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Job's Dilemma, 1958.

JOB'S DILEMMA

Is the Right Worth the Doing?

THE PEOPLE

November 16, 1958

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

I had occasion last week to visit New York City. I brought with me on the trip a volume of the Book of Job to refresh myself in its pages in preparation for this morning. On the desk in the hotel room I found a copy of the small monthly magazine Guidposts, and this coincidence suggested some of the thoughts which I should like to share with you this morning. Guidposts is a well conceived religious magazine published by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Dr. Peale is Pastor of the Marblegate Collegiate Church in New York City. He is an orator of acclaim, and he is certainly the most popular of all of the current churchmen authors. His book, The Power of Positive Thinking, has sold over one million copies since it was published some five years ago. Dr. Peale preaches an earthy and an optimistic gospel. It might be symbolized by his oft-repeated motto, "Faith power can work miracles". Dr. Peale feels that faith and prayer are an especially health-giving antidote for the poisons of frustration and depression and loneliness which enter into and wreak such havoc with the human soul. Dr. Peale makes much of the emotional disturbance, and the spiritual malaise of our age. He points to the alarming rate at which mental breakdown is on the increase. He underscores the excessive use of tranquillizers by our people. He says that a people who live amidst as much plenty as we do ought to be developing a literature of enthusiasm, of happiness.

But turn, he says, to our stage and to the popular novel, and you will find that it chronicles a society deeply disturbed and distracted. As a remedy, he proposes the medicine of faith, for he says that faith renews a man's confidence. Faith refreshes a man and prepares him anew for life's struggles. Faith releases in man many of his latent capacities and prepares him for achievement in life.

The magazine Guideposts is a magazine of testimony. It contains the spiritual biographies of men and women who have accepted Dr. Peale's medicine and who have found that in faith and in prayer their lives have developed a new dimension. Through faith and prayer they have become happier and more successful men and women. In the issue of Guideposts through which I browsed there was the chronicle of a shy, diffident woman who through faith found a means of projecting her personality and of winning for herself the social approval of her friends. There was a story of a football team who through prayer - group prayer - found the way to victory, and also to a deeper meaning of the group spirit and of the meaning of sportsmanship. Finally, there was the biography of a business man who had been hobbled by feelings of inadequacy, and who found that prayer and faith gave him a new confidence and permitted him to succeed in business and hence to support his family and his wife in a way which previously he had been unable to achieve.

Now I have no quarrel with Dr. Peale's enthusiasm for faith. I too believe that our age badly needs spiritual values and spiritual ideals. I too agree with Dr. Peale that faith can work wonders with our inner lives. It can help us to find a much needed sense of perspective amidst the thousand forces and obstacles which impinge upon our daily life. Faith can give us that much needed sense of purpose which gives meaning and color to our lives. But somehow I feel that Dr. Peale's enthusiasm for faith knows no limits, no bounds. He speaks in one breath of faith as spirit medicine and of the rewards which faith brings in the physical world, the tangible rewards which faith brings to man.

Consider his formula - and I quote - "Hard work, positive thinking, right living, the proper treatment of other human beings and the proper kind of prayer always get results." And if you take the results which he considers from the testimony of his magazine Guideposts, then these are results of a very tangible nature. A Woman who achieves social acceptance. A football team which achieves a skein of victories. A business man who achieves success in his chosen enterprise. I simply cannot accept such an optimistic view of the results of faith. I do not feel that it conforms with the reality of the world as it exists.

I said that I had brought with me to New York the Book of Job. And as I browsed through the biographies and the testimonies of the Guideposts magazine I thought often of the testimony of the Book of Job. Job was a man of deep and solid faith. Job was a good man. God himself says of Job that there was none like him in the earth as righteous, a man who feared God and shunned the evil. Job was a man who worked diligently. Job was a man who thought positively. Job was a man who prayed with his whole heart. And as a result, in a single day bandits made off with Job's cattle, lightning ignited a fire which destroyed Job's barn and his sheep, and killed his servants, Chaldean robbers attacked his caravans and pillaged and decimated them, and a howling tornado leveled the house in which his children were meeting and brought them to an untimely death. And when Job persisted in his faith, and when Job continued to live by the standards of righteousness and justice, when Job refused to blaspheme God or to revert to some less noble standard of action, Job himself was afflicted with disease. The racking pain of a dreaded skin ailment coursed through his body and no longer allowed him a moment of respite or relief. This was the reward which Job received for hard work and for positive thinking, and for right living.

Now of course Job is a book of fiction. There is no earthly counterpart to anguish to which Job had to submit as there is no earthly cause for the troubles which Job underwent. God and a "doubting Thomas" angel were arguing in Heaven concerning the nature of man. God had a high opinion of us. He felt that we were capable of noble acts, of acts of disinterested service. No so the doubting angel. He felt that no man acted but out of self-interest. When man did that which seemed proper and right he did so only to win the approval of his society because he felt that he would gain more by it. God did not argue theory with this angel, instead he offered him a living example, the paragon of nobility in his age - Job. Look at my servant Job. Is he not a man of fully noble spirit? Is he not a man of courage, of uprightness, of deep faith. Surely the example of such a man will, O Angel, demand of you a more hopeful evaluation and estimate of human nature. But the angel scoffed. The angel chided God: How is Job in any way a proof of your contention? Have you not built a hedge around Job? Has he not been blessed with position, with wealth, with fame, with family, with love? Has his courage and his faith ever been tried? Has his character ever been put to the test? So Job is put to the test. Job is made to suffer all these many anguishes in order to vindicate God's judgment of men.

His troubles are literary fiction. But as is so often the case in great literary works, there is a good deal of real truth implied in this fiction. For the Book of Job teaches us that God has never promised many any "quid pro quo" for good conduct. Life is not a school room in which at the end of the term the good scholar and the diligent student is rewarded with praises and with prizes. God has never signed with any of us a promissory note guaranteeing the bearer his heart's desire in return for rectitude and probity and allegiance. We might wish it were so, but the world is not of our making.

The Book of Job underscores the inscrutability of life. Life is not a predetermined movement from birth to grave through comfortable and predictable stages. The road of life is filled with sudden detours. It runs over rough terrain and is beset with obstacles, with by-paths, and with detours. There is a tragic element to life which from time to time intrudes upon the happy routine of our existence. For what is tragedy but the unexpected intrusion of unhappiness and of sorrow and of loss and of grief upon the normal day to day activity of man? Look closely even at this comfortable, antiseptic world in which we live and you will see that there is hardly a home and hardly a family which does not bear the scars of the tragic element of life. Here a young mother nurses a child who will never walk. Here a young widow draws close about her the mantle of memory, walking lonesomely through life warmed only by the dim fire of love. Here a father carries on bravely though his son left his house full of youth and strength and will never there return. I need not recite to you examples of this sad litany of tragedy. I wish only to underscore, as Job sought to underscore, that all life has this tragic element. We ought not to look at life only through rose-colored glasses and to presume that each day will be a happier occasion, a more joyful opportunity than the last. It will simply not be so. When we least expect it, when we are least prepared, tragedy walks in the door.

Hard work, my friends, hard work and right living and positive thinking always bring results except when death intrudes itself between the promise and the fulfilment.

Hard work, positive thinking, proper prayer, always bring results except that when someone better placed, abler than we, seeks the same goal/we covet.

What I am saying, and what Job was saying, is simply this: that though the cut and style of the garment of faith that we draw around us when the sun of

will be replaced by the brutal snows of winter. "The Lord has given. The Lord good fortune shines may not matter, it matters greatly the cut and style of the garment of faith which we draw around us when the first ill winds of misfortune

blow and howl about us. The fragile summer garments, the garments of the man who expects God to reward him for his good conduct, will be plucked off his back by the first blast of the howling winter winds of pain and loss. At the very moment when for achieving for ourselves success or fame or fortune - that often in life the man most needs the serene comfort of faith, his mind will be filled with doubt.

Instead of finding comfort, his soul will find only bitterness. For God will have let this man down. God will have gone back on His promise. Where there

ought to be consolation and encouragement and renewed strength there will be only a vain flaying of the fists against an unheeding Heaven, only the bitterness of frustration. For God will not have lived up to a promise which He never made, and the faith of such a man will not be equal to the demands which tragedy places upon it.

When we are faced with death, when we are faced with bitter illness, when we are faced with any of the tragic elements in life, whatever faith we claim is sorely tried. Only if we have long since been prepared to view our faith honestly, only if we have achieved a true perspective on our faith has our faith any hope of surviving the challenge of such an hour. Job had such a faith. Long before the day of his anguish, Job knew that if God's blessing shone upon him it was not because of his sterling character. He understood that if fortune turned against him it was not because of any lack on his part. When Job's wife, overwhelmed with her grief, distraught, unnerved, turns to Job and cries out to him, "Curse God and die!" What does Job answer? "Thou speakest as one of the impious women. What, shall we not receive good at the hand of God and shall we not expect also to receive evil?" Job had long since understood that there must be in life a twilight as well as the dawning, that the summer sun of good fortune will be

will be replaced by the brutal snows of winter. "The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

The Book of Job, then, teaches us many things. It teaches us that we ought not to see life only in its hopeful colors. We must see life in all of its parts. It teaches us that we ought not to look on good conduct as a means for achieving for ourselves success or fame or fortune - that often in life the good man must suffer and the wicked man seems to prosper. Is there then no reward for good living, for good conduct, for faith in God?

Paradoxically Job, who most denies this thesis, most affirms it. When Job was overwhelmed with his grief, three of his familiar friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, came to console him. For the seven days of mourning they sat beside him in silent companionship, extending the unspoken word of sympathy which means so much in the hour of loss. And when the seven days of mourning were over these three good friends of Job tried to console him, to comfort him by explaining the meaning of his suffering and by encouraging him to feel that his suffering would be only for the hour, that in time God his redeemer would come. These men, in brilliant poetic dialogue, examined the whole philosophy of human suffering, and they tried to emphasize to Job that no man is perfect, and that God sometimes punishes even the good man, in order to give that man pause, to make him remember that there is always room for improvement, that when you look along the skein of history the high living of the wicked is only the preamble to their fall and the defeat of the good is but the preamble to their triumph. Job, strangely, would have none of this comfort. Even though these men promised him the ultimate redemption of God, Job denies consistently in the dialogue their essential thesis. He refuses to admit that his fate was in any way dependent upon his action. He denies that the vast overarching anguish to which he had to submit is in any way

commensurate with weakness or wickedness on his part. Job simply refuses to admit that there is any visible balance in life between perfidy and punishment, between service of God and success in living. This Job will not admit. What then? Does this mean that it is a foolish virtue to continue to struggle to do the right? Might not the cheating way be better than the honest way? Might not the self-interested way be better than the selfless way? For if God is unheeding, and if there is no reward in life for our good deeds, why then should we penalize ourselves through charity, through graciousness, through gentleness, when we might be feathering our own nests, without thought to any need but our own? Job refuses to admit this philosophy which many of the "hero-philosophers" of mankind have espoused. Job prefers to think that the right is worth the doing simply because it is the right. Job prefers to remind us that the reward of the good deed is the good deed itself. We must not look in the physical world about us, in the world of things, for the reward of man. To find that reward we must look in the inner world, the world of emotions, of conscience and of character. If we look into this world we will see and we will understand the rewards of goodness. The reward of the good deed, Job says, is the assurance that we have conducted our lives as worthwhile sons of God. The reward of the good deed is the peace of mind that we achieve when we are conscious that we have lived by manly, decent standards; that we have acted with kindness and with gentleness towards our neighbors, and that we have in all ways comported ourselves as divinely configured human beings. The reward of the good deed is the inner peace, the inner self-assurance which we develop when we are conscious of having done the noble deed. In short, the reward of the good deed is our own sense of personal worthwhileness. Job says as much:

"I will hold fast to my innocence; I will not deny it.
My conscience has no regrets all of my life."

And when our conscience has no regrets, when we have assured ourselves (and we are the hardest judges of this) when we have assured ourselves that our lives have

been noble lives, worthwhile lives, that we have done all that it was in our power to do for others, for our God, then it matters little whether we live amidst the richness of the earth or in simpler surroundings. It matters little whether we enjoy the fullness of health or must struggle against the debility of illness, for we will have found the secret of true happiness, a sense of inner peace which will be ours whatever our fortune. It will accompany us in good times, it will shield us in bad times, it will be ours always.

This, then, is the burden of Job. He teaches us to look with candor and with honesty at life. He teaches us not to expect life to be a continuing round of pleasure and of joy, but to remember that "man who is born of woman is few of days and full of troubles. He blooms as the flower, and he withers. He flees as the shadow, and continues not." Job asks us to build our faith on an honest estimation of the reality of our world. Job reminds us not to expect God to return us any dividend for right living or for faith. That dividend will be ours, but it is of the spirit, not of the world. It will be ours because we will have held fast to our innocence, because our conscience will not reproach us all of our days.

Amen.

Just now I visited NYC. I had with me a volume of the Book of Job
to refresh myself in its pages in preparation for this morning. My thoughts
were full of the many problems raised by the book. Then on the desk in the
hotel room I found a copy of the magazine Understand. This coincidence
led me to many of the thoughts I should like to share with you this
morning.

Many among you have undoubtedly seen issues of Understand. It is
a small monthly ^{published} distributed by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and
distributed throughout the country. Dr. Peale is Pastor
of the Marble Collegiate Church in N.Y.C. He is an acclaimed speaker
and certainly the most popular of all modern American authors.
His The Power of Positive Thinking has sold over 1 million copies since
its publication 5 years ago.

Dr. Peale preaches an earthly and optimistic gospel. It can
be summarized by his motto "Faith Power Can Work Wonders".

Dr. Peale encourages the use of prayer and faith as a spiritual
antidote to the poisons of despair and loneliness and frustration. He
understands the emptiness of our age. The need of mental adjustment.
The need of peace and tranquility and resolution. The need of
cure of large scale ^{disorder} ~~disorder~~ in the midst of a civilization of
good things. For these ^{symptoms} ~~reasons~~ Dr. Peale prescribes faith therapy.
A positive faith, he teaches, removes a man's conflicts, builds a
man's courage, arranges a man's cure. Such a faith is the secret
to successful living. Understand is a magazine of testimony. It
reports the biographies of men & women who have found their
lives transformed through the miracle of faith. In the series which
I knowed were men the channels of a sound ^{who found faith & in so doing} ~~miraculous~~ transformed
themselves into the state of ^{self-confidence} ~~faith~~ of a football team which by praying before each
game found not only victory but a true spirit of sportsmanship and
teamwork held by feelings of unifying men ~~men~~ ^{self-confidence}
through faith and in so doing achieved financial security for his
family.

I have no quarrel with Dr. Paul's enthusiasm for faith. I too feel that our age has too little sense of purpose and of allegiance to values beyond the self. I know that often there is an acceptance of good values under a minor confidence, enlightens us with a true perspective on our problems, and infuses into our lives a much needed sense of purpose.

But Dr. Paul's enthusiasm seems to know no bounds. He speaks in one breath of the importance of faith for our inner life and ^{of the} ~~the~~ importance of faith for our public life. There seems to be little that faith can not do - from counseling the manner to counseling the businessman. To the Dr. Paul's own formula "Hard work, positive thinking, fair dealing, the right treatment of people and the proper kind of praying always get results." His unbridled attachment to results from life - no real investment, a dominant motive, ^{financial} ~~business~~ success.

I can not take such an optimistic view of life.

Hard work, positive faith, fair dealing always get results or contribute to results - but only if the person is sincere, honest, and fulfills his promises & fulfillments.

Hard work, positive faith, fair dealing always get results except when someone else and more influential and more powerful stand in the way.

Hard work, positive faith, fair dealing always get results except when a conspiracy demands results on body and address the mind.

As a result the enthusiasm of the unbridled, thought of the Book of Job that I had brought with me. What result did I find? Job was a positive faith and fair dealing a demand for job? Job was a man of deep and solid faith. He himself considered "Good and honest" is none else job is to have an unshakable faith and an upright". Job

was a man who revered God & shunned the evil. Job suffered
indistinctly, he thought affirmatively. He doubted Jesus. He trusted others
always, much, surely & never. His prayer was of the heart — and
as a result on a single day robbers came & carried off his cattle, burning
tens of thousands of sheep which destroyed his flocks & killed his servants,
children & maidens pillaged his camels, and carrying towards scattered
the house in which his children had met and brought them all to
an untimely death. And when even these appalling tragedies failed to
break Job's faith or prevent Job's song — when he continued to love
particularly and pray in honest sincerity until even his reward —
only this — deliverance and pain — a life without peace or a moment of
comfort.

Now Job, of course, is a model of fiction. Job's ordeal has no earthly
counterpart so it had no earthly cause. The characters are familiar.
Job and a doubting Thomas angel argue in heaven about mankind.
The doubting angel insists that we are wholly selfish creatures — when
we do the proper thing — when we are gentle or generous or great hearted
it is only out of self interest — because we think we will thereby ^{be} ~~become~~
the generous. Man never is the right simply because it is the right. God
will not accept the low estimate of human nature. He does not
argue with the angel but offers him ^{a proof} ~~proof~~ from life. Look at Job,
he thinks, and you will see a truly ^{un}selfish man. The
doubting scoff. It is not Job but blessed above all men, that has
wealth, position, family, how can you say that he but ~~nothing~~ has ever
been put to the test.

Job is made to suffer to illustrate God's ^{high} estimation of man's character.
Yet though the book is a literary forgery — like so much of the literature
it endures as a very real truth. Man must not expect material
prosperity — success — fame — fortune as a just proportion for good
conduct. Life is not like the public — where where at the end of
each term prizes and prizes are awarded on the good student.
God has never signed a promise of not punishing the wicked.
To his hearts desire is return for unrighteousness and all else.

We might need it otherwise - but the ordering of the world is not of our making - and it is simply not so.

Job's afflictions remind us that we must always be prepared for the unexpected reversal in life. Tragedy comes without warning - for which society is hardly but the ready picked witness of the sudden shifts of fortune & pain upon the young men of youth & the summer season of strength. Life does not move but every comfortable and predictable steps from birth to the grave. The path of life is full of sudden detours and unexpected obstacles. How knowingly at the life ahead you and you will recognize the intensity of tragedy. Here a young mother nurses a child who will never walk. Here a young mother ^{unwilling} ~~unwilling~~ of loneliness increased by the pale light of few memories. Here a father consoles his grief for a son who left the house full of youth and even returned to his home broken and unrecognizable. ~~Job's story is told in the Bible~~ for himself chosen this thought as unforgettable tragedy.

When God is man of iron

As of few days and full of trouble

He looks like a flower - then he withers

His flesh like wax. He continues not.

As long as good fortune shines upon us, I suppose it matters not what the God & style of the ^{government} of fate which we live around us. But a faith that is self-defending is false. A faith which underplays or denies life's tragic face is a vision of fragile insubstantial clothes - cloth which will not ^{protect} ~~protect~~ us against the biting winds of misfortune and suffering. The first ~~step~~ ^{step} ~~step~~ ^{step} is one of self-protection. The man who looks to God for reward, comfort against God in the hour of need - for to his tortured mind God has rejected him. God has reneged on his pledge, at the very moment when the sustaining serenity of faith is most needed - a faith based on the expectation of reward - desert - we are reduced to despair - to the painful play of our faith against the heavens

Job teaches us that we can find ourselves for loss in this faith - only if we have not accepted God ^{because of false} ~~because of~~ ^{expectation} ~~expectation~~. Job's faith was unprepared because Job saw God without change

ground. He did not look on his blessings as a result of his steady
qualities. He did not view his afflictions as the product of his failure.
We see the clarity when his wife - over one with grief - that is somewhat
unhindered by the swiftness of tragedy the despair and could her husband
to "Cure himself" - Job's answer: "Minister all that I have seen say
"Then I perceived as one of the despised women. What, shall we expect
good at the hands of God and hearken not to his voice?" Long before
his trial Job had learnt to love at life clearly - Wisdom had taught her
to expect the trials as well as the dawn - the passing away of
death as well as the evening rays of the summer sun. "The Lord
has given, the Lord has taken away blessed be the name of the Lord"

Now should we feel that Job's resolution is ~~unrealistic~~ ^{understandably} ~~unrealistic~~ ^{he}
Job knew & expresses his full measure of grief. But ^{understandably} ~~he~~
towards his fate, even for a moment death seem preferable to life.

Let the day perish wherein I was born
and the night wherein it said - a man shall it brought forth
let laborer - the - holder of death claim it as due
Why did I not die in the womb?
Why did I not perish at birth
Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery
Wherefore is life given to the bitterest need
Before men long for death but it comes not.

Suffering long in patience we recognize Job's plight - not to ^{need} ~~need~~
expression of our burden should be unrelenting - But the words
being been cried out - Job's full recovery - he regains his balance.
"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the end he will appear"

Though sorely tried, Job understands that the world, though cruel and
soonest can carry on. Tragedy always has faith - only the strongest
faith can survive.

Job knows we are help in all its parts
Job reminds us need a trial & strong faith to carry on, successfully
despite life's burden

Job repels a further horn of the horn of grief - yet Job stands

no, particularly, that just as round.

When Job was afflicted ^{and} three of his ^{old} friends turned their backs upon him, to his side - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Massadite. They came to counsel Job. For the 7 days of mourning they sat comfortless - saying nothing to him. Then when the mourning period is over they try to explain to Job why he has been tried and why send an agonizing job has been his. I suppose it is David who here to comfort him - to encourage him to believe that soon his trials would be over and he would recover his happiness again. A new series of mild but poetic dialogue ends of these men offer his explanation of human suffering. They tell Job that no man is perfect. That God afflict even good men in order to give them pause and to remind them that there is always room for improvement. They comfort Job with the thought that in the end the good man will be rewarded of his plight.

But job must have none of this comforting
He must not admit that he is in any way responsible for his fate. —
Instead he desperately denies that his tragedy is in any
way commensurate with his sufferings & his pain. To
job his plight is & remains simple evil.

Counting his French job as no balance on life between success
and success and between punishment and punishment, he rejected every
one of his companions' explanations. Why to only do good men suffer
while bad men sometimes prosper. Why a year, let alone
prosperity is momentary - a minute's light being before a
fall. Job replied ^{yes} this to his view of reward & retribution as
apparently untrue.

Wydziełano z nich

grow old - and much

There is one established along with them

These houses are 100 ft from ~~each~~

These houses are safe from ~~the~~
and the road of land is not ~~repeated~~ ?

had the idea and still currently popular - then that the volume of
good's justice is made right in the next world, job would have
rejected even this. For job there is no correlation between hard
work, prayer, and productive thinking and one's job & destiny.

Job denies all such claims because they do not conform with
reality. As it then remains, whether man is bound or free -
whether he is fortifying or denouncing? Of course is no correlation
between hard work and right living and one's destiny - it might well
seem that rectitude and piety and positive virtue -

Despite his demand of all material rewards, job surprisingly feels
that right is made as doing. Right living, says would but there
would be no interchange - they do not make themselves seen & are
physical world - one result can not be measured by the budget
quantities of success.

The reward of right doing is the peace which we feel within when we
have done the right deed.

The reward of right living is the satisfaction we feel when we
have brought happiness to others.

The reward of right living is the peace of mind we achieve when
we have done all that is proper & right &
leaved up to our best impulses.

The reward of right living is the confidence of our own worthiness

Job's joy is much and the thought brought him over as his
triumphant satisfaction

"I will hold on to my innocence & will not let it go.
My conscience does not reproach me any of my days."

To live however well as my love - is to love unconditionally
To live working however poor as my love to live is to love
happily with satisfaction -

The reward of the good deed is the deed itself.

There is the burden of grief to be borne for one's life. As I look back to
true happiness - a happiness which can be ours in spite of our
griefs - I see men built by high principles and composed themselves
even as dignified and gentle men. If we can achieve such a life
even if the most outrageous misfortune will befall us and never
overwhelm us - we shall find a peace and a dignity - a way
through life both meaningful and satisfying.

