literary masterpiece of ancient Israelite philosophy teaches, when “God responded to Job from the awakening,” it was Job’s own share of Heaven, the burning “lamp light” of his knowing consciousness, which flared up stormily out of sleep and oblivion to exist forever.<sup>161</sup>

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### **Notes**

1. Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (Bath: Sheffield, 1996), p. 42.

2. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 296. Maimonides soon clarifies that this common presupposition is inapplicable to Job. Carl Jung takes the idea of the early Job’s righteousness to its logical extreme when he claims that Job transformed God, not vice versa. According to Jung, Job’s admonition of God’s injustice results in a God who “raises himself above his earlier primitive level of consciousness by indirectly acknowledging that the man Job is morally superior to him.” Carl Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge 1984), p. 69.

3. Epistle of James 5:10.

4. Ambrose J.R. Baskin, “Job as Moral Exemplar,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 35:3 (September 1981), p. 222.

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5. Job 2:9. All biblical quotes have been translated by the author on the basis of the New King James Version and the original Hebrew.

6. Job 2:10.

7. Concerns about style and editorial changes are valid. Ibn Ezra saw the Book of Job as a translation of an earlier Aramaic source, a fact that allows for scribal errors in the Masoretic text. I believe that Zofar's final speech should be attributed to Elifaz, as its wording closely follows two previous speeches by him. Cf. note 115. The structure of the book, therefore, is simple: (1) prose prologue; (2) the Job-Elifaz-Job-Bildad-Job-Zofar dialogues (split into two); (3) the Job-Elifaz dialogue (split into two); (4) two long speeches by Job and Elihu; (5) the God-Job dialogue (split into two); (6) prose epilogue. The inner logic of each speaker over the duration of the book teaches more than the Ping-Pong dynamic of the spliced speeches. Indeed, though it is beyond the scope of this essay to address, the three friends represent three different schools of thought which Job must confront: Elifaz is the mystic—and thus the most important of the three—as well as a true prophet in his own right. Bildad is the traditionalist, and Zofar the rationalist.

8. See, for example, the story of King Harishchanra, dubbed “The Indian Job.” With the king replacing Job, Vasishta sitting in for God, and Shiva “the destroyer” playing Satan, the entire episode is explicated—and the moral of it taught—in a single paragraph: “Shiva... submitted Atschandira to all sorts of trials, deprived him of his wealth, kingdom, wife, and only son, but the prince persisted in his virtue. The gods rewarded him... and returned to him his previous estate.” From *Markandeya Puraan*, English translation from S. Terrien's commentary in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 879. Cited in E.J. Brill, “In Search of the Indian Job,” *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), pp. 771.

9. Genesis 22:16-17.

10. Job 1:21.

11. Job 27:2.

12. Job 30:21.

13. Job 7:20-21, 9:1. In point of fact, Satan was perfectly correct about the state of Job's faith. This assertion is troubling only if you believe in Satan as an independent, ungodly force. The author does not. For him, had Satan been mistaken about Job, God would not have allowed the test to commence.

14. See Job 33:12, 34:35-37, 38:2. It should be noted that God's rejection of Job's claims of purity does not contradict God's condemnation of the three friends. The atrocities they accused Job of were way out of proportion to his actual shortcomings, and these friends neglected to see how he was changing before their eyes.

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15. Job 1:1.

16. The four traits which typify the early Job are repeated in 1:8 and 2:3. Individually, fear of the Lord is also repeated in 1:9, and “turning away from evil” in 2:3 and 1:9.

17. Deuteronomy 10:12.

18. Psalms 34:15. It cannot, of course, be proven that these verses were known to the author of the Book of Job. Nonetheless, “fearing God” and “turning away from evil” are clearly negative attributes, whereas “loving God” and “doing good” are their logical positive counterparts. The text is strict in its use of the negative “sinned not” to describe Job’s reaction to his calamities. See Job 1:22, 2:10.

19. The word *tam* appears over a dozen times in the Book of Job and hardly anywhere else in the Hebrew canon. It seems, therefore, to be the essential aspect of the early Job. The “unaware” nature of this characterization is shown in the case of the young Jacob, who is called *tam* as opposed to his brother, the shrewd hunter Esau. The description of Jacob as *tam* implies naïveté and childishness, emphasized by the depiction of his still-tender hands and reclusive attachment to his mother’s tent. Both Jacob and Job grow out of this credulous character. Unfortunately, the word *tam* is frequently confused with *tamim*, which means “perfection.” *Strong’s Concordance*, for example, defines the word as “complete; usually (morally) pious.” It is, in truth, a closer cognate to *tama*, meaning “bewildered” or “perplexed.”

20. Nietzsche states: “Well-being... [is] a state which soon renders man ludicrous and contemptible.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin, 2003), p. 155, par. 225.

21. Job 1:5.

22. To underscore this failing, we return to precisely the same issue at the end of the book, when Job offers sacrifices on behalf of his friends. In this case, God makes it clear that the demand is for prayer to be offered in conjunction with a ritual act. In addition, he demands the physical participation of Job’s friends as well as their active repentance. All three elements are absent from the sacrifice in chapter 1. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik directs the reader to the fact that, in this manner, God teaches Job to pray for altruistic reasons, whereas at first he did no such thing: “Job!... When my graciousness engulfed you... you did not fulfill the role that my grace placed upon you... (a) never did you bear the communal yoke, nor did you participate in the trouble and grief of the community, and (b) you did not feel the pain of the individual sufferer... Loving-kindness means empathizing with one’s fellow man, identifying with his hurt and feeling responsibility for his fate.” Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek: Listen—My Beloved Knocks*, trans. David Gordon (New York: Yeshiva University, 2006), pp. 14-15.

Indeed, the idea that Job’s suffering is a necessary means of character development has been expressed by various thinkers, specifically Maimonides, as well as by

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artists such as William Blake. Jeanne Moskal's essay "Friendship and Forgiveness," discusses Blake's famous illustrations of the book, stating that "for centuries, theologians had taken the Book of Job as a struggle to justify the undeserved suffering of the righteous. Blake, however, shifts his attention to the content of Job's 'righteousness,' depicting in Job a progression from mere observance of the obligations of the law to a religion of imaginative fullness." Jeanne Moskal, "Friendship and Forgiveness in Blake's Illustrations to Job," *South Atlantic Review* 55:2 (May 1990), p. 15. Moskal's essay claims that Blake sought to overturn the presumption that the book deals with the suffering of an *a priori* righteous man.

23. Jeremiah 12:2.

24. Isaiah 29:13. In biblical Hebrew, the word *lev* stands for the breast, chest, or—literally—the central "core" of the body, never for the blood-pump muscle; cf. Moshe David Kasuto, ed., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1972), s.v. "*lev*," pp. 412-415 [Hebrew]. Figuratively, this physical "core" is considered to be the seat of the Cartesian "mind." The biblical *lev*, therefore, is hardly the bodily home of the emotions, and it does not stand opposed to a rational faculty of a "head" or a "brain" (concepts unknown to the Bible). A midrash on Ecclesiastes lists over fifty cognitive faculties that the biblical "core" is reported to possess (Ecclesiastes Raba 1:16). Translating *lev* into modern English as "heart" brings with it connotations of emotion and sentimentality which are completely misleading.

25. Job 1:6,13, 2:1.

26. Job 1:21.

27. Genesis 37:35.

28. II Samuel 19:4.

29. Jeremiah 31:14.

30. At most, they kept a silent mourning, as Aaron did when informed of the death of his two sons (Leviticus 10:3). See the reactions of the widow in I Kings 17, and of the Shunammite woman in II Kings 4. Job's stoic reaction is also in stark contrast to similar "Jobs" in ancient Near Eastern literature, such as the Mesopotamian Shubshi-Meshre-Shakkan, who express an acute awareness of their pain and grief. See S. Shifra and Jacob Klein, *In Those Distant Days* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), pp. 546-563 [Hebrew].

31. Shakespeare urges: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak, whispers the o'er fraught heart and bids it break." William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (London: The Folio Society, 1951), act 4, scene 3, p. 74. The young Israeli writer Hanoch Daum writes to his departed, pious father: "A man needs a measure of connection to his feelings in order to relate the feelings of those around him, but you,

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goodhearted and wise as you were, did not know how to appreciate your feelings; you could not explain them to yourself. There is no sin in this, it is not a moral fault, but it is a dire failing.” Hanoch Daum, *God Won't Allow* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2007), p. 54 [Hebrew].

32. Job 1:9-10.

33. Job 2:10. I translate *nevala* as “degenerate” because it is a derogatory term that is semantically close to, yet more logical than, “carcass.” “Stinking degenerate” better conveys the feel of the Hebrew. Israel J. Gerber, for his part, tries to justify Job’s problematic response to his wife by claiming that he was not angry with her, he was only being “instructive.” Israel J. Gerber, *The Psychology of the Suffering Mind* (New York: Jonathan David, 1951), p. 76. While this explanation is dubious, Gerber clearly recognizes that Job’s sinful behavior poses a serious problem for those who insist upon his saintly status.

34. Though Job is devout on the surface, then, his spurious responses fall within the category of “Be not righteous overmuch” (Ecclesiastes 7:16), just as his offering on his children’s behalf is precisely the shunned sacrifice of the ignorant, who “do not know to commit evil” (Ecclesiastes 4:17).

35. Job 2:10.

36. Francis Andersen reconciles Job’s presumed righteousness with his later speeches, in which he lashes out at God, by claiming: “Only a false piety... would expect in Job an unflinching fortitude in the midst of such loss and pain. Job rightly grieves his bereavement.... He is human. The untrammelled serenity which some describe as the goal of ‘victorious living’ is a negation of whole areas of our experience as God has made us.” Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1976), p. 68. This is a beautiful insight. Nonetheless, it is clear that Andersen, like so many others, accepts the fallacy of Job’s initial reactions. Instead of correctly labeling them—in his own words—as “false piety,” he praises “the noblest expression to be found anywhere of man’s joyful acceptance of the will of God.” Andersen, *Job: An Introduction*, p. 88. It is possible that, as a devout Christian, Andersen is compelled to ignore the contradiction because, for Job to prefigure Jesus, he must be saintly to begin with. In contrast, Rabbi Abraham Kook states: “Fear of the Lord must not displace man’s natural morality, for then it is no longer a pure fear of the Lord.” Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Holiness [Orot Hakodesh]* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1985), 3:27 [Hebrew]. Similarly, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, dean of the Volozhin yeshiva, opens his commentary on Genesis (*Haamek Davar*) with a justification of God’s destruction of the Temple: “For they were righteous and pious and earnest scholars, but they were not straight in the ways of the world... for God is straight, and he cannot stand such *tzadiks*.” Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, *Haamek Davar*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Volozhin, 1989).



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37. Lawrence Kohlberg's empirically based theory of moral development is uncannily similar to the text's description of Job's moral journey. Kohlberg describes six stages of inner change:

(1) Obedience and Punishment Orientation defines Job's moral outlook at the beginning of the text, when he acts only out of fear and respect for God's authority.

(2) The Instrumental and Relativist stage is the least moral of all stages, in which external authority is challenged but an inner, personal morality has yet to replace it. Job reaches this state in chapter 3. While Job theorizes about humanity, he is still focused on an egoistic, "instrumental" desire for death. Job is angry because he sees that all of his toil, and his assumed piety, did not serve his self-interest (i.e., did not "instrument" any gain). The speech also exemplifies what Kohlberg calls an isolative perspective. In keeping with the relativist tendencies of this stage, Job's first speech expresses the belief that everyone—victims and sinners alike—is equal in death, no matter how he behaved in life.

(3) The Interpersonal Relationships stage involves a small-scale moral code in relation to one's immediate companions. This takes shape as Job begins to talk about his friends, family, servants, etc. To enter society through social roles, as depicted in the text, is mentioned by Kohlberg as well. He also describes a third-stage child who claims to be a "good boy," just as this is the first time Job asserts his own virtue.

(4) Maintaining the Social Order is the primary concern of a person in Kohlberg's fourth stage. Starting in chapter 24, Job accuses God of presiding over a chaotic society, in which people are oppressed and mistreated: "Stage 3 reasoning works best in two-person relationships with family members or close friends.... At stage 4, in contrast, the respondent becomes more broadly concerned *with society as a whole*." William C. Crain, *Theories of Development* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 138. As Job continues to speak, he clearly moves from one-on-one relationships in his closed circle of friends to a vision of society at large.

(5) The Social Contract stage, in which a person begins to accept his own role in helping society, as Job does from chapter 29 onward.

(6) Universal Principles is the highest moral level. Job reaches it in his final speech by asserting not only his personal responsibility but also higher, abstract principles of morality and justice.

While Kohlberg's analysis is decidedly modern, it allows us to conclude that the author of Job had a particularly keen eye for changing behavioral patterns, from a toddler's egocentric judgment to an adult sense of morality.

38. Job 1:21.

39. I favor the reading that Job made only seven offerings, as this was the number of his sons. This is a typical number of animals to be sacrificed, and the same number is repeated in 42:8 with the parallel story.

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40. Job 4:3.

41. Job 22:5-9.

42. In the end, the three friends fail to console Job because they all believe he is being rightfully punished. This belief disables compassion: "Attempts to make suffering good blind us to the reality of our and of others' suffering by allowing us to view it as something that ought to happen or that ought to be accepted. Cruelty and insensitivity lie down this path." Stan Van Hooft, "The Meanings of Suffering," *Hastings Center Report* 28:5 (September/October, 1998), p. 10.

43. Job 2:10.

44. Job 3:1.

45. Amazingly, the speech does not mention Job's lost riches, children, or health; it is simply a summary of life's futility, based on his personal experience of the loss of everything he had attained in life. When Job curses his birth because it revealed *the toil* to his eyes, he uses the same term for "toil" (*amal*) that Ecclesiastes uses so frequently, which stands for the natural condition of man, "born to toil" (Job 5:7). Therefore, it does not concern only the "miserable." Qohelet, the main character of Ecclesiastes, asks: "What profit has a man from all his toil?" even as he refers to prosperous kings (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Instead, in its fixation on death, Job's desperate speech reflects the universal impetus to search for life's meaning. Job's outcry also concurs with the first chapters of Ecclesiastes, which state: "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Both books drive the point home by suggesting that the fate of a stillborn child is enviable (Job 3:16 and Ecclesiastes 6:3-4). Likewise, when Job ends his outcry by saying: "My sighing comes as my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water... I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest" (Job 3:24-26), he echoes Ecclesiastes' impression of the bread-maker: "His days are pains, and his travail anguish; his mind takes not rest in the night" (Ecclesiastes 2:23, 5:15). It is interesting that Job also makes multiple use of Qohelet's key term—*hevel*—to signify that life is as fleeting as breath. *Hevel* appears in Job six times, meaning "fleeting," but with an undertone of futility (*Hevel* is a concept identical to the Pāli term *anicca*, or *anitya* in Sanskrit). Job's words: "I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are but a breath" echo Qohelet's: "I hated life... for all is but a breath" (Job 7:16 and Ecclesiastes 2:17). Likewise, compare "Why labor for a fleeting breath?" with "What profit has he who has labored for the wind?" (Job 9:29 and Ecclesiastes 5:16). At this stage, Job's calamities force him to face the impermanence of life and his achievements—not God's inequity. As he lies in the ashes, Job faces the reality of his impending death. Seven days of meditation lead him to see the truth in his wife's harsh wisdom, and to confront mortality.

46. Cf. "the experience of suffering appears to be the opposite of activity." Eugene Thomas Long, "Suffering and Transcendence," *Springer Science+Business Media*

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B. V. 2006, p. 141. In describing Job as an anxious “soul in waiting,” Philippe Nemo comments how, in the Bible, silence is typically a prelude to revelation. Philippe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1998), pp. 3, 65.

47. Job 3:3, 10, 20, 24.

48. Job 3:3, 11-13.

49. Freud might say that, for Job, God is the “father figure” who prevents the desired return. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: International Psycho-Analytical, 1992).

50. Except for an abstract prayer that God grant his wish to die (Job 6:8), God is not yet described as one who fulfills wishes, but merely as a force of destiny. The author may be hinting that Job never prayed when, in 1:22, he compliments Job for not giving God any *tifla* (“folly”), a very peculiar word and conspicuously similar to *tefila*, or prayer. This typifies the author’s use of literary nuance.

51. It is reasonable, then, to compare the speech with an Egyptian text from the third to second millennium B.C.E. describing an introverted man in a dialogue with his own soul: “Death is in my sight today, Like the recovery of a sick man, Like going out into the open after a confinement.” “A Dispute over Suicide,” in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton, 1969), p. 407.

52. Ecclesiastes 7:3.

53. Gerber points to the cathartic value and the interpersonal support they provided, despite—or because—of their accusatory approach: “By [Job’s] receiving one shock after the other via the mouths of his friends, the desired therapeutic result was achieved.” Gerber, *Psychology of Suffering*, p. 65. Likewise, James Norton contrasts Job with the calm suffering hero of the Gita: “Job’s growth is dramatic rather than meditative, interpersonal rather than introspective.” James Norton, “Gita and the Book of Job,” in Shri P.T. Raju and Albury Castell, eds., *East West Studies on the Problem of the Self* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 179, 189.

54. Job 14:21.

55. Job 6:15.

56. Job 19:14-19.

57. The full quote is as follows: “This development implies an ego that begins to be independent of the mother’s auxiliary ego.... This personal richness [of the emerging inner psychic reality] develops out of simultaneous love-hate experience which implies the achievement of ambivalence, the enrichment and refinement of which leads to the emergence of concern.” Donald Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities, 1965), p. 75.

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58. Job 24:2-12.

59. Job 29:12-17.

60. This is a psychological device explained in White's "Narrative Therapy": "A narrative therapy is about... a re-engagement and a reproduction of history through the alternative presents of people's lives." Michael White, "Narrative Therapy," Massey University, [www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/white.htm](http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/white.htm). There are a growing number of researchers and theoreticians in this emerging field of psychotherapy.

61. Job 30:25.

62. We might similarly interpret Job's nostalgia for his lost children (Job 28:5) and his evocation of mourning (Job 30:31) as emerging signs of genuine grief. The text, however, is unclear about whether Job's children really died. There is no mention of his daughters' dying, and as for his sons, chapter 1 speaks only of the death of *ne'arim* ("lads," Job 1:19), a term previously used to describe Job's servant-boys. Also, unlike his wealth, the number of his children does not multiply at the conclusion of the book, and the text quite conspicuously avoids talking about new children being born. One could conclude that the author wants it both ways: Job's children are presumed dead, so his indifference to their fate reflects his self-centeredness; but they are ultimately *not* dead, so the children will not have suffered unjustly because of their father's inadequacies.

63. Job 31:15.

64. Job 31:9-12.

65. Kohlberg teaches that at this final stage of moral development, what is right is defined by the decision of conscience. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, regarding reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. Cf. "Kohlberg's conception of justice followed that of the philosophers Kant and Rawls, as well as great moral leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King. According to these people, the principles of justice require us to treat the claims of all parties in an impartial manner, respecting the basic dignity of all people as individuals. The principles of justice are therefore universal." Crain, *Theories of Development*, p. 140.

66. Job 31:21-40. The conclusion of the book brings Job's newfound humanism to fruition. He offers prayers for his friends, names his daughters, and gives them land—all expressions of repentance for his early deficiency toward them.

67. Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, eds., *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 159. For a dynamic existentialist account of Job in the face of an evil that is "a gnawing away of human identity," thus bringing out a first "intentionality" of transcendence, see Emmanuel Levinas, "Postface: Transcendence and Evil," in Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil*, pp. 165-182. Nemo and Levinas read Job

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correctly as an exercise in revelation, though they completely ignore the content of the revelation itself.

68. The identification of Wisdom with light starts hesitantly with Job and the three friends. It is then picked up and highlighted by Elihu and by God. Job is thus likely to be the doctrinal source of much Kabbalistic thought.

69. Job 10:21-22.

70. Job 22:11.

71. Job 38:16-17. See also Job 27:20. When a dead man descends, “the underworld (*balahot*) takes hold on him as waters.” That the biblical underworld is a world of water is also evident, for example, in Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 4:16-18, 5:8.

72. Job 26:5-6.

73. Job teaches that man’s flowing lifeblood (i.e., *nefesh*, the liquid, animate soul) runs out of the body at death, seeping down to a bloodlike reservoir at the bottom of the cosmos. This is the general understanding of *nefesh* in the Hebrew Bible: “The blood flow is the *nefesh*” (Deuteronomy 12:23 and elsewhere).

A fascinating example of this understanding can be found in Job 2:6. God secures Job’s essential prowess by allowing Satan to harm Job’s body—explicitly his flesh and bones—but not his *nefesh*, or lifeblood, which is responsible for vigor. God does not order Satan to preserve Job’s life, as a mistaken reading suggests, since this goes without saying. Were Job to die, the entire experiment would be pointless. A midrash describes God’s demand as a requirement to “Break the [earthenware] cask, but keep the [blood-red] wine.” *Yalkut Shimoni*, Job 2. (Deuteronomy 32:14 establishes the connection between wine and blood.) Accordingly, Job is never described as feverish or too frail to respond. Superficial boils, a festering type of affliction which even “bloodless” trees can have, were a satanic enough fulfillment of God’s dual requirement.

In keeping with Hebrew Scripture in general, the Book of Job brushes away all simplistic solutions regarding the afterlife. Not a single speaker mentions the picturesque idea of an unearthly Garden of Eden, for no such place existed in Jewish theology. Not for a moment would Job accept that some ghostlike double can live in bliss, drinking heavenly nectar under the wings of angels. Various shamanistic notions—where the dead maintain some power over the “real” world—are also off the table.

74. Job 7:21.

75. Job 10:19.

76. Job 9:22.

77. Job 21:26. Likewise, “For the morning is to them even as deep darkness” (Job 24:17). In these verses, death is not presented by Job as a sign of divine

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malevolence, but rather of the insignificance of man: “When a cloud vanishes, it is gone; so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up” (Job 7:9). Job’s egalitarian view of death is similar to Ecclesiastes’ early rhetorical claim: “Do not all go to the one place?” (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

78. Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1993), p. 11.

79. Job 11:8.

80. Genesis 1:2. What may rightly be termed the book’s Zoroastrian streak even recalls the Zoroastrian name for “hell,” *Yama*, which echoes the Hebrew “*yam*” of the primordial sea.

81. Job 26:12-13. The two last words—*nahash bariab*—refer not, in fact, to a “fleeing serpent” but simply to a “copper bar,” the strong, metal bar that locked the gates to the underworld. The verse’s verb is “bolted” or “created,” not “speared.” Note that the word *bariab* here is the exact same as the one unanimously translated as “bar” in Job 38:10. The “serpent” mistranslation is understandable because of the sea monster in the mythic story, but the root *nun-bet-shin* appears repeatedly in Job, always as copper.

82. Job 38:8-11.

83. Job 7:12. Likewise in Proverbs: “When he drew a circle over the surface of the deep... when he gave the sea its decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment” (Proverbs 8:27-29). Regarding “sea monster,” see Isaiah 27:1, 51:9-10; and Psalms 74:13-14.

84. Job 36:30, 37:3.

85. Job 26:10.

86. Job 28:3.

87. Job 28:11. True wisdom must ultimately inquire: “In which way does light reside, and where is the place of darkness?” (Job 38:19). We can surmise that the firmament of creation’s second day congealed the light created on the first, and made possible the life created on the third. In Job, light is considered to be the very *substance* of Heaven: “Do you know when God... caused the light of his cloud to shine?... the bright light which is in the sky.... Out of the north comes the golden sun; God is clothed with terrible majesty” (Job 37:15-22). Also: “I have observed the Light when it shines; the moon moving in brightness” (Job 31:26). Job’s concept of white clouds, called *anan*, is always of light, not water; this is the case in most of the Hebrew Bible (in contrast to *av*—a dark raincloud).

88. Job 14:13-15.

89. Job 14:15. Gerber commented on the first phase of this development as well. Gerber, *Psychology of Suffering*, pp. 61-62. Maimonides sees this change in

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Job's outlook—where he first sees death as an equalizer, but at the end believes in a heavenly afterlife for the deserving—as the main purpose of the book. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 296.

90. Job 19:23-24. Here, the author's pen foreshadows the connection between meaningful immortality and wisdom. His concepts of (1) language and (2) being inscribed forever in a "book" are anything but accidental. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible these are the precise means whereby man's eternal light is inscribed forever in the fire book of Heaven. See Ethan Dor-Shav, "Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man," *AZURE* 22 (Autumn 2005), pp. 78-113.

91. Job 21:16. Perhaps there is a scribal error in Job 21:19, and Job actually says: "God stores up his light (*oro*) for his sons"—rather than his "iniquity" (*ono*), a word which makes the verse nonsensical.

92. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 224.

93. Job 15:30.

94. Job 18:5-6, 18. Bildad's pivotal speech on the subject is based on the awareness that man's highest soul (*neshama*) is in truth a form of light, distinct from the life force (*nefesh*) that bleeds from the body and descends to Sheol. In fact, Bildad articulates an entire system regarding the different souls of man: "The light of the wicked shall also be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine" (Job 18:5). This is a reference to the heavenly soul, or *neshama*, composed of light. "The light shall be dark in his residence, and his candle shall be put out on him" (Job 18:6). The "residence" refers to the body, the temporal home of the self. "And they parade him before the king of terrors" (Job 18:14). This describes the descent of the life force, the *nefesh*, into the underworld. "Brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation.... His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his harvest dry out" (Job 18:15-16). This refers to the total annihilation of any genetic future—or offshoots—for the sinner's earthly body. "His remembrance shall perish from the Earth, and he shall have no name in the outer region" (Job 18:17). The name "in the outer region" refers to a man's eternal name (*shem* in Hebrew) which is inscribed in Heaven. "He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the cosmos. He shall have neither son nor grandchild among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings" (Job 18:18-19). This last predicament is the opposite of the blessed state of those biblical figures who "gather unto their people" when they die. It likely refers to the "social" soul, called *ruah*, which is the "wind-spirit" of man.

95. Job 20: 26.

96. Proverbs 20:27.

97. Job 38:15. The verse is referring to the Light of the joyous "children of God," who are the singing "morning stars" of dawn (see Job 38:7, 12). It is

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imperceptible to read these verses as if they deal merely with the visible light of daytime, shining above people who are still in the flesh. Note, also, how the book starts with an assembly of the children of God and later, to close the narrative loop, God returns to the issue of these angelic “children of God” in 38:7, placing them squarely in Heaven as stars, without the material Satan.

98. Job 33:28-30.

99. Psalms 36:9. Also: “In the light of the King’s face is life” (Proverbs 16:15). Cf. Psalms 27:1; Proverbs 6:23; and the genius hymn which opens the prayers on the Day of Atonement: “Eternal light in the treasury of life, lights from darkness—he said and it was so.”

100. The usage is in line with Genesis, where this lamp-type soul is designated as a higher order of reality, for its very inception is as “a *neshama* of life” (Genesis 2:7). Semantically, we have no other frame of reference for eternal life aside from the temporal, animal-type one, which we enjoy on Earth. The dual use of the same term, for almost apposing concepts, is apparent in all cultures and languages.

101. “Where is Wisdom found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its measure, and it is not found in the land of the living [i.e., it is not on Earth]. The Abyss says, ‘It is not in me,’ and the Sea says, ‘It is not with me’” [i.e., it is not in the underworld realm of water] (Job 28:12-14). Then again: “From where does Wisdom arrive? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air [i.e., it is not from Earth]. *Avadon* and Death say: ‘We have only heard a rumor of it with our ears.’” [i.e., it is not in the underworld either] (Job 28:20-22). And finally: “Aha! God understands the way to it, and he knows its place [i.e., it does have one]. For he looks to the confines of the Earth and sees everything under all of Heaven” [i.e., this is it] (Job 28:23-24).

102. Job 28:28. Adding the “a” and “an” are legitimate, due to Hebrew grammar. Even without the device, the statement “Fear of the Lord is Wisdom” should be read like “Butter is milk!” Do not stress the “is.”

103. Job 36:4.

104. Job 38:19.

105. Job 38:37-38.

106. Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 314.

107. Job 38:33-36. I.e., innards, the inner seat of instinctive Wisdom, translated according to the Targum and the Talmud. The word “mind” is a likely translation of *shekui* according to Rashi and Ibn Ezra as well as the Targum. Even if it means a type of bird, it represents a symbolic idea, like the modern “wise” owl.



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108. In verses 38:39-40 God talks about the cunning hunting skills of lions; he does not imply a power simply to place food on their plates, like a child feeding a silkworm, just as God doesn't spare ravens their need to hunt artfully. This is the way to read the entire vision—from the design behind rain, which grows the grass to feed the animal kingdom.

109. Men use animals in three ways: to work fields, to spawn food, and to provide transportation. All three uses are covered in turn. In verses 9-12 God compares the wild ox with the domesticated cow. The impossibility of taming the ox highlights the opposite in his brethren that work the fields. Of domestic birds (coexisting in human habitation) God points out how they leave their eggs for man: “forgetting that a foot may crush them.... She deals forgetfully with her young, as if they were not hers... because God disowned her of Wisdom and given her no share in understanding.” The bird's poor memory is the blessing of its carefree life but also the source of man's omelets. Last is the cavalry steed: “He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword.... When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’...” Like cow and fowl, the horse is ignorant of its potential fate, which makes the creature jubilant and fearfully useful to mankind. There is, evidently, much Wisdom behind these animals' created attributes.

110. Job 39:26-29.

111. The prophecy also suggests that understanding animals is a key to true knowledge, just as Solomon “spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” I Kings, 4:13.

112. Proverbs 8:22-27. “In Proverbs we meet another metaphysical being—wisdom.... The Book of Proverbs never uses the Hebrew word *malach* in the sense of angel; instead we have wisdom, begotten before the beginning of creation, the darling of God then, taking delight in men after the world came into being, singing, and calling upon all to follow in its ways.” Israel I. Efron, *Ancient Jewish Philosophy* (Tel Aviv: Bloch, 1976), p. 20 [Hebrew]. According to the Hechalot literature that developed afterward, wisdom, or *hochma*, “herself makes men prophets.” Efron, *Ancient Jewish Philosophy*, p. 30.

113. Job 38:4.

114. It is, in effect, similar to the Zen koan that asks: “What did your face look like before your parents were born?” There is much more to be said about Job's cosmology and its teaching of light and darkness. Above all, we haven't touched on the appearance of the Leviathan and the Behemoth in God's final revelation, beings that are “the first of God's creation.” It is nonsensical to regard them as a hippo and a whale, just two formidable animals in a long list. The mention of the Leviathan was presaged by Job, stressing its cosmic importance. Job mentions the Leviathan (Job 3:8) in the context of its momentous “waking up,” the same context that God relates to it (Job 40:25). Job also talks of an “alligator” (Job 7:12), which is equal

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to the (monster) Sea. This speaks to the unity of the text. It is just as questionable to equate the Leviathan and the Behemoth with Canaanite deities. The Qumran scrolls render Leviathan as “alligator” (or “sea monster” in the new Dead Sea Scrolls translation); the Aramaic does not retain the original Hebrew name, as a capitalized “Leviathan” implies. Perhaps they refer to prehistoric animals, but I believe that these two creatures are symbolic of the whole cosmic creation, a metaphor complementary to Ezekiel’s chariots. It can hardly be coincidental that their description concludes with a “trail of light” that turns the black abyss into white (Job 41:24).

115. The canopy of Heaven is a pure realm of light, the equivalent of elemental fire. Heaven’s canopy is held up by foundation “pillars” erected from beneath the Earth (Job 9:6, 26:11, Isaiah 40:22). All illumination and warmth shine upon the Earth from this brimming realm of sapphire-blue fire (the same fire that came down from Heaven onto Job’s sheep). Most importantly, Heaven is populated with fiery angels and stars that are truly one and the same and are also called “the children of God” or “the holy ones.” Indeed, the mystic Elifaz twice contrasts humans with angels: “[Of angels:] Behold, even in his servants he does not trust; and his angels he charges with folly [Of men:] How much less so those that dwell in clay vessel, whose foundation is soil...?” (Job 4:18-19). Then again: “[Of angels:] Behold, even in his holy beings he does not trust; and the Heavens are not clean in his sight. [Of men:] How much less so the abominable and filthy man?” (Job 15:15-16). These verses demonstrate that stars and angels are interchangeable, an idea made even clearer later on: “[Of angels:] Behold even to the moon—it shines not, and the stars are not pure in his sight. [Of men:] How much less so man...” (Job 25:5-6). The similarity of this passage to the previous ones leaves little doubt that this third parallel is also from Elifaz and falsely attributed to Bildad. Other star-angel parallels appear in Isaiah 14:12, Daniel 8:1, and elsewhere. I understand that the human “lamp” is not placed in Heaven at the moment of passing, when the shade of the *nefesh* seeps down to Sheol. Rather, it coexists with the body during man’s life on Earth, inherently linked, as it glows to a lesser or greater degree according to one’s merit. After death, this lamp (if not extinguished by sin) simply remains in Heaven, no longer changing—an autonomous entity.

116. Job 4:21.

117. Job 24:13.

118. Job 36:12.

119. The fruition of this new knowledge may also be found in the book’s epilogue. It concerns the curious names that Job gives to his three daughters, as they reflect the three cosmic realms. First, the name “Yemima” relates to *yam*, the Sea. “Keren-Hapuch” means the luster of a precious gem. As such it represents Heaven, sparkling in its crystalline Light: “Its stones are the place of sapphires, and its dust is of gold” (Job 28:6. see also 28:1-2). That *puch* is a precious gem, similar to

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sapphire, we see in I Chronicles 29:2 and Isaiah 54:11. The two mentions of women's eye makeup, under the same name, refer to ground crystal, or another type of "shimmer-powder." In between, the name "Ketzia" references a form of fragrant flora, a growing progeny of Earth. Regarding Ketzia, Job may also be hinting at *ketzot ha'aretz*, his recurrent term for "the corners of the Earth." In any case, using a fragrant growth indicates smell and also encompasses the sub-realm of Wind (in Job the atmosphere is part of the land of the living). The metaphor is nothing short of brilliant.

In Job, all gems are from Heaven, likely because of their perceived inner flames. Many verses in Job are clarified when we bear in mind that crystalline gems and Light-reflecting metals are all referring to Heaven. Indeed, being white, snow too is perceived to be of Light. It appears, we must admit, only on the highest mountain peaks, close to Heaven, and ours is a book written in a desert land.

Job's emphasis on the three cosmic realms, and on their respective inhabitants, found its way to the opening set of three blessings that start every "silent prayer" in Jewish tradition: The first blessing talks of the chief living inhabitants of the Earth, of God's grace to the living and to their earthen genealogy; the second talks of the dead, and of those afflicted with any illness, which is a touch of death. As the underworld is the water domain, it is within this second blessing that rain and dew are prayed for. The third blessing talks of the heavenly inhabitants, referred to by Elifaz's term, *kedoshim*, namely the holy ones. This blessing is where *kedusha* is recited, highlighting the celestial praise "Holy! Holy! Holy!" given by the "swarms of angels above."

120. Job, Elifaz, Bildad, Zofar, and Elihu. The relevant midrash appears in Baba Batra 15b. That God never speaks to three of them is beside the point, or it may be based on Job's saying: "you have all had visions" (Job 27:12).

121. A full account would be excessive. Here is, however, a minute sample of the suffering of prophets, emphasizing Job-like cries and death wishes. First, Abraham is famous for his tribulations. Everything seemed meaningless to him because he was childless: "what will you give me, seeing I go childless...?" (Genesis 15:2). Likewise, Isaac believed Rebecca when she cried, "I am weary of my life" (Genesis 27:46). Jacob, who refused to be comforted for Joseph, summarized his life to Pharaoh: "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been..." (Genesis 47:9). Rachel, for her part, cries heatedly to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" (Genesis 30:1). Then, after the horrific ordeals of Joseph, we arrive at Moses, who prayed to God "Kill me, I pray thee... and let me not see my own wretchedness" (Numbers 11:15). Stripped naked on display, prophet Samson, too, begged to die (Judges 16:90), as later did Elijah (I Kings 19:4). Later, God commands Ezekiel to lock himself at home, laying down for four hundred thirty days, eating dung-covered barley cakes and drinking only measures of water: "I will lay bands upon you, and you will not turn yourself from one side to another" (Ezekiel 4:8). A festered Job,

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scratching himself in the ashes, would sympathize. He could just as easily identify with Jeremiah's cry "Cursed be the day on which I was born" (Jeremiah 20:14), and with Jonah's repeated death wish: "for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:3). Finally, one would think that God's ultimate king and prophet would have a charmed life. Instead, King David's words betray acute anguish: "When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid.... In my distress I called upon the Lord..." (II Samuel 22:5-7). Psalms signed in his name echo this sentiment, and for good reason: "I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded" (Psalms 109:22). From his entry on to the stage of history, King Saul tried to kill David, forcing his young son-in-law into an exile during which David's wives were kidnapped, and his own people wanted to stone him to death (I Samuel 30:1-6). David had to bitterly mourn Jonathan (II Samuel 1:26), Avner (II Samuel 3:32), a dead son from the wife of Uriah (II Samuel 12:14), his son Amnon, who was murdered by Absalom (II Samuel 13:31), and later Absalom himself, leading him to proclaim in grief: "Would I had died instead of you" (II Samuel 19:1). This same Absalom led a successful rebellion against his father: "And David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people... weeping as they went" (II Samuel 15:30). Suffering and tragedy accompanied the anointed's every step.

122. "These ideas presented themselves like an inspiration [‘vision’ in the original Arabic] to me." Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, part 3, ch. 22, p. 297. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Did Maimonides Strive for Prophetic Inspiration?" in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, Hebrew section (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), p. 162.

123. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 226. Maimonides stresses the additional prerequisite of subduing all material desires.

124. Job 4:11-17. This description follows the Book of Numbers: "I, the Lord, make myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream" (Numbers 12:6), and is consistent with the experiences of a dozen biblical figures, mostly gentiles, who are reported as having true prophetic dreams: Abimelech, Joseph, Laban, Jacob, the Chief of Butlers, the Chief of Bakers, Pharaoh, Solomon, a friend of Gideon, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar.

125. Job 11:5.

126. Job 33:13-31. See also Job 34:32, 36:10.

127. Job 6:4.

128. Job 7:13. Job's description directly addresses Elifaz's own fear-induced vision experience. Elifaz and Job are describing a type of terror that accompanies a true dream vision, even if its content is not fearful. See, for example, Daniel 4:5.

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129. Job 9:17. The Midrash stresses the connection as well: “Raba said: Job blasphemed with a storm and was countered with a storm.” *Yalkut Shimoni*, Job 9.

130. Job 9:16.

131. Job 13:22.

132. Job 7:20.

133. Job 10:2.

134. Job 13:3.

135. Job 13:18.

136. Job 16:17.

137. Job 19:7.

138. Job 23:3-5.

139. Job 27:4, 8.

140. Job 33:13.

141. Just like Job’s servants didn’t fail to “answer” any questions. They simply didn’t respond to his *calling* (Job 19:16). The same term is used after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, when Miriam “responded” with her own song to that of the men (Exodus 15:20). Obviously, no question was posed in that scene.

142. James Norton, “Gita and the Book of Job,” p. 185.

143. Job 42:4.

144. Job 42:5. The Hebrew word for “now” also points to God as a “you.”

145. Cf. “The person praying must concentrate in his heart on the words that he utters; and he must think he has the divine presence before him; and he must remove all thoughts that occupy him until his thinking and his intention remain pure in his prayer... And this is what the pious ones and men of deeds would do; they were solitary and intent on their prayers until they attained consummation and augmentation of mental power, approaching the level of prophecy.” Joseph Karo, *Shulhan Aruch, Orach Haim* 98:1. This idea regarding the nature of prophecy is summarized in a single verse: “A prophet [is] a mind of Wisdom” (Psalms 90:12). Thus Elihu’s last words before the storm of prophecy erupts are “every wise mind” (Job 37:24).

146. Anyone who reads through the witty exchanges between Job and his friends must admit that the author has an unsurpassed gift for sarcasm.

147. Song of Songs 5:2.

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148. When Job says, “gave birth to me unto clay,” he is using the root word *hara* for pregnancy and fathering children. Sadly, all translations completely miss the simple meaning of this verse. In Genesis 18:27 Abraham, too, describes man’s existential state within the material world as being of soil and ashes.

149. Job 42:2-6. The root *nun-het-mem* is used five times in the Book of Job in the context of consolation. The verse can also be read as “I took back what I said about ‘soil and ashes.’”

150. Job 42:4.

151. In a magnificent conclusion to his article, in which he appreciates the gradual arousing of Job into full consciousness and compares the process to that described in the Indian Bhagavad Gita, James Norton writes: “The choice that I make depends on the answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’ And the answer to this question, in the analysis of both the Bhagavad Gita and the Book of Job, is not to be found in the self. They both indicate the wisdom of the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, who long ago observed that ‘[God] has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end’ (Ecclesiastes 3:11). If it is true that God has put eternity into the minds of men, it would suggest that man is not the measure of all things, not even the measure of his own self.” Norton, “Gita and the Book of Job,” p. 192.

152. Job 14:12.

153. Job 38:1, 40:6.

154. Cf. Jeremiah 25:32, “a great storm (*sa’ar*) will awaken (*ye’or*).”

155. While *se’ara* can definitely relate to a windstorm elsewhere in the Bible (normally with an explicit mention of “a wind *se’ara*,” which would be rather redundant if it meant “a wind whirlwind.” Cf. Psalms 55:9, 107:25, 148:8; Isaiah 41:17; Ezekiel 13:11; Jonah 1:4-12), in Job it is in line with the stand alone type of fire and lightning storm quoted in the body of the essay.

156. Interestingly, also in the context of “a dream of a night vision.” Isaiah 29:6-7.

157. Job 9:14.

158. Amos 1:14.

159. Job 83:14-15.

160. II Kings 2:11. The clearest portrayal of this storm may be found in the vision of Ezekiel 1:4: “Behold, a spirit-storm (*ruah-se’ara*) came out of the north, a great cloud of light, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it... out

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of the midst of the fire.” Ezekiel combines the concept of a visionary firestorm with the “spirit” of divination seen elsewhere in the Bible.

161. See Isaiah 34:4, 65:17, 66:22. Also Daniel 7:27 in conjunction with 12:2-3. The Septuagint adds that “He will rise again with those whom the Lord raises up” (Job 42:17), qualifying Job as one of Daniel’s *maskilim*, or enlightened ones.