



Friendship During Crisis: Learning from the Book of Job

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Job 2:1-13

(11) When Job's three friends heard about all these calamities that had befallen him, each came from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. (12) When they saw him from a distance, they could not recognize him, and they broke into loud weeping; each one to his robe and threw dust into the air onto his head. (13) They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. None spoke a word to him for they saw how very great was his suffering.

איוב ב': י"א-י"ג

(יא) וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת רֵעֵי אִיּוֹב אֶת כָּל-הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ אֶל־יָפוֹז הַתִּימָנִי וּבִלְדָד הַשׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיִּוָּעְדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לְגוֹד־לּוֹ וּלְנַחֲמוֹ: (יב) וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת-עֵינֵיהֶם מֵרְחוֹק וְלֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכוּ וַיִּקְרְעוּ אִישׁ מְעָלוֹ וַיִּזְרְקוּ עָפָר עַל-רֹאשֵׁיהֶם הַשָּׁמַיְמָה: (יג) וַיִּשְׁבּוּ אִתּוֹ לָאָרֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְשִׁבְעַת לַיְלוֹת וְאִין-דָּבַר אֵלָיו דְּבַר כִּי רָאוּ כִּי-גָדַל הַכָּאֵב מְאֹד:

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Moed Katan 28b

Rabbi Yohanan said: The consolers are not permitted to speak words of consolation until the mourner opens and speaks first. As it is stated: "And they sat down with him upon the ground for seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him; for they saw that his suffering was very great. After this Job opened his mouth" (Job 2:13-3:1). And afterward: "And Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said" (Job 4:1).

מועד קטן כ"ח ב

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: אֵין מְנַחֲמִין רְשָׁאִין לוֹמַר דְּבַר עַד שְׂפִיתַח אָבֵל, וְשָׁנְאֵמַר: "אַחֲרֵי כֵן פִּתַח אִיּוֹב אֶת פִּיהוּ", וְהֵדַר: "וַיַּעַן אֶל־יָפוֹז הַתִּימָנִי".

Job 3:44

(1) Afterward, Job began to speak and cursed the day of his birth. (2) Job spoke up and said:
(3) Perish the day on which I was born,
And the night it was announced,
"A male has been conceived!" (4) May that day be darkness;
May God above have no concern for
May light not shine on it;

איוב ג':א'-ד'

(א) אַחֲרֵי־כֵן פָּתַח אִיּוֹב אֶת־פִּיהוּ
וַיִּקְלַל אֶת־יוֹמוֹ: {פ}
(ב) בַּיַּעַן אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר: (ג) יֵאבֹד יוֹם
אֲנִלֵּד בּוֹ וְהִלִּילָה אֲמַר הָרָה גִבֹּר: (ד)
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הִהוּא יְהִי־חֹשֶׁךְ אֶל־יְדִרְשָׁהוּ
אֱלֹהִים מִמָּעַל וְאֶל־תּוֹפֵעַ עָלָיו נִהְרָה:

Job 3:24-26

(24) My groaning serves as my bread;
My roaring pours forth as water. (25)
For what I feared has overtaken me;
What I dreaded has come upon me.
(26) I had no repose, no quiet, no rest,
And trouble came.

איוב ג':כ"ד-כ"ו

(כד) כִּי־לִפְנֵי לַחְמִי אֲנֹחֲתִי תִבָּא
וַיִּתְּכוּ כַמִּים שֹׁאֲגָתִי: (כה) כִּי פָחַד
פָּחַדְתִּי וַיִּצְתָּנֵנִי וְאֲשֶׁר לִגְרָתִי יָבֵא לִי:
(כו) לֹא שְׁלוֹתַי | וְלֹא שְׁקֵטַתִּי וְלֹא־
נֹחַתִּי וַיָּבֵא רָגֶז: {פ}

Job 4:12

(1) Then Eliphaz the Temanite said in reply:
(2) If one ventures a word with you,
will it be too much?
But who can hold back his words?

איוב ד':א'-ב'

(א) וַיַּעַן אֱלִיפַז הַתִּימָנִי וַיֹּאמֶר: (ב)
הַנֶּסֶף דָּבָר אֲלִיךָ תִּלְאַה וְעֶצֶר בְּמַלְיָן
מִי יוֹכֵל:

Job 5:1-18

(17) See how happy is the man whom
God reproves;
Do not reject the discipline of the
Almighty. (18) He injures, but He binds
up;
He wounds, but His hands heal.

איוב ה':י"ז-י"ח

(יז) הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־י אֲנוּשׁ יוֹכַחְנוּ אֱלֹהִים
וּמוֹסֵר שְׂדֵי אֶל־תְּמָאָס: (יח) כִּי הוּא
יִכְאֵיב וַיַּחַבֵּשׁ מְסַחַץ וַיַּגֵּן תִּרְפִּינָה:

Job 7:1-21

(17) What is man, that You make much of him,
 That You fix Your attention upon him? (18) You inspect him every morning,
 Examine him every minute. (19) Will You not look away from me for a while,
 Let me be, till I swallow my spittle? (20) I have sinned, what have I done to You, Watcher of men?
 Why make of me Your target,
 And a burden to myself? (21) Why do You not pardon my transgression
 And forgive my iniquity?
 For soon I shall lie down in the dust;
 When You seek me, I shall be gone.

איוב ז':י"ז-כ"א

(יז) מַה-אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי תִגְדָּלְנוּ וְכִי-
 תִשִּׁית אֵלָיו לְבָבְךָ: (יח) וְתִפְקֹדְנוּ
 לְבַקְרִים לְרֹגְעִים תִּבְחָנֶנּוּ: (יט)
 בַּמָּה לֹא-תִשְׁעָה מִמֶּנִּי לֹא-תִרְפְּנִי
 עַד-בִּלְעֵי רִקְיִי: (כ) חָטָאתִי מָה
 אֶפְעַל | לָךְ נִצָּר הָאָדָם לְמָה
 שָׂמַתְנִי לְמִפְגַּע לָךְ וְאֶהְיֶה עָלֶי
 לְמִשָּׂא: (כא) וּמָה | לֹא-תִשָּׂא
 פִּשְׁעֵי וְתַעֲבִיר אֶת-עֲוֹנֵי כִי-עֲתָה
 לְעַפָּר אֲשַׁכֵּב וְשִׁחַרְתְּנִי וְאִינְנִי:
 {פ}

Job 17:1-26

(12) They say that night is day,
 That light is here—in the face of darkness.
 (13) If I must look forward to Sheol as my
 home,
 And make my bed in the dark place, (14)
 Say to the Pit, “You are my father,”
 To the maggots, “Mother,” “Sister”— (15)
 Where, then, is my hope?
 Who can see hope for me? (16) Will it
 descend to Sheol?
 Shall we go down together to the dust?

איוב י"ז:י"ב-ט"ז

(יב) לַיְלָה לַיּוֹם יִשְׁימוּ אֹר קְרוֹב
 מִפְּנֵי-חֹשֶׁךְ: (יג) אִם-אֶקְוֶה שְׂאוֹל
 בֵּיתִי בַחֹשֶׁךְ רַפְדֹתִי יִצוּעֵי: (יד)
 לְשַׁחַת קָרַאתִי אָבִי אֶתָּה אִמִּי
 וְאֶחָתִי לְרָמָה: (טו) וְאִיָּה אִפוֹ
 תִקְוֹתִי וְתִקְוֹתַי מִי יִשׁוּרְנֶהּ: (טז)
 בְּנִי שָׂאֵל תִּרְדָּנָה אִם-יֵחַד עַל-עַפָּר
 נַחַת: {פ}

Mary Oliver, Thirst

The Uses Of Sorrow

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.”

Job 19:11

(1) Job said in reply:
 (2) How long will you grieve my spirit,
 And crush me with words? (3) *יא* “Ten
times. Time and again you humiliate
 me,
 And are not ashamed to abuse me. (4)
 indeed I have erred,
 My error remains with me. (5) Though
 you are overbearing toward me,
 Reproaching me with my disgrace, (6) I
 know that God has wronged me;
 He has thrown up siege works around me
 (7) I cry, “Violence!” but am not
 answered;
 I shout, but can get no justice. (8) He has
 barred my way; I cannot pass;
 He has laid darkness upon my path. (9)
 He has stripped me of my glory,
 Removed the crown from my head. (10)
 He tears down every part of me; I perish
 He uproots my hope like a tree. (11) He
 kindles His anger against me;
 He regards me as one of His foes.

איוב י"ט:א'-י"א

(א) ביען איוב ויאמר: (ב) עד-אנה
 תוגיון נפשי ותדכאונני במלים: (ג)
 זה עשׂר פעמים תכלימוני לא-
 תבשו תהפרו-לי: (ד) ואף-אמנם
 שגיתי אתי תלין משוגתי: (ה) אם-
 אמנם עלי תגדילו ותוכיחו עלי
 חרפתי: (ו) דעו-אפו כי-אלוה
 עונתי ומצודו עלי הקיר: (ז) הן
 אצעק חמס ולא אענה אשוע ואין
 משפט: (ח) ארחי גדר ולא אעבור
 ועל נתיבותי חשף ישׂים: (ט)
 כבודי מעלי הפשיט ויסר עטרת
 ראשי: (י) ותצני סביב ואלה ויסע
 כעץ תקותי: (יא) ויחר עלי אפו
 ויחשבני לו כצרי:

Malbim on Job 19:2:1

Job is grievously hurt by his companions' insinuation that under the cloak of his righteousness he is really a very wicked person, his suffering being the proof of this, there being no suffering without sin according to them. Even if he was as wicked ~~as they~~ say, and even if, as they contend, his suffering is from God, its magnitude is out of all proportion to any sin he may have committed.

מלבי"ם על איוב י"ט:ב:א'
עד אנה תוגיון נפשי, מ"ש לו
שנפשו תאבד מארץ החיים,
כי בכל מ"ש בעונש הרשע
כיון על איוב:

Job 26:44

(1) Then Job said in reply:
(2) You would help without having the strength;
You would deliver with arms that have no power. (3) Without having the wisdom, you offer advice
And freely give your counsel. (4) To whom have you addressed words?
Whose breath issued from you?

איוב כ"ו:א'-ד'
(א) ויַעַן אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר: (ב) מָה־
עָזַרְתָּ לְלֹא־כֹחַ הוֹשַׁעְתָּ זְרוּעַ
לֹא־עֹז: (ג) מַה־יַּעֲצָתָּ לְלֹא־
חִכְמָה וְחִשְׁיָה לָרֵב הוֹדַעְתָּ: (ד)
אֶת־מִי הִגַּדְתָּ מִלִּין וְנִשְׁמַת־מִי
יֵצְאָה מִמֶּךָ:

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Jeremiah: Pain and Promise, p. 82

Without complaint there are no prayers of lament. Laments argue, protest, whine, and mewl; they berate God even as the one praying holds fast to God like a lover in a life-altering quarrel. Laments compose a poetic forum in which to express fury at the deep fissures of the world and the ways God fails to care for it. These qualities make laments ready-made prayers for victims of trauma and disaster.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Jeremiah: Pain and Promise, p. 90

Turning to the disappeared God is how to survive disaster.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Lamentations & The Tears of the World, pp. 94-95

“Lamentations Denies Denial”

The biblical book of Lamentations refuses denial, practices truth-telling, and reverses amnesia. It invites readers into pain, chaos, and brutality, both human and divine. It conveys effects of trauma, loss and grief beyond tears. Because God’s voice is absent, it gives primacy to suffering voices like no other biblical book.

Yet even as the voices in Lamentations speak in beautiful, ordered poetry, they assert the impossibility of fully articulating their suffering, for “is there any pain like my pain?” (1:12); it is “great as the sea” (2:13). “Memories of trauma - the loss of a loved one, the experience of betrayal, the violation of basic human rights - become centers of pain that paralyze everything around them” (Schreier 1998; see Lifton). Torture and genocide are beyond speech, as many survivors of the Holocaust rightly insist. But half a century later, literature by and about Holocaust survivors continues to burgeon. Although lamenting the truth in even a partial way can take generations, there is no way forward without bringing suffering to voice.

When we live with a world destroyed, when we find our lives evoked by the world of the speakers, Lamentations becomes a mirror of our sorrow, loss, and doubt. It creates a framework, a larger world to which individual and community suffering can be related. We are no longer alone in our suffering because it is called forth, acknowledged, and named, no matter how indirectly, no matter how veiled by the text’s metaphors and images. Art that leaps across the centuries can mirror our lives, echo our circumstances, and validate our experiences of divine absence. We are not the first to find no God seeing, no God hearing, no comforting presence to uphold us. We are not the first to long for the missing voice or to plead for God’s attention and not receive it.

The voices of Lamentations urge readers to face suffering, to speak of it, to be dangerous proclaimers of the truths that nations, families, and individuals prefer to repress. They invite us to honor the pain muffled in other parts of the world. In this way Lamentations can shelter the tears of the world.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Lamentations & The Tears of the World, p. 96

Lamentations can shred the heart and spawn despair, but, paradoxically, by mirroring pain it can also comfort the afflicted and open the way toward healing. It can affirm the dignity of those who suffer, release their tears, and overcome their experiences of abandonment.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Lamentations & The Tears of the World, pp. 100-102

The witness sees suffering for what it is, without denying it, twisting it into a story of endurance, or giving it a happy ending. The witness has a profound and rare human capacity to give reverent attention to sufferers and reflect their truth back to them. And in the encounter with those who suffer, the witness undergoes conversion from numbed or removed observer to passionate advocate....

The narrator's tears, his bodily turmoil, and his listing of Zion's sorrows, losses, and her shaming abandonment reveal how his encounter with her has shaken him from his marbled numbness. Although he is powerless to act on her behalf, he has enormous power to stand and let her pain address him. He sees that what has befallen her is unspeakable. He sees her truth and this is how he comforts her. In that reverent attention she is no longer alone with her catastrophe. His seeing is the indispensable event that invites her back into human connection....

The witness who receives the pain breaks the isolation and creates a sacred bond with sufferers that at first simply accompanies them, and then this renews their dignity and enables them slowly to regain identity.

The Amen Stone

On my desk there is a stone with the word "Amen" on it,
a triangular fragment of stone from a Jewish graveyard destroyed
many generations ago. The other fragments, hundreds upon hundreds,
were scattered helter-skelter, and a great yearning,
a longing without end, fills them all:
first name in search of family name, date of death seeks
dead man's birthplace, son's name wishes to locate
name of father, date of birth seeks reunion with soul
that wishes to rest in peace. And until they have found
one another, they will not find a perfect rest.
Only this stone lies calmly on my desk and says "Amen."
But now the fragments are gathered up in lovingkindness
by a sad good man. He cleanses them of every blemish,
photographs them one by one, arranges them on the floor
in the great hall, makes each gravestone whole again,
one again: fragment to fragment,
like the resurrection of the dead, a mosaic,
a jigsaw puzzle. Child's play.

יהודה עמיחי, פתוח סגור פתוח

על שלחני יש אבן שכתוב עליה "אמן", שבר אבן
משלש מבית קברות יהודי שנחרב לפני דורות רבים,
שאר השברים, מאות, מאות, נשארו מפזרים בערבוביה.
וכמיהה גדולה וגעגועים שאין להם קץ בכלם:
שם פרטי מחפש את שם המשפחה, תאריך מות
מחפש את שם העיר שבה נולד המת, שם בן
מבקש למצא את שם האב ותאריך לדה רוצה להיות
שוב מחבר לנפש שרוצה להיות צרורה בצרור החיים
ועד שלא ימצאו זה את זה לא ימצאו מנוחה
רק האבן על שלחני שלוח ואומרת אמן
אבל עכשו השברים נאספים על ידי איש טוב ומיטיב,
איש עצוב ואוהב, והוא מנקה אותם מכל רבב
ומצלם אותם אחד, אחד ומסדר אותם על הרצפה

באולם הגדול ומשלים את המצבות והופך אותם
לאחדים, אחדים, שבר קרב אל שבר
כמו בתחית המתים, כמו פסיפס,
כמו פזל, משחק ילדים