

DID JOB OR G-D REPENT?

AN OUTLINE OF A PRESENTATION AND A COLLECTION OF MATERIALS

PRESENTER

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PLACE AND TIME

עם ילארש AM YISRAEL

Conservative Congregation of the North Shore
4 Happ Road (just west of Edens between Willow and Lake)
Northfield, Illinois 60093 Tel. 1-847-446-7215
Debra Newman Kamin, Rabbi
Yom Kippur. September 23, 1996. 2:15-4:00pm

GREETING

One of the many deeply moving aspects of Yom Kippur is the charge to invite the stranger. As a Christian I am a stranger and you have invited me and charged me with the responsibility to discuss with you a deeply Jewish aspect of human spirituality, namely, the tradition of Arguing with With G-d ... and that on Yom Kippur!

I am a Christian who has studied the Christian teaching of contempt for Judaism and I am convinced that this Christian anti-Jewish attitude prepared the climate in which the many pogroms and then even the Shoah/Holocaust became possible. Unbelievably horrible!

I am a Christian who is convinced that the Christian faith, the way we have known it since the second century, has died in Auschwitz. I am convinced that the Christian faith, after Auschwitz, must be expressed in such a way that it is not anti-Jewish.

I am a Christian who believes that this is possible, based on the Christian teachings during the first century. Apostle Paul clearly stated that for Gentiles the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth (his life, teaching, death and resurrection) functions like a grafting point. Gentiles, like a wild olive branch are engrafted on the cultivated olive tree, the people of G-d (Romans 11:17f.). The author of the Gospel of John likened Jesus to a door (John 10:7f. Through this door all have access to the heart of G-d.

I am convinced that Jews and Christians are about the very same task, namely to be examples of the breaking in of the kingdom of G-d, examples of the breaking in of the messianic life into our daily life. There is no better example of this in Jewish liturgical life than Yom Kippur and in Christian liturgical life the confession of sins.

WHAT IS THE ETYMOLOGY OF KIPPUR?

Yom Kippur is usually translated as "a day of, a time of at-one-ment," i.e., an opportunity of reconciliation with one another and with G-d, which, of course, is not limited to Yom Kippur.

In Leviticus 23:27 (and other places) the expression *yōm kippūrîm* (piel, plural) occurs.

In the standard dictionaries the etymology of *k-p-r* is given as

1. *kpr*, usually in the piel, *kipper*, “cover,” i.e., to cover one’s face, make amends, atonement.
2. others think that *kpr* might mean “wash away, obliterate.”

There is a third possibility.

M. Dahood has written about this third etymology in several places. See, e.g., “Love and Death at Ebla and Their Biblical Reflections,” in Marks, J. H. and R. M. Good, eds., *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East*. Guilford, Connecticut: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987, 93-99.

On p. 95 he writes:

“The bilingual vocabulary which renders Sumerian URUDU, ‘copper,’ by Eblaite *kà-pá-lu* (n.23: See G. Pettinato, Ebla [N 1]: 206, 248, n.31, and 262. The tablet number is TM.75.G. 1678 obv. III 6. Since Sumerian-Akkadian bilinguals equate URUDU, ‘bronze’, with *erû*, it becomes obvious from URUDU = *kà-pá-lu* at Ebla that Eblaite is not early Akkadian but rather a Canaanite tongue.)

sheds light on *kōper*, ‘payment, gift,’

(n.24: For a recent study of *kōper*, see H. C. Brichto, *HUCA* 47 [1976]: 19-55, esp. 26-27, 35. Brichto correctly points out that etymological derivations of *kipper*, ‘to compose a difference,’ from putative cognates in Arabic with the meaning ‘to covers’ or in Akkadian with the sense ‘to rub, wipe’ are without support in biblical Hebrew; derivation from Eblaite *kà-pá-ru*, ‘copper,’ now offers a Canaanite commercial explanation for an important theological term, as well as upsetting the Egyptian etymology of biblical *koppōret*, ‘cover, lid,’ recently proposed by M. Görg, *Biblische Notizen* 5 [Bamburg 8, 1978]: 12.).

Since the scribes at Ebla sometimes write *lu* for *ru*,

(n.25: Consult G. Pettinato, *Ebla* [N 1]: 68.)

the equivalence of *kà-pá-lu* and *kōper* is quickly established, and the etymology of Cyprus, a chief source of copper in antiquity, discovered. This definition also elucidates *kōper*, ‘henna’ a reddish-orange (hence the color of copper) dye made from the leaves of henna, and *kēpîr* frequently rendered ‘young lion,’ but now preferably to be understood as ‘tawny lion.’ Ezek 38:13, *šōḥārê taršîš wēkol-kēpîrêhā*, may now be translated ‘the traders of Tarshish and all her copper goods.

(n.26: Contrast the most recent English translation of the Bible, the *New International Version of the Holy Bible* [Abbr. *NIV*; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978] which renders, ‘the merchants of Tarshish and all her villages,’ with the alternate version or ‘her strong lions.’ If the latter is correct *kēpîrêhā*, ‘her tawny lions,’ may have a metaphorical sense of ‘tycoons,’ the metaphor suggesting the color common to the copper currency and to the lions. Consult my comments on Ps 34:11, *kēpîrîm*, in *Psalms* I [AB 16; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966]: 206.)

See also Michel, *Job I* (1987), p. 84f (n.18) on Job 4:10-11.

So, *kpr* then has to do with disposing of a debt, or some other difference, with copper, i.e., with money. *Kpr* then is a financial term and has nothing to do with “cover”, or “wipe, wash away.” If this, truly, the etymology of *kpr* then *kipper* means “to compose a difference (with copper = money).”

On Yom Kippur we compose our differences with one another and with G-d and ask G-d to inscribe us into the Book of Life. How then dare we speak about the Arguing with G-d Tradition on Yom Kippur? I may be mistaken, but, I think, there is no better time. If we understand our relationship with G-d as a ברית, *bērît*, “covenant, promise,” than, not only we, but also G-d is held to G-d’s promise.

THE ARGUING WITH GOD TRADITION

The arguing with G-d tradition is deeply imbedded in the Bible. See, e.g., Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the Book of Ruth, Jeremiah, the Psalms of Petition, the Book of Lamentations and, of course, the Book of Job. As a further reminder of this tradition I will list a few books.

A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY (Please, let me know which books I must add)

Aiken, Lisa, *Why Me, God? A Jewish Guide for Coping with Suffering*. Northvale, New Jersey; London: Jason Aronson, 1996.

- Blumenthal, David R., *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1993.
- Boteach, Shmuel, *Wrestling with the Divine: A Jewish Response to Suffering*. Northvale, New Jersey; London: Jason Aronson, 1995.
- Laytner, Anson, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition*. Northvale, New Jersey; London: Jason Aronson, 1990.
- Wiesel, E., *Zalmen, or the Madness of God*, adapt. M. Wiesel, based on translation by N. Edelman. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Wiesel, E., *The Trial of God (As It Was Held on February 25, 1649 in Shamgorod)*, trans. M. Wiesel. New York: Random House, 1979.

Finally, please, do not assume, immediately, that I am added something blasphemous. We all know that humor is often the best medicine. I also think, that humor is one legitimate way to argue with G-d. I have found the following book immensely helpful in my spiritual life.

- Lipman, Steve, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust*. Northvale, New Jersey; London: Jason Aronson, 1991.

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE ARGUING WITH G-D TRADITION

My contribution to the arguing with G-d tradition has to do with my way of reading and understanding verse 6 in Job 42. I have not published my treatment of Job 42:6, as yet.

We may turn to my manuscript on this text (which is placed at the end of the set of materials) at this time, or we might, first, quickly survey the Book of Job. What is your wish?

THE BOOK OF JOB

- The Book of Job - An Overview
 - Job's pious, almost liturgical and automatic, responses to unjust suffering:
 - Job 1:21 "YHWH/The LORD has given, and YHWH/the LORD has taken away.
 - May the Name (*šēm*), YHWH/the LORD be blessed!"
 - Job 2:10 "Yes, the good we accept from Elohim,
 - then we must certainly also accept the evil."

A LOOK AT THE TENSIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOB

- This overview was inspired by
 - M. Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1960) 73-106

VARIOUS VIEWS OF SUFFERING

There is, actually, some comfort (really?) in the fact that there are various views of suffering in the Bible. On the other hand, if all suffering were related to sin and disobedience we humans, probably, could do something about it. Or is this a false hope?

- "The Meaning and Purpose of Lamentations,"
 - pp. XV-XVII, from Hillers, Delbert R., *Lamentations*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972.
- "Counterpoint and Canon,"
 - pp 4-6, from Habel, N. C., *Job*. Knox Preaching Guides. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981. Habel surveys the various views of suffering in the Book of Job. He writes from a Christian perspective.

JOB 3:1-26 - JOB'S OUTCRY AGAINST INNOCENT SUFFERING

Now Job abandons the, almost automatic, pious responses to suffering and challenges G-d with the accusation that G-d has misused G-d's creative powers in order to torture a loyal, righteous, upright, innocent servant.

On the left side the material is taken from:

- Reichert, V. E., *Job*. Soncino Books of the Bible. London, Jerusalem, New York: The Soncino Press, 1946

On the right side the material is taken from

- Michel, Walter L., *Job In the Light of Northwest Semitic. Volume I. Prologue and First Cycle of Speeches Job 1:1 - 14:22*. Biblica et Orientalia (Sacra Scriptura Antiquitatibus Orientalibus Illustrata) - 42. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987. XVII, 436 pages.
- REVIEWS: • Fensham, F. C., in *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 14 (1988) 229-230 • Job, J., in *The Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 39 (1988) 168-169. • Kaiser, Otto, in *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100.1 (1988) 146-147. • Klein, R., in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15.5 (1988) 448-449. • Müller, Hans-Peter, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 114 (1989) 23-24. • Tournay, R. J., in *Revue Biblique* (1988) 448-449.

A couple of my published articles are relevant to this chapter in Job:

- Michel, W. L., "Death in Job," *Dialog* (A Journal of Theology) 11 (1972) 183-189.
 Michel, W. L., "‘SLMWT, ‘Deep Darkness’ or ‘Shadow of Death’?" *Biblical Research* (Papers of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research) 29 (1984) 5-20.

JOB 31:1-40 - JOB'S OATH OF INNOCENCE

This chapter leaves no doubt that the poet of the book wanted to be very sure that the problem to be discussed, and, if at all possible, to be resolved is the problem of innocent suffering of a member of the community of G-d. What is the reason for innocent suffering? Is there such a thing as innocent suffering? According to the poet of the book the answer is definitely, YES. He may be wrong, but that is what he thinks. Based on the view of a covenantal relationship with G-d such an idea may not be so eccentric. Is it possible that G-d did something inappropriate and wrong? Can G-d break the covenant? Can G-d become a sinner, a criminal?

- Jeshurun, G., "A Note on Job XXX:1," *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* XII (1928) 153-154.
- A Translation of Job 31:1-40 by
 Ceresko, A. R., *Job 29-31 In the Light of Northwest Semitic - A Translation and Philological Commentary*. Biblica et Orientalia - N. 36. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980.
 One of my published articles is relevant to this chapter:
- Michel, W. L., "BTWLH, 'virgin,' or 'Virgin (Anat)' in Job 31:1?" *Hebrew Studies* 23 (M. Mansoor Festschrift, 1982) 59-66.

THE G-D SPEECHES, JOB'S REPLIES AND THE EPILOGUE

Please, read the text in Hebrew or in any translation. The startling fact is that G-d does not respond to Job's plight and questions in the G-d Speeches. G-d is portrayed here as pompous, bombastic, authoritarian, haughty, arrogant, overbearing, abusive, bragging, ...

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE ARGUING WITH G-D TRADITION

- Michel, Walter L., "Job 42:6: Ellipses, Janus Parallelism and the Message of the Book of Job. A brief Summary of Arguments for a new Translation." (A Draft. Not for publication, as yet).

Please, be so kind and let me know your opinions, whether you agree or disagree, especially, if you disagree. One version of my argument is presented in the following article:

- Michel, Walter L., "Confidence and Despair: Job 19,25-27 in the Light of Northwest Semitic," in W. A. M. Beuken, ed., *The Book of Job* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, CXIV. Leuven: University Press, 1994) 157-181. See pages 176-177.

AN INVITATION

I have found my studies, thoughts and meditations on the theme of "Arguing with G-d" endlessly frustrating, oppressive and depressing, but also quite empowering and liberating (foolishly so, probably). If you want to make your life miserable, but joyful, at the same time, I invite you to take up the study of "Arguing with G-d."