

Elie Wiesel:

(applause) So, let us study. Once upon a time, in a faraway land named Uz, there lived a legendary man named *Iyov*, or Job. That is the opening line of a tale rich in events and endowed with meaning that has been hounding not me alone, but also generations of scholars and students across cultures and memories. It is a dramatic tale, filled with theological suspense and literary tension. Actually, [00:01:00] we have tried already twice at least to explore it in this setting at the Y. Now, why tackle it again? Because the more we think we know the protagonist and his remarkable destiny, the more we realize that we have just begun.

It is enough to open the book, to immediately be confronted with new, yet eternal, questions, revelations, and mysteries, that cannot but puzzle and fascinate anyone eager to discover what remains hidden in deceptively simple words and reverberations. In truth, all the moral problems, metaphysical dilemmas, and religious situations facing individuals and families are to be found [00:02:00] in this story. Relationships between husband and wife. Parents and their children. Happy and fortunate

people fallen into a life of pain and distress. Their encounter with friends. The ambivalence of language and memory. The anguished connection between creator and his creation. The sacred, and the profane. The danger of Satan's influence and power. Related questions of blasphemy, resignation, or suicide arise from certain parts of the timeless and eternally timely tale called the Book of Job.

Now, numerous books have been written, and many more will be written, on any one of these topics. It reads [00:03:00] like a fable, almost a fairy tale for adults, with a quiet beginning, a thought-provoking middle, and reassuring denouement. And decades from now, one autumn evening, someone else, your grandchild perhaps, will sit at this table and say, "Let's open this great book of questions and confrontations. Let's again turn its pages, beginning with the first words."

"Once upon a time in the land of Uz, there lived a man named Job." And this man, says the text, was a *tam*, which means both innocent and whole, and he was in all things perfect, fearing God, [00:04:00] and avoiding evil. The name of his father, unknown, which is strange. In biblical texts, when we speak about people, they always give us the name of the father. Not here. What about his childhood? Omitted. Who were his

teachers? Unknown. A land named Uz? Where is that land? It appears in three places in sacred volumes. The great Saadia Gaon places it near Damascus. Other sites are offered in Talmudic sources. However, both Maimonides, the great philosopher, and Rashi, the greatest of all commentators, maintain that the name has no geographical significance. In fact, it could be everywhere or nowhere.

[00:05:00] Following the praise given Job, logically the concerned reader is now awaiting a positive development. Since our hero is so pious, that the divine compliments covering him surpass even those bestowed upon Abraham or Moses, God will surely reward him. He deserves rewards. In fact, he has already been rewarded. He's wealthy, thousands of lands, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 she-asses. Also, he's the head of a marvelous family. A good wife, seven sons, and three daughters. Furthermore, he's the greatest of men in the east, says the text. So, he's entitled to be happy. And he is, surely, happy with people [00:06:00] and at peace with himself.

And yet, a faint doubt insinuates itself in the mind of the reader right away. First, the optimistic approach of the story is too beautiful to be true. Second, the book has such a foresight. It's too long. And those of you who are just

beginning to study it, you will see, it's long. (laughter) To extract its moral lesson, one chapter, one page or two, like the ones describing the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, would have been sufficient.

As for the story itself, when in my classroom, students and I read a volume, any volume, any novel, or any research book on philosophy or history, [00:07:00] old or new, fiction or not, the teacher asks, "What actually is the book about?" So, what is this story about? Is it about decisions made in heaven that affect the lives of human beings below? Is it a tale of sin and punishment, a la Dostoevsky? Is it a story of God's presence in history? Is it about human fear and trembling, and their possible meaning or ultimate absurdity? Or is it just to make us wonder? If good deeds produce suffering, why be good? Why choose good over evil? Why obey God's commandments if God is doing what He's doing to His favorite servant, then?

But then, once [00:08:00] suffering is inflicted on the individual chosen person, what does one do with one's suffering? Does it change the sufferer? And who is responsible for their suffering? We cannot not ask that question. God or -- let's listen. Job's life was not so peaceful, we learn right from the outset. He does have problems with his children. Admit it.

They were partying too much. (laughter) Now, they were partying, we are told that's in the text. Why weren't the parents invited? (laughter) They're offering a terrible example to us. Job didn't know what they were really doing. The fact is, he worried. [00:09:00] And he asked himself, "And what if they sinned in their heart?" Neither he nor the reader could be certain that they did something wrong, but he thought maybe they did. And so, to cover all possibilities, Job decides to atone on their behalf, and he brings offerings to God. For sins that maybe, they didn't commit.

But how could a father not be informed of his children's whereabouts? And activities? This is the first question: how could such a father, pious and God-fearing, have such children? (laughter) Second question: can one really bring sacrifices on behalf of others? Be they real sinners or close relatives? [00:10:00] The story moves on with a high-level meeting in heaven. God's VIP angels -- the term is the sons -- *B'nei Elohim* -- the Sons of God -- appeared before Him, and, says the text, Satan was among them. Has he been invited? Not sure.

And God asked him -- the language is real, almost like this. "Hey. Hi." (laughter) And Satan says, "Hi." "Where do you come from?" Satan answers, "Oh, I don't know. I just took a

walk down below." "Oh, really?" says God. "How interesting. Did you happen to notice my good and brave servant Job? Don't you agree that there is no one like him in my whole wide world? [00:11:00] Morally whole, upright, fearing God, and avoiding evil?" And what follows is an astonishing dialogue between God and Satan. One wonders, how could Satan in the presence of other important angels be so impudent with God? And why didn't they silence him? They could have said, "Hey, who are you? You speak like that? To God?"

His argument is actually clever and predictable. And he said -- 'cause look, immediately, he's not. Satan can -- you can say anything about him, he's not an idiot, and he understood right away that that was a leading question that he was asked. So, what does one do? One answers the question with another question. Saying, "Of course, of course," [00:12:00] he said. "Why, he is absolutely good and kind and everything. But why shouldn't Job be the perfect man You described? He's wealthy, and happy, and everything he touches is blessed by God. But take everything away from him, and we'll see. Ah, let's see what will happen. Let's see if his faith will still totally remain unblemished."

"Good," said God. "You know what? Take care of him. I'll let you do whatever you want with him, except don't kill him." End of dialogue. Satan politely bowed, left the meeting. Were there reactions in heaven? Interventions? Commentaries? Applause from the audience? [00:13:00] Criticism? If yes, they were not recorded.

And now, the action moves quickly from Job to his sons and daughters. They ate and drank, and had a good time, at the oldest brother's home. What happened then, we learn from other people. We are together with Job when a messenger knocked at the door with sad news. "While oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them, hostile civilians appeared out of nowhere and slew them and their caretakers. I alone escaped to tell the tale." He was still talking when another came with his report. "A fire came down from heaven, and devoured sheep and shepherds, [00:14:00] and I alone escaped to come and tell the tale."

He was still talking when a third messenger appeared with this story. "Chaldeans raided our camp, took the camels, and killed the drivers. I alone escaped to tell the tale." He hasn't finished talking when still another messenger arrived. "Your sons and daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Job, were eating and drinking at the home of their oldest brother's, when a huge wind came

from the desert and shook the four corners of the home. All were killed. I alone escaped and came to tell the tale." Only then, did Job stand up and tore his clothes, fell to his knees, and exclaimed, "Naked have I come out of my mother's womb, and naked I shall return to the earths. God has given, [00:15:00] God has taken back, may His name be blessed."

Let's open here a short parenthesis. Later on, you will see that our sages made it a point -- made it, for them, a very important task, to say that Job was not Jewish. And when I studied that, I wondered, where did they take that from? Why should they say that he wasn't Jewish? What text is there to even hint that he was not Jewish? And thinking about it, I think I know why. Because, how come that Job didn't behave the way normal people behave in extreme situations? The first impact is one of denial. [00:16:00] How come he said, "Are you sure? Are you sure you didn't come to the wrong home? I'm number 16, maybe it's 14?" (laughter) And how come he didn't say, "Come on, you are reading a script. Same words, 'I alone escaped.' It cannot happen." How come that he didn't question the messengers? And that proves that he was not Jewish. (laughter) A Jew would have questioned right away. "Are you sure? Can you prove it?" (laughter) "Do you have IDs? Really." (laughter)

But the text leaves Job in his distress, and takes us back to heaven, where -- we'll come back to that. But we must follow [00:17:00] our tradition with some preliminary remarks. It is good to be back here at the Y for the 43rd year, and explore -- (applause) -- and together explore sacred texts, forever looking in every passage, in every expression, for hidden meanings left to us by sages and scholars and students and friends throughout the centuries. Why have we returned to Job for the third time? You may say, why not? (laughs) But you may also add, have we left him at all?

Like so many famous politicians and scientists, and so many literary figures, both authors and protagonists, he must be fond [00:18:00] of the 92nd Street Y. (laughter) Or is it my compassion for his lonely destiny? My desire to place him among true friends. Let's stop here. I know the reader and the listener are surely curious to find out what follows. But let's think of those who are even more eager. Outside. Once the doors are open. (pause)

Well, the last time we saw Job, he was in distress and in mourning, while in heaven, the Sons of God presented themselves again before God, and again with Satan in their midst. As if

we're reading a well-prepared script -- written by whom? -- God asks Satan the same question. Interesting. God doesn't ask any other angel, only Satan. [00:19:00] "Hey, where do you come from now?" And Satan gives the same answer: he took a walk down below. And God responds as He did the first time: "Really? Have you noticed my servant Job, who is unlike any other in the land? He's upright, fearing God, and avoiding evil. You see? It is in vain that you incited me against him."

And Satan does not surrender. "Actually," he says, "he only lost his goods and belongings, but let me handle him personally, physically. Then, we'll see what happens." As before, God consents. "Do to him, with him, whatever you wish. But he must remain alive." Job fell ill, his body broken, his skin untouchably [00:20:00] repulsive. And now we know exactly, of course, the situation. Sitting there, suffering terribly. Being tortured. Satan's role remains incomprehensible, disturbing, appalling, so much so that Rabbi Yochanan, a great sage who felt incommensurate sympathy for Job, made the following statement. "This story, because of its implications, is so strange that were it not written, we would not dare to utter it."

What? Satan? One of the Sons of God? We shall return to him next week, here, [00:21:00] when it is he who will be at the center of our exploration. For now, our attention is exclusively turned toward Job, who is in bad shape. As he said on the ashes of his dwelling, his entire body was in intolerable pain, and then, as if out of the blue, his wife turned to him and says, "You still hold fast to your wholeness or to your innocence? Curse God, and die." It is for the first time that we notice her altogether. Where was she until now? Did Job eat alone that evening? Did the messengers talk only to him? And now that she is here, and she talks, what kind of advice is she giving him? [00:22:00] To commit suicide?

Or is it possible that her words are meant to help him, saying, better die outside, or against faith, than in or with faith? In fact, the word she uses is *barech*, which on the simplistic level means "curse" and "bless." Again, parentheses. When I taught Job for years, two years, on French television, primetime (laughter) -- only in France, really (laughter) -- the Book of Job -- and I said -- I asked a question, I said, "I am terribly sorry with the book, because after all, she was there, she suffered the way he did, she also lost her children, she lost her fortune, [00:23:00] she lost her home. And the book is about him, not her. Why isn't there a book about Mrs. Job?"

(laughter) Few years later, I got in the mail a book, written by an author, a Lebanese woman, saying, "Professor Wiesel, I heard you, and this is the book." (laughter) Sometimes, my words are being heard.

So, she said that to her husband, and his answer is shocking. "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak," he says. "Shall we receive the good but not the bad at the hand of God?" The expression in Hebrew is even worse. It's insulting. He calls her *achat hanevalot*, one of the wretched. And that was their last exchange in our version of the story. In the Septuaginta translation, [00:24:00] her lines are more numerous. She says, I quote, "How long will you go on saying that you will wait and wait longer for your salvation? Why, your very memory is faltering. My sons and daughters, fruits of my womb, are gone, and like a maidservant, I go from place to place, from house to house, waiting for the sun to shine so I could rest in my distress. Curse God and die."

But what happened then? In all texts, both Babylonian and Judean, she disappears for good. Does she really? It is not clear from the text. It's quite possible that she remains onstage throughout the discussion with the friends, throughout the disputations between her husband and his friends, but

remember, they were his friends, not hers. But he remains silent. In Apocrypha sources, [00:25:00] mention is made of her continuous presence. Better yet, when the trial ends, Job is being rewarded. He reconstitutes a family. He will have twice seven sons and three daughters. But with whom? Will he remarry? Or is this woman his second wife? Some commentators disagree. For them, it was his first. They never divorced, and they were never separated. So who is she?

Various Midrashic sources tend to believe, or to make us believe, that she is Dinah, or Dinah. Yes, Jacob's only daughter. Surely you recall her tragic fate. A prince of *Shechem*, or Nablus, fell in love with her, and raped her. Her shame was avenged by her two brothers, Shimon and Levi.

[00:26:00] The entire male population of *Shechem* was wiped out. In both stories, the word *nevalah*, wretchedness, appears. And no one except in the fascinating fantasy of sages has ever heard of her again, of Dinah. But in the Talmud, somebody says, maybe Job's wife was Dinah. But why do they marry her to Job? Hasn't she suffered enough? (laughter)

The only reason for this arranged marriage has to do not with her, but with him. Thanks to Dinah, or Dinah, Job belongs to the era of Jacob, and Moses, which is needed to explain Job's

trial, as we shall see later. For the moment, let's simply state that everything here is done to make our hero as elusive as possible. Either geographically or biographically, [00:27:00] some sources question his name itself. Not Job, but Yovav, son of *Zerach*, an Edomite. His birthplace, Uz, is quasi-mythical. So is his date of birth. Legends moves him over time and space. Was he Abraham's contemporary? Esau's grandson? Or a neighbor of Joseph? An advisor to Pharaoh, and possible acquaintance of Moses' father-in-law Jethro? Was Moses the author of his book? Did Job live in the time of the Judges? Or of Persia's King Ahasuerus, perhaps? Was he really an immigrant from Babylonian exile? Was he truly the head of an academy in Tiberias, as is the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan, who quotes Rabbi Eleazar?

But was he Jewish at all? Not so sure. Some sages dispute this conclusion, [00:28:00] claiming that he actually was a non-Jewish, virtuous, just man. Or even an accomplished prophet to Gentiles. One text says, quote, "A pious man existed among the nations of the world, and his name was Job. And he came into this world only to receive his reward. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, inflicted suffering on him, and he began protesting and cursing until the Holy One, blessed be He, doubled his reward." End of quote.

So many stories and contradictory theories have been offered, in various, various sources, that it could lead to confusion. Actually, to prevent confusion, Rabbi Shmuel, son of Nachmani, comes up with a revolutionary idea. "*Iyov lo haya v'lo nivra.*" "Job actually never existed." [00:29:00] "*Mashal haya.*" "He was simply pure fiction." Is this the final word, *mashal*, Job, a parable? The great Saul Lieberman, my teacher and friend, adds his own interpretation, "To say that story, the story of Job, is *mashal haya*, a parable, is not sufficient. Something is missing here. One could say, '*Ked mashal haya,*' 'It was like a parable.' You cannot say a whole life of a person is a parable. It can be like a parable, or better yet, '*Lur mashal haya,*' that his life was to be a parable."

In other words, Job existed, and his suffering was real, but only in order to serve as a story, a parable, an example, to learn from it. [00:30:00] Yes, to learn from it how to deal with suffering. Our own and that of others. And how to reconcile faith in God's compassion with His rigorous ethical principles of *din*, how to reconcile *rachamim*, compassion or pity, with rigor. Thus, Job himself turns into an exemplary figure to be followed. To this day, Jews behave like him in matters of mourning. They tear their clothes and use his first

words humbly, "*Baruch dayan ha-emet*," accepting God's judgement of truth. God has given, God has taken, may His name be a blessing.

And you may then say, maybe the whole story is about truth. The stage is set for the next [00:31:00] phase in his life. Enter his three friends. The laws of mourning are still observed. They speak only when he speaks. They eat only if he eats. They rise only when he rises. For seven days and seven nights, his lips are sealed. So are theirs. Because, says the text, they witnessed his great pain. Were they united in silence? Is the silence of the victim the same as that of the comforter? Or the spectator? They may use the same words, but is their meaning the same? Do they convey the same experience?

Next question. Had Job not been silent, had his friend not been silent, would he have found the words to curse the day of his birth? Would he have cursed at all? [00:32:00] Does the language of silence produce other words? I must say, until here, I am very much moved by this scene. The silence, seven days and seven nights. Three visitors and Job, together, silent. But furthermore, we must ask the question: who are the three friends? We know their names and origins. Eliphaz the Yemenite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. One

Baraita suggests that like Job himself, they were prophets to the non-Jewish world. They must have known Job and his family, and heard of his plight. Also, they must have been in contact, otherwise, how did they manage to arrive together at the same time?

The Apocrypha book, [00:33:00] *Divrei Iyov*, or Job's Words, declares that the visit actually occurred 20 years after the event itself. It took them 20 years to come? But then, really, the question, why did they wait so long? And why was Job still in mourning? Is this version given only to tell us that Job's mourning lasted so long? But then, isn't overextended grief against Jewish law? Very few areas have attracted so much attention, compassion, sensitivity, from our sages, as the laws of mourning. Every moment is being explored, sensitized, and we are also told not to extend mourning too long. It's a sin. [00:34:00] Therefore, it's measured.

First the seven days, the *shiva*. Then 30 days, the pain is less. Then a year. And then, you cannot, one must not remember the dead too long. My translation of the text in the Bible, *u'vacharta bachayim*, you shall choose life. I interpret it, you shall choose the living.

And here, we have 20 years? In the same ancient texts of the Apocrypha, three visitors look at Job with disbelief, and even before he opens his mouth, wonder among themselves, "This man was so generous. He helped so many poor people in surrounding cities and villages. Why does he deserve such suffering?" More or less similar questions are raised in the biblical story, [00:35:00] but later. After all, this first episode, says the biblical text, after his long silence, Job opened his mouth and cursed his life. The text used the term *vaya'am*, "he replied." But to whom? Not to his friends, since they were still silent. He replied with words to his own silent thoughts.

And he said, "*Yovad yom ivaled bo*, may the day I was born perish. And the night which announced the male child is born, may that day be darkness. May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. Let night be barren." He wishes he died when leaving his mother's womb. "I request," he says, "that God would grant my desire. That it would please God to crush me. That He would let loose His hand, [00:36:00] and cut me off. That would be my consolation." Of his friends, he says, "My friends are treacherous as a torrent bed. As freshets that pass away, which are dark with ice." Further, he says, "Are not men's days like the days of a hireling? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, who looks for his wages. So I am allotted

months of emptiness. Nights of misery are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing 'til dawn."

And he declares, "Therefore, I will not refrain my mouth, I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." He questions the purpose and meaning of his ordeal. He wants to know why, for what specific reason, he's made to endure such distress. He asks heaven, [00:37:00] he asks, he said, "What have I done to displease You? What transgression am I guilty of? What sin have I committed?" In other words, he asks God, "What do You want from me?" (pause) I remember during our time, one learned person had only one question for days. Would look up to heaven and says, "What do You want from us? Tell us. What do You want from us?"

Job's outburst is followed by his friends' speeches. And there, you feel let down. Are they meant to console and comfort him? Some sages answer in the affirmative, quoting a verse from the Ecclesiastes, "It is better to go to the house of a mourner than to the house of rejoicing." Rabbi Shimon applauds them for doing precisely that. [00:38:00] "That's why they were rewarded by God, by escaping their place in hell." Other sages disagree, and they judge harshly the friends' statements. So does God

Himself, and so do we. Between him and his pain, they choose God and His justice. They are not on his side. Each in his own way, with his own attitudes, offers him explanations rather than human solidarity. He is in pain, and they speak theology.

Instead of alleviating his pain, they increase it. They make him feel worse, instead of making him feel better. Bildad the Shuhite answers first. "How long will you utter these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?" And listen to his revolting response to Job's multifaceted, agonizing [00:39:00] views. He says -- his friend, so-called friend, says, "If your children have sinned against God, He has delivered them into the power of their transgression." And this explanation is, to me, the most outrageous, most scandalous of all.

He says that since the children were killed, they must have deserved their punishment? To say that to an orphaned father, while he is still in mourning, is unforgivable. Now remember, at that point, Job has not denied God's existence. He just question His impact on his life. And yet, Bildad says, "Can papyrus grow where there is no water? While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. [00:40:00]

Such are the paths of all who forget God. The hope of godless men shall perish." What? Job, godless? Job, forgot God? How dare Bildad level such accusations against his friend?

And Job answers, "How can a man be just before God, who removes mountains, and they do not know when He overturns them in His anger? Who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble?" No, Job, yet, then, doesn't deny neither God's existence nor His power. All he wants is to understand His awesome and mysterious ways in dealing with His creation. Not that he's unwilling to submit to God's will -- he is. But he wishes to understand what it is, and why it is at times for him to be happy [00:41:00] and or in distress. Is there no connection between heavenly compassion and divine justice? Or must divine heart's justice be answered by a human quest for concern and compassion, for the other always, but not by God's direct answer?

What is the meaning of all that? One of Job's harshest critics is not among his three friends, it's a fourth, seemingly uninvited, guest. Elihu, son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the Ram family, his part begins with anger. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God. What? Wasn't Job's instantaneous response to declare that God has given and

God has taken back? Elihu was also angry at Job's friends for their poor dialect in refuting his arguments. He said, "I am young in years, and you are aged. Therefore, I was timid and afraid in speaking up. [00:42:00] I waited for your words, but now I'm confused. Job won't answer these words properly, so I must speak, that I might find relief." And turning directly to Job, he reproaches him for not admitting that God is greater than man, quote unquote. "Why are you against Him for not answering your words? God speaks in one or two ways, but man does not perceive it. Listen to me, old Job," he said. "Be silent and I will teach you wisdom. Far be it from God that He should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that He should be wrong."

Neither the friends nor Job answered Elihu. The attitude towards him is varied in ancient sources. Some sages just praise him. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah sees him as Isaac. Others blame him. Rabbi Akiva condemns him as being *Bil'am*. [00:43:00] And other sages persuade that he is Satan. In the Apocrypha volume, he's worst of them all.

With Job, it is not the individual who wonders, searches, and argues. He's the reflection or representative of all members of the human family. And particularly, those who are

underprivileged and singled out for impossible situations with a complex testing, which they don't understand. Job knows that he's not only innocent, but also God-fearing, avoiding evil, and pious. The text told him that. All he has to do is to look into his own book, with the impressive praise. And since the book tells him that his life is above reproach, he is simply unable to comprehend why he deserves punishment and pain.

[00:44:00] His three, and later four, friends do understand. Or at least, that is the general substance of their discourse. Faced with ontological dilemmas, Job doesn't know. And that's what I like about him, that he doesn't know. They do know, and that's what I don't like. (laughter)

Is this the gist of the story? Wait a second. Are we to believe that Job doesn't know at all why his children were killed? No possible explanation? Oh yes, there is one. Doesn't he, after all, doesn't he say in his heart that maybe they sinned? Before the family tragedy experience, a parable, he had it -- that they were partying. Now, the question really is, what should Job do? [00:45:00] Suffering is already behind him, it cannot be undone. God Himself cannot undo what was done. What should Job feel? And there, at one point, he has a marvelous, marvelous verse. He says, "*Hein yiktaleini lo*

ayacheil.," which means, "Let Him kill me, I shall nevertheless yearn for Him."

But *lo*, in Hebrew, with a *vav*, means "him." With an *alef*, it means "no." In other words, the verse may read, "Let Him slay me but I shall continue placing my faith in Him," or, "Let Him slay me but I shall not have faith in him." And I also think it can mean, "*lo ayacheil*, I shall wait for death." [00:46:00] In general, we believe that Job was tested by God and that he failed due to his angry outburst. And I don't like it. How is one to explain that the story has never been considered for *genizah*, meaning to be excluded from the canon? To be forbidden reading?

It became part of the *genizah*, but not in the canon. The Song of Songs, the *Shir ha-Shirim*, was on the list for a while, as was the Ecclesiastes, and Job was not. One thing is clear: wherever we turn with our analysis, Job remains at its center. That the friends are wrong, perhaps they talk too much, becomes evident, since they are rebuked by God Himself. But Job needs to see [00:47:00] his predicament with absolute moral clarity, and here, a well-known extraordinary Midrashic parable is presented to the reader. It raises the question, whether the

story might not be the consequence of a terrible mistake, made by the Almighty Himself.

And each time a tragedy occurs -- and some of you I know place even this tragedy within the context of the tragedy of the last century that our people endured -- was it a mistake? Listen. A legend. More in bewilderment than in sorrow, Job turned to God, master of the universe. "Is it possible that a storm passed before You, causing You to confuse *Iyov*, Job, with *Oyev*, the enemy?" The same letters. Strange as it may seem, of all the questions raised by Job, only this one was answered, and [00:48:00] God's voice roared in the tempest.

"Pull yourself together, man, and listen. Many hairs have I created on the human head, and every single hair has its root. I don't confuse roots. How could I confuse Job and enemy? Many drops have I created in the clouds, and every single drop has its own source. I confuse neither drops nor clouds. How could I confuse *Iyov* and *Oyev*, Job and the enemy? Many thunderbolts have I created and for each bolt, a path of its own. I don't mistake one bolt for another. How could I confuse Job and the enemy? And I want you to know that the wild goat is cruel with its young. As they are about to be born, she climbs to the top of a very high rock and lets the little ones drop from the

precipice. So I prepared an eagle to catch them on his wings. But [00:49:00] were the eagle to arrive one moment too early or too late, they would fall to the ground and be crushed. I don't confuse moments, or lightning bolts, or drops, or roots, and you are asking me if I am confusing *Iyov* and *Oyev*, Job and the enemy."

Here, Job is rebuked by God, who seems to say to him, "You don't know what I am doing and why, but I do. Let this be sufficient for you." That's where the Midrash goes farther and offers an ethical reason for Job's divinely-received plight. Listen again. "Egypt's Pharaoh had three equally influential advisors. Jethro, *Bil'am* the prophet, and Job, and he obviously consulted them on matters of state. So when [00:50:00] the issue of slavery was put on the agenda, and Moses appeared before him, asking, 'Let my people go,' he summoned his three advisors and requested their opinions. There must have been a real discussion, with arguments in favor or against the Hebrew slaves' right to freedom, or faith, or movement. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was naturally on their side, pleading for his new family's friends and relatives. 'What do you need them here?' he must have said. 'They only cause trouble. Other tribes may follow their example. Let them go, and there will be peace in the land.' The enemy prophet protested violently. 'The Jews

were born slaves, let them remain slaves. You need their work, their labor, even their ingenuity. If they gain freedom, all the other slaves will want it too. So reject Moses' plea. Be harsh with his emissaries, and things will be all right.'

Caught between two opinions, Pharaoh turned to Job.

[00:51:00.0] 'What do you think?'"

Did he think at all? We never know. All we know is that he didn't answer. He kept silent. And says the Midrash, "It is because of his silence then, at that fateful moment of decision for the people of Israel, that Job was eventually punished." In times of danger, remember, my friends, in times of peril, silence helps the victimizer, never the victim.

Is that reason fully acceptable? As in other places, we may echo Midrashic discontent, asking if Job sinned, why were his children killed? But we must stop again. Earlier, we said it was God's will that Job suffered. Was it? Really? Wasn't there someone named or nicknamed Satan, too? [00:52:00] Hasn't it been his idea from the outset? Yes, but he was only one of many angels present at the heavenly morning summit meetings. Why was he singled out by God, who chaired the session? If God had not given him the floor, the Book of Job would not have been written.

These questions are pertinent. But Satan is -- how should I say it -- our invited guest scheduled for next week, so wait. For the moment, I'll simply suggest that Job's own quest for meaning and concern for justice cannot not appeal to our own. A great Hasidic master, Rabbi Zusha of Hanipol, known for his long life and lifelong misery, once exclaimed, "Oh master of the universe, I do not mind suffering. (pause) Provided, it is for Your sake." [00:53:00] Has Job suffered for God's sake?

Oh, in the beginning, when I explored this subject, years and years and years ago, I expect my lack of enthusiasm towards him for submitting to God took quickly, too easily, too conveniently. At that time, we invoked the example of Moscow's infamous show trials in which the celebrated defendants confessed to unthinkable and implausible crimes. They did so without arguing on details, just to tell us elsewhere, later, that they didn't mean it. Had they disputed certain charges, but not others, the trials must have been accepted as warranted, if not legally, but historically, valid. But in their total submission, they hinted at their innocence.

The same could be said of Job. Had he argued, the student of his life [00:54:00] and struggle could have consented to agree

with both prosecutor and judge. By not arguing, he suggested rebellion. Still, the real reason for his submission is to be found elsewhere. Job's fear was not that God is unjust. Who are we human mortals? Authors and victims of our own ambitions and frailties. Who are we to dare comparing our sense of justice to His? To do so would be blasphemy, wouldn't it? Job's fear was that, who knows? God on His throne might be indifferent to His creatures and their silly or dramatic adventures here below on our small, insignificant planet. That is what hurt him. The indifference, the possible indifference of God. [00:55:00] So when God, late in the story, in chapter 38, finally addressed Job from the whirlwind, immediately Job fell to his knees and was satisfied. Listen.

"Who is this, that darkness counseled by words without knowledge, gird up your loins like a man. I shall question you," says God. "Where were you when I laid the foundations for the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who stretched the lines upon it? Who laid its cornerstone when the morning star sang together and all the songs of God shouted for joy? Have the gates of that been revealed to you? Have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Do you know the ordinance of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on earth?"

And Job surrendered immediately. "I have uttered words that I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me [00:56:00] which I did not know. Now, my eyes see Thee. I therefore despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." We are nearing the denouement. God wins. A victorious God settles His and Job's accounts with his friends. "My wrath is kindled against you, for you, for you have not spoken to what is right as my servant Job has." Job is vindicated, rehabilitated. He became God's servant again. He enjoyed his reward as the head of a new family, wealthier than before, perhaps even happier than before. His three daughters, endowed with names, the text says, were the most beautiful among the women in the land. I didn't know they had beauty queens at that time. (laughter)

But all is well that ends well. What does the story teach us? [00:57:00] In conclusion, Job's tale deserves to be read and understood on various levels. On the religious and metaphysical levels, his dilemma is simple. To believe or not to believe in his own faith in God, whose justice is also compassion. If his choice is to rebel against Him, which could have been an option, then what good would it do to others? But not to rebel Him, at least for a moment, is impossible. In all failures therefore, the same can easily be said -- though not so easily -- were his

option, as the head of a new family, to continue believing in God, in spite of the problems that such a belief poses.

But what if the same God decided to repeat the same agonizing test He inflicted on him and his children on others? What changed? [00:58:00] Something did. God spoke. God spoke to Job. Why was Job satisfied with His response? Maybe he wasn't. He was simply satisfied with the fact that God spoke, which means that He, the creator, cares about His creation. That He answers. In other words, God is not absent from it. He's not indifferent. Which means Job, yes, Job could accept God's terrible injustice, but not His awful indifference.

That is the urgent and yet timeless lesson we receive from his tale, if we read it from a purely ethical viewpoint. Isn't this the theme that runs through all our encounters, that took place here since their very beginning, and all of my work? And so many others. What is the Torah [00:59:00] if not a commandment forbidding indifference? Thou shall not stand idly by. It's one of the most beautiful, extraordinary, magnificent counsels given to us, worried over our own survival.

What is the Talmud if not the interpretation of that commandment? What is Hasidism if not a moving, yet powerful,

appeal for being open to another's pain, fear, and joy? Doesn't Job pray on behalf of his so-called friends, who are being so rightly and severely reprimanded by God? Tell me, has Job forgiven God? Seemingly, the answer is yes. What bothers me is that at no point, and no one told Job the truth. And [01:00:00] maybe this is the story. What the story's about? It's about truth, which was concealed from him. No one bothered to tell him, neither the angel nor God, "Job, you didn't do anything wrong. Satan was there. It was only a wager between me and Satan. It had nothing to do with you. Don't worry. You did nothing wrong."

So, I believe, therefore, that Job's story is also to be read, and explored, and even understood, on a human level. It's a story not of beginnings, but of beginning again. Isn't this also an essential component of Jewish history? How many times did it compel us to build on ruins? Ruins of homes, ruins of certainties, ruins of hope. The fact that Job could [01:01:00] marry or remarry, and have children, and embark upon a new life with its discoveries, challenges, failures, and triumphs, serves as a blueprint for all human beings everywhere, forever. The story's being read again and again, for it occurs again and again, and yet, we continue.

Still, again, the question is permanent, because it is there and we read it. And so, we approach the conclusion of this dramatic and challenging biblical tale. Let's read chapter 42. "And Job spoke to God. 'I knew that You are all-powerful, and no evasive project is hidden from You. Who can ignore counsel without knowledge? Thus I spoke and did not understand. Wonders remained removed from my grasp. I asked answers from You, and You answered. [01:02:00] Before I heard You, now I feel You. Therefore, I repudiate my ways. I am but dust and ashes.'"

And Job's humility is rewarded. He's rewarded because God again repeats the expression, speaking of him as "my servant, Job."

"And Job's" -- all of a sudden, we are told, the text, further -- "and Job's brothers and sisters and acquaintances arrived to break bread with him, and bring him expensive gifts." What?

(laughter) He had brothers? (laughter) And sisters? Where were they when he was struck by catastrophe? When he needed them?

Is it possible that they didn't know what happened to him? That three friends knew and they didn't? His brothers and sisters?

Or is it that they came only [01:03:00] when he didn't need them? Well, strange happy end. We are told then that Job lived 140 years more, and saw four generations of children and grandchildren. And he died an old man, saturated with years.

In other words, nothing is forgotten, but always forgiven. Has Job's faith remained pure, as it had been long ago? Is all this possible? And here, I discovered in the *Zohar*, the holy book of mystical splendor, claiming, offering, another theory. Job simply lost his mind. (laughter)

If so, when did he lose it? During or after? When he became richer? How about seeing Job as the prototype of [01:04:00] a survivor today? At one point in his life or her life, they must have had a choice, during or after. Either giving up faith, or sanity. But they kept both. What does it mean? Thank you.
(applause)

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