On Sitting With Suffering: Who Are Job’s Friends
Midwest Jewish Chaplains’ Group – Yom Iyun

Job 1:21

And [Job] said, “naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked shall I return there. God gave and God took away. Blessed shall be God’s name forever.

Job 1:22

In all this/despite everything, Job did not sin and did not ascribe blame to God.

Job 2:9-12

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse/Bless God and die!"

He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not evil?" In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Job’s Three Friends

When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all this evil that had come upon him, they set out each from his place and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they raised up their voices, began to weep.
aloud (יִשָּׁחֵץ חֲזָלִין יִבְכֶּם), and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

QUESTIONS:

1. What surprises you about this description of the visit from Job’s friends?
2. What do you notice about it?

Chapter 3: Job Speaks of His Pain

Job 3:1

אמרינו פנת אָבֶיה אָחֹתיים וְחָכַלֵּינוּ אַחֲרֵינוּ:

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day [the day of his birth].

Chapters 4-42: Dialogue about the nature of suffering with the three friends:

Job 4:1-2

והוא אלים קוהמתיים יאמר: חנשו זבר אלף אלף חלמה וreleased בָּמִלָּי וַיְלָחוּ:

Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient / are you too weary? But who can keep from speaking?"

QUESTIONS:

1. What do we learn about suffering from
   a. Job?
   b. Job’s Wife?
   c. The 3 Friends?
2. What does/would it mean to listen to Job?
3. What does listening bring up in the friends and in his wife?

And now, a word from you...
A PASTORAL REPLY FROM A (NEW) FRIEND OF JOB

Part Two:

Anthony the Englishman spoke next. He said:
Job, my friend, we have sat together
These seven days and nights.
My heart is full of anguish
And I have fought to hold back my tears.

No man or woman in God's universe
Should have to suffer the blows
That have rained like rocks on you -
Surely no person deserves it less.

I also remember with such sorrow
Your beautiful sons and daughters,
And for them too do I grieve;
Oh my dear good friend – my heart breaks.

Now I hear you curse
The day you were born;
Your misery is so great
You wish your life had never been.

I understand, I understand, my friend,
But still my heart rebels
Against such words,
Your wish to rub out your whole, good, life.

God only knows
That I, a weaker man than you,
Would also regret a life that had been so horribly And repeatedly assailed.

It is a mystery to us all
That God gives us life,
And seems to sit idly by
While that life is devastated.

It would be forgivable indeed
If a man so deserving of good
Yet so receiving of bad,
Did raise his fist to Heaven.
Everything we have been taught
Of god and evil
And the ways of God
Now seems written in the sand.

With pain I do wonder
If God sleeps while men do cry.
Forgive me if I offend you, friend,
With my words of blasphemy.

Now one thing I am convinced of for sure, Observing these sad times I have no more doubt:
The events that befall us
Have naught to do with our good deeds or bad.

Enough of my anger
Enough of dry philosophy;
The comforting of my loving heart
Is the best solace I can bring.

And yet, and yet, my friend
Of God still I would talk.
One day the time may be ripe
To tell you of my own faith.

But now I hold my peace
I sit with you in love and pain
Till you, in time, do bid me:
Anthony, now speak again.