

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

1. 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?

2. 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.

3. 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.

Introduction to Chapters 16-17

4. Job's response to Eliphaz's first speech (Chapters 6-7)

- I never asked for your help – and the help you provide is not what I need!
- You ridicule my outrage, but Gd has forced me to be outraged
- Gd has smashed me, or allowed me to be smashed
- I have no hope; there is no narrative for a hope-filled future
- I will turn to Gd, but in defiance

5. Outline of Chapters 16-17

- 16:1-5 Rejects their words as foolish, and betraying a lack of comprehension
- 16:6-16 Gd has crushed me, on multiple levels
- 16:17-22 I am innocent, and so I demand justice from Gd
- 17:1-10 Gd has robbed me of support
- 17:11-16 My suffering is great, and I have no hope

16:1-5 Your words are foolish and uncomprehending

6. Metzudat David to 16:2

כולכם מנחמים תנחומי הבל לומר שאחר התשובה ישגה אחריתי - ואם אין בידי עון, מה מקום לתשובה? ומה זה תספר לפני עונש הרשעים, לעורר לבי לתשובה?

All of you provide empty consolation, saying that my end will flourish after repentance – but if I have not sinned, what place is there for repentance? And why do you speak of the punishment of the wicked, to awaken my heart to repentance?

7. Rashi to 16:4

ככם אדברה - ככם אני יודע לקנתר:

"Like you I would speak" – Like you, I know how to attack.

8. Malbim to 16:4

הכי גם אנכי ככם אדברה? בתמיהה. אם היה מקרה כזאת מגיע אליכם ואתם הייתם המנוגעים תחתי ואני הייתי בא לנחם אתכם, וכי הייתי מדבר כמוכם להרשיע אתכם ולהכאיב את לבבכם? לא כן, כי בהפך הייתי עושה, אחבירה עליכם במלים...

"Would I speak like you?" This is an expression of wonder. If such a thing would happen to you, and you were struck instead of me, and I came to comfort you, would I speak like you, indicting you and paining your hearts? No! I would do the opposite. "I would join upon you with words"...

16:6-16 Gd has crushed me, on multiple levels

9. Daat Mikra to 16:9

מחמת הרגשתו שכעסו של אלקים חל עליו, שוב אין הוא יכול לדבר אל אלקים בלשון נוכח, וחוזר ומדבר אליו בלשון נסתר.
Because of his feeling that Gd was angry at him, he could no longer speak to Gd directly, and he reverted to addressing Gd in the third person.

10. Ralbag to 16:7

פעם לנוכח ופעם שלא לנוכח על דרך אומרו משכני אחריך נרוצה הביאני המלך חדריו:

Sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, like, "Draw me; we will run after You. The King has brought me to His chambers." (Song of Songs 1:4)

11. Metzudat David to 16:6

ואם בזה תחשבו להחדיל אמרי במה שתאמרו שאני מיפר היראה אשר היא עוד סבה לבל ילכו היסורים, הנה לא כן הוא כי כמו אם אדברה לא יחשך כאבי, כן לא יחשך אם אחדל מדבר, כי מה מן העון אשר ילך לו על ידי מירוק היסורים, עד שאשוב להיות נקי...

And if with this you think to halt my statements, saying that I eliminate awe and this is another reason why my pains don't leave me, it is not so. Just as speaking does not spare me pain, so ceasing speech will not spare me. What sin will depart via the cleansing afforded by suffering, until I am clean?...