

15:1-16 Rejecting Job's words (continued)

1. Metzudat David to 15:7-8

מה תבזז לדברי צופר על כי הוא צעיר לימים ואתה ישיש? וכי ראשון נולדת לאדם... וכאומר "מהו אשר הוא צעיר לימים? הלא יתכן שקבל אמריו ממי שקדם לך, אשר שפט גם הוא מן החוש אשר ראה ברוב הימים!" ואם תתפאר למולו במרבית הידיעה הבאה מפאת החכמה, האם התבוננת בסוד אלוהים להבין מסתוריו?...

Why do you mock the words of Tzofar because he is young and you are aged? Were you born before Adam... As if to say, "Why does his youth matter? Perhaps he received his statements from one who preceded you, who also judged from what he sensed in his long life!" And should you glorify yourself before him due to the great knowledge that comes from wisdom – have you examined the secrets of Gd, to understand His mysteries?...

2. Malbim to 15:11

התנחומין שינחמך קל על עצבון ידיך באדמה אשר אררה ד' ועל חיי העוה"ז הכלים ואובדים, ינחמך קל בדבר אשר לאט וכסה עמך, שהיא הנפש הרוחניות הלוטה ומכוסה תחת מעטה הגויה והיא לוטה בסוד ד'...

The consolation Gd will provide you for your suffering on the land Gd has cursed, for life in this world which ends and is lost, Gd will console you with that which He has hidden with you, the spiritual soul which is concealed beneath the cloak of the body, concealed in the secret of Gd...

3. Metzudat David to 15:16

האדם הנתעב במעשיו והנבאש במעלליו ומרבה לעשות עול, כדרך השותה את המים אשר ירבה לשותות די ספוקו על כי אין הדרך לתת בעדו מחיר

Man is abhorrent in his deeds and repellent in his sins, and he increases corruption like one who drinks water, who drinks as much as he needs because one does not normally pay for it.

4. Talmud, Yoma 72b

אמר רבא: כל תלמיד חכם שאין תוכו כבדו - אינו תלמיד חכם. אביי ואיתימא רבה בר עולא אמר: נקרא 'נתעב', שנאמר "אף כי נתעב ונאלח איש שתה כמים עולה."

Rava said: A Torah scholar who is not the same inside and out is not a Torah scholar. Abbaye, or Rabbah bar Ulla, said: He is called 'abhorrent', as in, "He is also abhorrent and impure, man, who drinks corruption like water."

15:17-35 The suffering and hopelessness of the wicked

5. Metzudat David to 15:19

החכמים ההם משלו ברוב חכמתם על כל העולם כאלו להם לבדם נתנה הארץ ולא עבר בתוכם לנחול עמהם איש זר אשר איננו מהם, וכאומר הואיל וקבלו הדבר מאבותם ואין דרך האב להשריש דבר כזב בלב הבן, והמקבלים היו חכמים גדולים משכילים לבחון האמת הוא או כזב, ואף עיני כן ראו בחוש, אם כן בודאי אמת נכון הדבר:

Those sages, through their great wisdom, reigned over the entire world as though it had been given only to them, and no stranger who was not of them passed among them, to take a share with them. It is as if to say that since they received this from their ancestors, and a father does not embed a false idea in his son's heart, and those who received the tradition were great, insightful sages who could discern truth from falsehood, and my eyes also saw this, it certainly must be true.

6. Rashi to 15:18-19

"אשר חכמים יגידו" ויתוודו פשעם ולא כחדו עוונם מאבותם, זהו אשר ראיתי, והנני אספר לך. והיכן ראיתי? יהודה הודה ולא בוש במעשה תמר, ראובן הודה ולא בוש במעשה בלהה. ומה היה שכרם? "להם לבדם נתנה הארץ", בשכר זה זכה יהודה למלכות נצח ונטלו שניהם מן הנחלה חלקם ולא גורשו מן נחלתם בעוונם מאחר שהודו. "ולא עבר זר בתוכם" כשבא משה לברכם, שנא' (דברים לג) "יחי ראובן ואל ימות וזאת ליהודה".

"The sages will tell it", admitting their sin and not denying it from their ancestors. This I saw, and I tell you. When did I see it? Yehudah admitted and was not ashamed, regarding Tamar. Reuven admitted and was not ashamed, regarding Bilhah. And what was their reward? "To them alone was the land given," in return Yehudah earned eternal monarchy, and they both received their portion and were not evicted for their sins, because they admitted it. "And no stranger passed among them" when Moshe came to bless them in Deuteronomy 33, "Let Reuven live... This is for Yehudah".

7. Rashi to 15:27

עשה פה על חלצים, שחלבו ועובי שומנו כפול על כסליו, ונראין כמי פה:

It forms a mouth over his thighs, for his fat and the thickness of his fat fold over his loins, appearing like a mouth.

#### 8. Metzudat David to 15:31

התועה ללכת בדרך שוא לא היה מאמין אשר תמורתו תהיה שוא ר"ל שגמולו יהיה כמפעלו

One who wanders, following an empty path, does not believe that his reward will be empty, like his deeds.

#### Do they really believe this?

#### 9. Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, pp. 118-125

Yet if such statements were intended as universal, exceptionless claims, only a deluded fool could believe them, and whatever the friends may be, they are not fools... What is at stake between Job and the friends is making evident the nature of the world, which each attempts to communicate through vivid evocations. This work of disclosure is the work of metaphor, the "seeing as" that produces redescriptions of reality. Thus, the dialogue between the friends and Job becomes a struggle over metaphors and a conflict over stories...

This claim about reality [that justice exists - MT], however unobvious it may appear to modern readers, was one of the most widespread and fundamental beliefs in the ancient Near East, attested to in many literary forms, though given its most articulate expression in wisdom literature. Restated in conceptual terms [as opposed to metaphor or example - MT], this belief is that good and evil have a different relation to reality. The resilient, enduring quality of good derives from its participation in the structures of creation itself, whereas evil, no matter how powerful and vital it appears, is actually fragile and subject to disintegration because it has no root in that order of creation (e.g., Psalm 1)...

One cannot convince another of the truth of this perception by means of argument, for the issue is fundamentally one of perception itself. Rather, as [Raphael] Demos says, one can only "evoke" a world, a vivid pattern of a whole... The persuasive power of an iconic narrative does not derive from a simple empiricism. Although it cannot be wholly disconfirmed by experience and remain plausible, the story remains surprisingly resilient in the face of a mixture of conforming and nonconforming experience...

An example from contemporary American culture may illustrate. Consider popular business literature in which the story is told, over and over, of the individual who turns a creative idea into a flourishing business. This is the iconic narrative of entrepreneurial capitalism. Everyone knows that the large majority of new businesses fail, yet the story does not lose its power... That story is seen as expressing the nature and essence of an entrepreneurial society with all the static cleared away...

An anecdote about the success of the wicked cannot explain the reality of this world of values, which is experienced as such every day. Such things may happen, but they are perceived as anomalies, lacking explanatory power. But the story of the wicked overtaken by calamity, like the story of the restoration of the good person, rings true because it is consonant with the foundational values of the society.

#### 10. A third approach?

The book of Tehillim [Psalms] is neither a work of history nor a collection of prophecies. Rather, Tehillim is an archive of prayers.

Tehillim is King David's monument to Faith, a record of his relationship with his Creator throughout the epic struggles of the most embattled figure in all of Jewish Scripture. From family strife to national upheaval to international conflict, from punishment and rejection and distance from G-d to cycles of sin and repentance and love and longing for the Divine, from public humiliation to the vision of a triumphant Temple built, King David expressed in words the extremes of human emotion he experienced through the numerous religious apices and nadirs of his seventy years of life.

Through that lens, the words, "I have never seen a righteous person abandoned," may be more prayer than assertion. The king who had known dire circumstances—poverty, flight, life as a fugitive before King Shaul in the land of his foes, a son Avshalom who attempted to kill him in pursuit of his throne, another son Adoniyahu who staged a feast while his father lay on his deathbed in an attempt to claim the throne for himself—pledged fealty to G-d, saying, "Despite all of the suffering I have seen and experienced, I have faith that You would never truly abandon the righteous." We invoke this prayer at the close of our Birkat haMazon, as part of our own assertion of faith. "The man who trusts in G-d is blessed, for I believe G-d will not abandon a righteous person, or his descendants. G-d will give strength to His nation, and He will send them shalom." This is King David's prayer, and ours as well.