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The book of the great ordeal, 1945.

655
THE BOOK OF THE GREAT ORDEAL

First of a series of three
lectures.

WRHS
By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, March 4, 1945

Some people come to religion easily, without much searching and questioning and upheavals of their souls. Their early training, background, and their own temperaments prepare them for a ready acceptance of religious tenets and attitudes.

On the other hand there are other people who arrive at their religious conclusions after much doubt, sometimes as a result of some great searching, personal experience, after profound and troubled reflection.

Both of these types of religious people are acceptable of course in the sight of God - the readily believing and unquestioning man of faith and the one perhaps who must struggle against besetting doubt and scepticism to maintain his faith. Perhaps he who comes by his faith the hard way comes to understand it the profound way.

It is noteworthy that the greatest religious figures of Judaism did not seem to enjoy a placid unruffled religious confidence at all times. They knew their hours of black doubt and confusion when the spiritual foundations of their lives seemed to be shaken. They voiced their doubts and the perturbations of their minds. They questioned and argued with God. Frequently they rebelled against the divine economy and complained bitterly against what they regarded as grave injustice in God's management of His world. Abraham, the first Jew, the Law-giver, Moses, Jeremiah, the greatest of the prophets -- each experienced great spiritual conflict and voiced it.

In the Bible, that amazing record of the total spiritual life of Man, it does not hesitate to record all ~~these~~ this dissidence, this heresy, this scepticism, this irreverent questioning of God's rule, realising now native they are to man, how inevitable they are. And knowing also that Religion has the answer to all of them.

Were man's life always placid and unruffled, then one's faith, one might then assume, should remain constant and unswerving. However we know human life is shot through with so much of turmoil and ferment, so often tangled and embroiled, beset with so much of frustration and want and sickness and pain and one must therefore make allowances for the outbursts, the rebellion, the resentments of the human heart and spirit, and regard them as of the essential warp and woof of human existence. They also belong to the very pattern of religious life. They are not blasphemy, nor irreligion. They are the sad road which many

men traverse and which leads many of them to God.

That is why the Bible welcomed into its spiritual family such a Book as Job.

Job is a drama, a symposium, if you will, a drama based on a great ordeal, the spiritual ordeal of a pious, saintly man who is suddenly overwhelmed by disaster, the loss of his possessions, the death of his children, and he himself becomes afflicted by a foul and fatal disease, the disease of leprosy. And the question which tortures the mind of this good man, which tortures him even more than the physical torment of his body is why? Why has all this befallen him? He has been a God-fearing man all his life. I sought earnestly to do God's will in the world - why has this come upon me? Why has a just God forced all this misfortune upon me? Is This justice? Is there justice in the world?

This is the problem posed by the great drama of Job.

There is yet another problem: posed in the prologue of the drama. The scene takes place in the Court of Heaven where all Heavenly beings are assembled in the presence of God, Satan among them, Satan the foe of man, Satan the supreme cynic and doubter. Satan is among them.

And God says to Satan: "Have you noticed my servant Job, that there is none like him on earth, a man perfect and upright?"

And Satan replied: "Has Job feared God for Nothing?" You have prospered Job. You have given him everything. Why shouldn't he be perfect and upright? Lift thy hand, take away what he has and see what will happen.

God said: "He is in your power."

Satan descends to earth and gets to work on Job. Thieves and marauders suddenly seize his fields and cattle and camels and put his servants to the edge of the sword. A mighty tornado sweeps out from the wilderness and destroys the house where his sons and daughters were assembled and the house falls upon them and they are killed. Everything has been taken away from Job, his possessions, his household, his children.

Does Job, then, change his attitude towards God? No. Job did not change anything unseemingly to God. In spite of everything that happened he does not blame ~~God~~ God.

"Naked did I come from the womb of my mother, naked shall I return. The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away and the name of God be blessed."

Again the scene shifts to the Heavenly Court and all the Heavenly beings again assemble around the throne of God. And God says unto Satan: "Job still holds fast to his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without cause."

And Satan replies: "All that man has will be given for his life! Put forth thy hand and touch his bone and his flesh. He will curse thee to thy face."

God says: "He is in your power. But preserve his life!"

Satan goes forth and smites Job with leprosy from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head so that he had to take a potsherd with which to scrape himself as he sat, an outcast, in the midst of the ash-heap"

Does Job then curse God? His wife said to him: "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and give up your faith. A God who does this to you is not worthy of your worship."

Job replies: "You speak as one of the foolish women might speak. Should we receive the good from God and should we not receive the evil?"

And so the whole problem is posed here. Is there such a thing as disinterested piety? Can a man be God-fearing and do the will of God without expecting reward? The answer is given. There is such a thing as disinterested piety. Definitely there are men who would worship God in spite of suffering, pain and death. And Job was one of them. And there the answer might have rested were it not for the confusion wrought in Job's mind by his three friends who came from a distance having heard of his misfortune to console ~~with~~ him and to comfort him.

And these three friends turn out to be sorry comfort indeed. For when they hear Job bitterly lament his fate, writhing in his agony, and uttering the complaints which sorely tried and suffering men on the rack often do, their orthodox souls are shocked and they chide Job for uttering what they regard as ~~pi~~ blasphemy. They rebuke him for questioning the justice of God. They finally denounce him as a gross sinner, for otherwise God would not have visited on this man all this. Job was a sinner.

These three friends represent the older more conventional theology which maintained

that all human suffering was punishment for sin. This was the only way they could square their belief in a just God, with the existence of evil in the world. God brings evil upon men because they deserve it.

Job who was content to receive the evil at the hands of God, as he had previously received the good, without questioning God's government of His world, was prepared to submit and accept, violently recoils the imputations of his friends. He is prepared to suffer, his incurable disease, but he is not prepared to accept the terrible evils which have befallen him as proof of his guilt or wrong-doing. He is conscious of no sin which he committed that can justify such suffering. He will not justify God by condemning himself! "He will not defend falsehood in behalf of God." He will not defend himself, debase his own moral integrity in order to keep God's record, as it were, straight. He is prepared to bring his case against God to judgment if he is to be accused of having been so wicked as to merit God's chastisement.

So hot and bitter and furious rages this debate between the tormented and afflicted Job, defending his innocence, maintaining that his suffering is undeserved, and his three friends defending the ~~an~~ older conception of the God of absolute ~~and~~ of Retributive Retributive Justice.

There are three rounds of dialogues between Job and his friends. Each of his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, speaks up and Job answers each one in turn. The argument of the friends is variously stated. The arguments summarized are these: God is just. If you are suffering search your own life and see whether you have not deserved punishment at the ~~hand~~ hand of God. No one is perfect. Repent and God will forgive you and ~~heed~~ you. If you see the wicked prosper, do not be misled by it. This prosperity is but for a moment. "They know that a day of darkness is at hand." "The triumph of the wicked is but short."

Again, in spite of the fact that one might be a very righteous man, it is your duty to be humble. "Is it any concern to the Almighty that you are righteous!" or is it any gain to him that you should make your ways perfect?" God does not need you. You need God.

Job protests this doctrine which would add to his extreme physical torment the spiritual torment of self-condemnation. He will not betray his integrity and his moral self-respect.

"Far be it from me that I should justify you;
"Till I die I will not put my integrity from me
"I will hold on to my innocence and will not let it go.
"My conscience does not reproach any of my days."

Again Job declares: If physical suffering is God's punishment for sin, then physical well-being and prosperity must be God's reward for piety. Then why is it that the wicked prosper?

"Why do the wicked live
"Grow old, and amass wealth
"Their children are established along with them.
"Their houses are safe from terror
"And the rod of God is not upon them?
"They sing to the timbrel and the harp
"And make merry to the sound of the flute."

O, you say, his triumph is but for a moment. "God stores up his trouble for his sons." Why does not God requite it unto him himself? If you are right, says Job, then I must conclude that God does not care whether a man is good or wicked. Then black and hopeless despair would envelope me. But Job never doubts God, never loses faith in Him.

"I know that my vindicator lives
And at the last He will appear on earth
"Even after my skin hath been torn from the flesh
"Still will I cherish the hope that I shall see God."

Job intends that God Himself will vindicate him. So while rejecting his friends' theology, Job gropes his way to a theology which reaffirms his faith, retains his own integrity and justifies him to bear his tragic physical misfortune. There is retributive justice in the world, Job comes to understand, but it is not the kind of justice his friends speak about. God does not reward and punish in the physical world, but in the spiritual life of man. Retribution is not a matter of out fortune, but of inner experience.

The good man enjoys the inner satisfaction of inner struggle knowing that he has lived the good life, done the manly and decent things, never cheapened or lowered himself.

His conscience is clear. The wicked man, in spite of his material prosperity has lost out in life. He has missed its greatest spiritual opportunities and satisfactions. His soul is unclean and his conscience forever troubled.

"I, Job am suffering, but "my heart need not blame any of my days." I ~~have~~ have lived a fine and decent life. I can face God unafraid, unashamed. "I will account to Him for every one of my steps like a prince will I approach Him. And God Himself will vindicate me.

And God does vindicate Job. God addresses himself to one of the three friends and says: "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against they two friends, for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath!"

Thus Job is vindicated. But there still remains the larger problem ^{with} which they are also concerned. True, Human suffering is not always punishment for sin. But why is there evil in the world altogether? And why do good men suffer? To what end? What is the law by which God governs this Universe?

Job finds the only answer that man can find. Man's mind cannot reach that ^{and} fact. Man cannot even grasp the nature of the laws which govern the physical world, the laws by which God governs the spiritual world are even more mysterious. Were man God he could understand the ways of God. "But the ~~the~~ Almighty we cannot find." We simply cannot fathom the inscrutable mystery of God. "He is Almighty in power and in justice. He abounds in righteousness, but he gives no accounting."

At best we know

"But the outer edges of His ways

"Only a whisper of Him do we catch.

"But the thunder of His omnipotence, who can perceive?"

There are superb chapters in the Book of Job where the whole majesty ^{and mystery} of creation is unfolded before Job's eyes. God questions him: "Where were you? Can you explain this? Can you understand this? Do you know the mystery of this?"

Job comes to think

The wisest attitude in the face of this eternal and impenetrable mystery is one of acceptance and humility. Man has the right to complain and question when overtaken by suffering. It is not rebellion against God. But the noblest quality in man is still

acceptance and resignation to God's will whose ways are not always known to us.

So Job concludes:

"I know that Thou canst do all things

"That nothing is impossible with Thee...

"Therefore, tho I am wasting away

"I am comforted for my lot of dust and ashes."

Job is reconciled to his tragic fate and remains steadfast and unshaken in his faith. There is disinterested piety. Job is proof of it. God does reward and punish, but not as a man would reward and punish, and all other questions touching God's government lead to the eternal mysteries which man cannot penetrate.

The Rabbis liked the Book of Job a great deal. There are many comments made by great teachers on the Book of Job, many keen and precise observations. The Rabbis said: "Happy is the man who when afflicted does not cavil against God's justice." They said that had he ^{Job}restrained his complaints a little more, when suffering came upon him, he would have merited greatly and in our prayers we would say not only "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," but the "God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job." But Job differs from the patriarchs. When Abraham was sorely tried, Abraham did not complain bitterly. When Isaac was stricken with blindness, he didn't complain with the bitterness of Job, and when Moses who had suffered so many years in the wilderness while leading his people, hoping that he would be able to lead them into the Promised Land, and when he stood on the very threshold of the Promised Land straining his tired eyes to catch a sight of it, and prayed for the privilege of setting foot on the blessed land - when God said unto Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land, Moses did not complain bitterly.

Perhaps Job was not as great a man ^{as}were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.....

This the Book of the Great Ordeal, my friends. Let us reflect upon it. Its ~~disciplines~~ experiences are very near to the hearts of men and women today.

1/ Some come to Rel. ^{easily} without much searching, questioning + upheavals, the soul. Their early training background, and then our temperament prepare them for the acceptance of the R. tenets and attitudes. Others arrive at their R. conclusions only after much doubting + debating, and as a result, ~~great~~ ^{great} personal experiences or profound and troubled reflection.

Both are acceptable in the sight of God. - the ~~simple~~ ^{readily} believing, unquestioning man, faith - and he who must ~~struggle~~ ^{struggle} against battling doubt + softness, to maintain his faith. Perhaps he who comes by his faith the hard way - come to understand it the profound way.

2/ It is noteworthy that the greatest of Jews, the Bible - did not enjoy a placid, untroubled rel. confidence at all times. They knew their houses of black doubt ^{and} confusion, when the ~~ph.~~ ^{ph.} ~~predecessors~~ ^{predecessors}, their lives seemed to be shaken. They voiced their doubts and the perturbations of their minds. They questioned and argued with God. Frequently, they rebelled against the divine economy and complained bitterly ag. what they regarded as pain inflicted by the God's management of the world. Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah - prophets experienced & voiced sincere, ~~the~~ ^{the} conflict.

And the Bible that amazing record, the total of life of man - does not hesitate to record all these discontents, this ~~harry~~ ^{harry}, this softness, this inherent questioning, God's rule - ~~making~~ ^{making} how volatile they are to man - how ~~unavoidable~~ ^{unavoidable} - and being also that Rel. has the answer to them all.

3/ Were man's life always placid + untroubled - then our faith, our ~~unfettered~~ ^{unfettered} ~~than~~ ^{than} ~~assumes~~ ^{assumes}, should remain constant, ^{unmoving}. But

human life is shot thru with so much, turmoil & ferment,
 so often tangled and embroiled, beset with so much of frustration
 + ~~want~~ + ~~need~~ + pain, - that one must therefore make allowance
 for the instincts the whirls, the resentments, the human heart
 + spirits - and regard them as the essential crisis &
work of human existence. They ^{also} belong to the very pattern of the
real life. They are not flourishes, nor irregularities - They are
 the end road which many men traverse - and which lead
many to God.

4/ That is why the Bible welcomed such a Book as Job
 into its family. (It is a drama) based on the spirit
order - the ideal of a pious, sanctified man who is roughed
over whenever by disaster, the loss of his possessions, the
death of his children, and the loss of his body & is brother
by the poor, & fatal disasters of life. And the question
which torments the mind, the good man - with a tor-
ture even greater than his physical suffering - (is why)
Why has all this befallen me? I have done nothing
a good thing any day. I have sought earnestly to do a good
and upright life. Why has all this come upon me? Why has
a just and righteous God visited all this unmerited mis-
fortune upon my head? Is this further? Is this not
really retribution further in the world?

This is the problem posed by the drama Job.
 There is yet another: posed in the prologue of the drama.
 The same takes place in Heaven - However being omitted!

as the presence, the Lord - Satan among them -

God: 'Have you not heard my servant Job - that there is none like him on earth, a man perfect + upright -

Satan: 'Has Job feared God for Nothing?' - Prospered - Put faith - they have + take away whatever he had.

Job: 'He is in your power' -

Satan - Gets to work - Thieves + murderers - seize his flocks + cattle - put his servants to the edge, the sword - Forcibly leave his home - A night wind smite four corners of the house where his sons + daughters were resting - Fell upon them - dead - Job did not change anything necessarily to God his son -

2nd Scene - Again assembled - Satan.

God - Job ^{Satan} holds fast to his integrity! the you incited me against him - to ruin him without cause!

Satan - 'All that a man has will he give for his life! Put forth thy hand and touch his bone + his flesh - He will curse thee to thy face!

God - 'He is in your power! But forbear his life! - Smite Job with boiling from so, his foot & the crown of his head - took a potsherd with which to scrape himself as he sat, an outcast, in the midst of the ash-heaps!

Does Job curse God?
His wife - 'Do you still hold fast to your ^{integrity} ~~faith~~? Curs God and die!

Job - 'You speak as one, the foolish women might speak

"Should we receive the good from God
"And should we not receive evil?"

(4)

The problem is posed here - Is there such a thing as dis-
interested piety? Can a man be God-fearing & do the will
of God - without expecting reward? The answer is given -
Definitely there are such men! Job was one of them! -
And then the answer might have rested there it was for
the confusion wrought on Job's mind by his 3 friends
who came from a distance, having heard of his misfortune, he
could not turn & comfort him.

They turn out to be "sorry comforters". For when they
hear Job bitterly lament his fate - writing in his agony,
~~and~~ uttering the ~~inextinguishable~~ complaints which only
fired & suffering men on the rock ~~can utter~~ do - they other-
wise are shocked. They chide him for uttering blasphemies!
They rebuke him for persisting the further from. They finally
denounce him as a gross & palpable sinner - for otherwise
God would not have laid down such terrible punishment
upon him.

These 3 friends represent the ~~old~~ ^{conventional} theology which
maintained that all human suffering was punishment
for sin. This was the only way they could square their
belief in a just God - with the existence of evil in the
world! God brings evil upon men because they deserve it!

Job who was content to receive the evil as the
honest of God - as to had passively received the good -
without questioning God's government of this world -
proposed to submit and accept - violently react

"They know that a day of darkness is at hand!"

"Calamity is ready at his side"

"The triumph, the wicked is but short"

④ Again - a man should ~~not~~ be humble. "Is it any concern to the Almighty that you are righteous?" or is it any gain to him that you should make your ways perfect?" He does not need you, you need him -

6). Joh protests this doctrine which would add to his extreme physical torment, the sp. torment of self condemnation. He will not betray his integrity this moral self respect

"Far be it from me that I should justify you;

"Till I die I will not put my integrity from me

"I will hold on to my innocence and will not let it go.

"My conscience does not reproach any of my days"

⑤ Again - If physical suffering ^{fully} is punishment for sin - then physical well-being & prosperity must be God's reward for piety. Then why is it that the wicked prosper.

"Why do the wicked live,

"Grow old, and amass wealth -

"Their children are established along with them..

"Their houses are safe from terror

"And the rod of God is not upon them?"

"They sing to the tambour and the harp

"And make merry to the sound of the flute"

O, you say, his triumph is but for a moment -
"Job stores up his strength for his eyes?"
Why does not God requite ~~him~~ it unto him himself!
= If you are right - then I must ~~say~~ ^{conclude} - that
God does not care - whether a man is good or wicked.
And black, hopeless despair would envelope ~~him~~ me.
= "But I know that my Vindicator lives!
And at the last He will ~~redeem~~ appear on earth
Even after my skin hath been torn from the flesh
Still will I cherish the hope that I shall see God"

7) Regarding his friends' theology - Job poses his way to a theology
which reaffirms his faith, ~~and~~ retains his own integrity, and
fortifies him to bear ~~the~~ his tragic physical misfortune.
There is retributive justice - but not in his friends' concepts
of it - God does reward and punish, but on the spiritual
not the material life / man.

"Retribution is not a matter of 'outer fortunes' but
of inner experience."
The good man enjoys the inner satisfaction, ^{inner strength} of knowing that
he has lived the good life, done the manly and decent things,
never cheated or lowered himself. His conscience is clear -
The wicked man, in spite of his material prosperity,
has lost out in life. He has missed its greatest of
satisfaction & satisfaction. His soul is uneasy and
his conscience never settled -

I, Job, am suffering but "My heart need not blame any
of my days".

~~God Himself will vindicate him.~~

I can go forth, unafraid and unashamed!

"I will account to Him for every one of my steps
like a prince will I approach Him".

And God Himself will vindicate me.

8) And God does vindicate Job - in the drama!

God - ~~after appearing to Job in the storm~~ addressing
Himself to Job 38 - Eliphaz - "My wrath is kindled
against thee, and against thy 2 friends, for ye have
not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my
servant Job hath."

9) Then Job is vindicated!

But there still remains the larger problem -

True, Human suffering is not ^{always} punishment for sin.

But why is there evil in the world altogether? And

Why do good men suffer? To what end? What
is the law by which God governs this Universe.

To this Job finds no answer! Man's mind
cannot reach that source. Man cannot even

grasp the nature of the laws which govern the
physical world - The laws by which God governs the
spiritual world are even more mysterious.

Wen man frd - he could understand the way of frd - (9)
"The Almighty we cannot find" 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

He is Almighty in power and in justice

He abounds in righteousness, but, he gives us condemnation

at best we know

"But the outer edges of His ways,

"Only a whisper of Him do we catch

But the thunder of His omnipotence, who can perceive?

10) The wisest attitude in the face of this eternal and
unfathomable mystery is one of acceptance + humility.

Man has the right to complain ^{question} ~~and~~, who rejoices

by suffering. It is not rebellion against God, ^{acceptance}

But the noblest quality in man is still respect
to God's will, when ways are not always known to us.

11) And so Job:—

"I know that thou canst do all things

that nothing is impossible with thee ...

therefore, thou I am wasting away

I am comforted for my lot of dust and ashes"

12) Job is rewarded to his tragic fate.

He remains steadfast + unshaken in his faith.

There is disinterested piety in the world.

God's does reward and punish - but in man's inner
life - All other qualities touching God's service and faith

13/ "Happy is the man, say the Rabbis, who, when afflicted (10)
does not curse against his juster!"

If Job had restrained his Wrath when suffering came
upon him, he would have merited greatly. Just
as we say - God of Abraham etc.

I tested Abraham - "Thy children will be strangers
in a land that is not theirs". He did not curse!

Noah - Abundances -

~~Job~~
Thurs -

promised land -

