



of dust and ashes

a poetic adaptation
of the Book of Job

by nashid fareed-ma'at (ashi)

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poetry by nashid fareed-ma'at (ashi)

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introduction

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

from Book of Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 8

(Those who see how this relates to the story of
Job may not need to read this introduction.)

In the end, Job’s health and earthly wealth are restored, to be more plentiful than before. Such is how many commentaries and summaries of the Book of Job describe the ending of this biblical poem. But for a mystic there is a greater treasure than Job’s restoration: he is able to hear directly from God¹. This indescribable blessing is

¹ Those familiar with some of my other writings will know I tend to avoid use of the term “God.” The modern context and usage of this term often points to a rigid monotheism that does not reflect the spiritual path I am upon. But for the sake of simplicity I use this term throughout this book. In the coming paragraphs I will address in more detail some factors of what “God” means in the contextual setting of the Book of Job.

directly connected to the suffering Job endured when God gave Satan an open hand to afflict but not kill Job. And this blessing is the “crown jewel,” a major motivating force for this poetic adaptation of the Book of Job.

Let me lay out some basic background information regarding the Book of Job. It is an ancient script of the Old Testament of the Bible, and falls strongly within the tradition of Jewish scriptures. The author (or authors), when and where it was written, and its intended primary audience are uncertain yet its relevance remains strong throughout time. Other religions, including Islam and Christianity, embrace Job as a significant figure within their canon of teachings. (It should be noted that Job is regarded by many as a descendant of Abraham, which clearly factors in his importance among Abrahamic religions.) The book is written with a strong dramatic structure, as if to be read as a play. A prologue and epilogue envelope the main portion of the book in which points of spiritual and philosophical reasoning are eloquently presented as dramatic poetry. And, unlike most other books of the Old Testament which focus primarily on relating biblical teaching and history, the language of this book is firmly rooted in the personalities of the characters.

Most descriptions of the Book of Job state that suffering of the righteous is a prominent theme of the book. Yet there is considerable variance in interpreting the main lessons of this book. This speaks to a strength of the book: its ability to convey varying yet appropriate meanings and answers to different readers reading it for differing reasons. As a result, the Book of Job is often grouped with the

‘Wisdom Literature’ of the Old Testament, which also includes the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. These books are not only written in poetic form but capture layers of metaphoric and deeper meanings for those who have the openness of heart to realize what is within and beyond the words. Let us also remember that these books, in the times they were written, were presented as individual books that stood on their own. So each has its own specific factors which demarcate them as distinct, even if they have common characteristics that moved people to later collect them into a grouping.

The main characters of the Book of Job include Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu, and God. Other minor characters include Satan, angels, and Job’s wife. Although Job is, in many respects, the anchor of the story, for me, the Book of Job is all about God. But who and what is God? Even in the end when God speaks, the language reflects in metaphors who and what God is but doesn’t definitively define God. I, within the vast limitations of my understanding, won’t even begin to try to say who and what God is. But let me share some things that may be helpful in opening to a fuller understanding of who and what God is, as this may open us to a more comprehensive and deeper contemplation of what the Book of Job addresses.

Let me first state that I do not embrace a spiritual path of monotheism but this in no way prevents me from studying and learning from spiritual traditions that are monotheistic, as is the case in the Book of Job. God in the Book of Job is clearly the one supreme, universal God of the Jews, the one God of Abraham and the line of prophets

that follow him, often referred to as Yahweh (or YHWH) or Jehovah. My studies of mysticism have, however, shaped me to look beyond the rigidness of modern monotheism. For example, although in modern times the one God of the Jews is often translated in a singular masculine tense, I don’t place God in a human gender; for me, God and the what the term points to is beyond the limits of human gender. I also don’t hold God to a set form or forms, such as a conceptual supreme male figure sitting on the throne of heaven.

In many paths of mysticism, as well as some ancient cultures, God is not seen as separate from Its qualities. To give an example: if God is love, then every instance in which we witness or experience love, we experience God Itself. (This statement should not be taken as endorsing the things we humans wrongly call love to be God.) This same principle points to a prominent theme in the Book of Job: that God is justice, therefore, any discussions about justice (and injustice) are direct statements about God. It also follows that commentary on the functions and determinations of justice, such as innocence and guilt and punishment, are also commentary on God. Thus, the dialogue between Job and his friends takes on a deeper relevance: these are not just points of reason about justice in this world; they clearly understood that although they may use terms such as “justice” and “innocence” they are talking directly about God.

Yet the wonder of God, even within most monotheism, is that despite the known names and qualities of God, the fullness of God exceeds human understanding.

The dialogue between Job and his friends encompasses a wide range of Jewish understanding of God; yet when God speaks at the end of the book, God speaks things that affirm and yet, at the same time, completely diminish all that had been previously said. Which brings up a poignant question: are reasoning and traditional teachings sufficient means to understand God? We'll explore this question soon enough.

In the opening chapter, it is important to note that God allows Job to be exposed to the great suffering that is unleashed upon him. The first verse describes Job as "blameless and upright," as written in the New International Version of the Bible -- the King James Version states "perfect and upright." This use of double emphasis indicates that Job was an exceedingly righteous person. In fact, God goes on to say in Verse 8 of the same chapter: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). This rare righteousness may seem even more profound when we take into account that Job was also a very wealthy man. This wealth became the basis upon which Satan (literally, "the accuser") challenged God about the supposed conditionality of Job's righteousness. Traveling among angels, Satan presented himself before God and suggested that if the protective hedge around Job were removed and he lost all his wealth and prosperity, he would curse God to Its face. In response to this, God allowed Satan reign over all Job had on the condition that Job himself not be touched.

With God allowing this to occur (not imposing it directly upon Job), in the course of one day Job lost his ten

children and the exceeding majority of his wealth -- which in those days was measured more in livestock, not so much money. Yet, despite this immense tragedy, Job did not curse (or blame) God, instead praising the name of the Lord in his mourning.

As chapter two begins, another day arrived when Satan, in the presence of angels, returned before God. Once again, God mentioned the blameless and upright qualities of Job, that he maintained his integrity although experiencing ruin for no justifiable cause. Satan belittled this point, stating that humans will give all they have to save their lives; but that if you strike their flesh, a person will curse God to Its face.

In response to this second challenge, God allowed Satan free reign over Job's life on the condition that Satan not kill Job. His skin was afflicted from head to toe with painful sores. Throughout the book, Job described his suffering to be constant without end or even temporary relief, such as being able to fall asleep and be free from his pain while sleeping. This physical torment was augmented by a deeper mental pain of feeling betrayed and abandoned by God -- of feeling God made Job an enemy for reasons that cannot be explained by his understanding, which included the spiritual teachings of his forefathers. Yet, Job refused to curse or blame God.

Let me take a moment to emphasize what befell Job. Many of us, even after hearing of or reading the Book of Job, are thrown into deeper wells of despair for lesser tragedies than what Job suffered. Within such ordeal, we end up blaming and "cursing" (in essence, abandoning the

commitment of faith to) God or whatever higher spiritual powers we praised when life was more pleasant. The equivalent of what happened to Job is that of losing all one's wealth and the means to produce wealth; for example, for a carpenter this would equate to losing all one's wealth, tools, and supplies as well as the carpentry skills that would allow one to earn again what was lost. The loss of Job's livestock was more than just the sheep, the oxen, and donkeys but also the labor and additional "wealth" (i.e. milk, wool, offspring, leather, etc.) this livestock produced. (This was one of the reasons wealth was kept in livestock more so than money in those days.) But on top of that, Job also lost all his children, which equated to losing all his family except his wife, who later encouraged Job to curse God. The Book of Job is very clear in stating that all this loss occurred in a single day. And after it was lost, it remained so because Job was not restored anything until the very end of the book. So he lost nearly everything in a day, remained in such a state of loss for an indefinite period of time until God then allowed Satan to afflict the very body of Job. Even in enduring this, Job refused to blame, curse, or abandon his devotion to God.

After being physically afflicted and sitting in ashes, Job's wife came and encouraged him to curse God. Some say she was moved by the despair of Job's great suffering while others say she lovingly acted out of mercy in encouraging him to curse God and die. Whether such death would be merely physical or not is not clearly indicated in the text, but it is inferred that if Job cursed God his great suffering would end. So, in addition to the previous one

day of unimaginable loss and living in the lingering consequences of such, Job's only surviving relative didn't support him but instead insisted that he abandon his faith and righteousness. But Job refused to curse or blame God for what happened. He does later question why God, being the all-powerful supreme being, allowed this to occur; but he does so without judging God to be wrong, instead asking for the opportunity to plead his case before God to be judged.

(Let me also encourage readers to not read too much into the fact that the gender of Job's wife is a factor in her encouraging Job to curse God, especially in light of how some have made similar assertions of Eve's gender playing such a role in Adam's fall from grace. If we examine human history, we will see that this role has been played by members of both genders over and over again throughout time. I pray we not view this as an inherent weakness of being a woman.)

The strength of Job's faith was immense, a measure few humans achieve yet alone aspire for. Many of us abandon God (or our spiritual paths) when we lose just a portion of what we hold as valuable in our lives. Clearly, one of the beautiful - beautiful qualities of the Book of Job is Job himself: one who refused to blame or curse God after losing almost everything. Instead, he actually sought God and a better understanding of God within his intense suffering as reflected through the coming dialogue with his friends.

So, after Satan afflicted the body of Job and disappeared, and after Job's wife encouraged him to curse

God and disappeared, three of Job's friends arrived as comforters. The role of a spiritual comforter was highly regarded in ancient cultures. Despite how many (including Job) interpret the words of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, they came not to cast judgement upon Job. As spiritual comforters, the sacred duty of such service prohibited them from casting judgement even upon one who was obviously suffering the punishments of their sins. Their job was to be a place of calm in the presence of the sufferer and, if the situation warranted, to offer guidance and reminding of spiritual teachings since when humans suffer we often forget these. Comforters traditionally came in humility, refusing to even utter a word unless the one suffering spoke first. In fact, Job 2: 12 - 13 states how they cried and mourned upon seeing Job and sat with him for seven days and nights in quiet. Only after Job spoke and ended without being interrupted, did they begin to offer their counsel to him.

A predominant theme in ancient Jewish theology is that suffering only happens to those who do evil. This being how the comforters (and Job) were taught, in their efforts to comfort Job they encouraged his repentance for whatever evil he must have done to earn this horrible fate. One of the main points of contention Job had with his friends was that he did not do anything to warrant his afflictions. And in his refusal to admit to a sin he did not commit, which would be lying, their ancestors' teachings became points of divergence in seeking to understand God (as justice) beyond the limits of their present understanding of God.

But there is also a traditional limit to spiritual comforting: if the comforters cannot "comfort" the sufferer, they are to return to silence. This, in fact, happened toward the end of the book. The comforters even allowed Job the last word. It was at this point that Elihu, a brash young man, decided to speak, condemning Job and also the comforters for their failure to correct Job. Elihu acted in a way that goes beyond the role of a spiritual comforter and was the last voice heard before hearing the voice of God.

If God does not punish the innocent, and yet what Job has suffered is punishment (or very much like it), why then did God allow Job's suffering to occur? Is there a reason beyond our reasoning for why God allowed one who is "blameless and upright" to be afflicted great torment by Satan? These questions are main driving forces in why I was led to embark upon this project. Even today, a main teaching among many spiritual and religious traditions is that righteous innocence often places the innocent beyond punishment reserved for the wicked. This is so logical to our minds, yet so incomplete in understanding what we call God. The reasoning and logical nature of the Book of Job clearly places the majority of this book in the realm of the mind, not the heart. Yet, as a mystic, I cannot ignore some obvious yet subtle elements of the book. One being that it is written in a poetic form, which leans toward the suggestion that there are meanings beyond the surface meanings of the content and words of the book. But is the mind capable of perceiving these?

Job was right but he was wrong, he was innocent and yet guilty. Already the minds of some readers may be

deem this as contradictory babble, but there is a context beyond the mind that makes Job both right and wrong from the same position. All of his arguments were correct and verifiable according to the tenets of his ancestral teachings but they were made from a self-chosen context, within the mind (the seat of the ego), that distinguished himself from God -- *his* innocence and *his* righteousness as distinct from divine justice. (Remember, in the context of Job's time God is justice, among other qualities, and all determinations of justice, such as innocence, come from God directly -- not human beings.) This subtle imposition actually removed Job from being in harmony with God and became a greater sin than all the other sins Job was actually innocent of. His position also indicated the limitations of the mind: it is the mind which makes and finds justification of these arguments against God.

Some mystic paths hold that it is only the mind (and its "stuff") that separates us from the Beloved -- even a mind firmly rooted in righteous action and direction. Job, in his blameless and upright state, had a mind that separated himself from God. Such a mind will remain a barrier to us directly experiencing the complete, uninhibited reality of God. Yet, the righteous and restrained mind, despite its best and purest intentions rarely overcomes itself to surrender itself that we may experience the Beloved directly. Thus, by the conditions created by our own minds, we call forth and often make it necessary to experience intense suffering as a needed medicine to reveal and purge our attachments to our own minds -- even a blameless and upright mind. Could this be why God

allowed Satan to afflict Job, to drive him to the limits of his own binding mind? It was only after Job stopped making arguments (an activity of the mind) and ceased in responding to others' arguments (also an activity of the mind) that God revealed Himself and spoke directly to Job. It is very important to note that God revealed Himself; neither Job or any of his comforters were able to discover or compel God to reveal Himself by their own means.

This direct experience of God is completely overwhelming and beyond words, relayed as massive and epic metaphors in the Book of Job, some which get lost or diminished in (contextual) translation. As a result of this direct experience, Job, who refused to relinquish his innocence earlier, is transformed: despising himself, he repented in the lowliness of dust and ashes. Instantly, the intense suffering Job endured became irrelevant to having this forever changing direct experience of God. One can infer that this, the direct experience of God, is the main purpose of why God allowed Job to suffer. For after this and the transformation it rendered, of even a blameless and upright human, Job prayed for his comforters and God ended his suffering to restore his health, wealth, and family to be more than before.

As humans who still live lives dominated by our minds (and the memories of teachings we hold therein), are we living in ways that are ready to let everything go to experience God directly? And if we have not yet reached this point upon the road of blamelessness and righteousness, is there a deeper message to the suffering we encounter? Are our pains means we misconstrue, means

aimed at moving us beyond the mind where we can dwell in stillness and silence to experience God directly? One of the intentions of the Book of Job is that we garner what we can from it so that we need not repeat his fate to learn what we can from his story.

One of my explicit hopes with this project is that readers realize, within our own minds, the indicators already pointing beyond the limits of our minds; for once there, we can effortlessly receive God's revelation of Itself to us. But if we must suffer to arrive there, then let us suffer. And certainly Job's story provides an excellent example of how to righteously bear great suffering: not cursing or blaming or abandoning God, instead to seek God faithfully even within the mind until we come a point where we surrender the mind to silence and grace.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.*

quote from Mevlana Jalaludin Muhammad al-Balkhi,
also known as Rumi
(translation by Coleman Barks)

* * *

prologue

it's only after
i had no questions left to ask
no arguments left to make
nothing for me to prove
no proclamations to assert
nothing else left to say
nothing else left to hear
only after reaching this point
and surrendering my whole being
to silence
you revealed yourself
to give me a direct experience of you

then, only then
nothing else mattered
for there was and will forever be
only you
only you
❖ ● ❖

1.
i do nothing for the sake of earning your esteem
i live my life as appreciation

i never asked for your praise
i only fulfilled the calling of servitude

my righteousness, the fruit of my humility
you have blessed me beyond my desires
but even these boons i accept in appreciation
knowing that my greatest blessing
is my servitude of you
this alone is the light of life
everything else is a pitiful shadow

even as thieves murder my servants
and take what is not mine
but that which you entrusted to my care
i will not call such my possessions
because such only comes to me by your grace

even as fire descends from the sky
to devour more of these provisions
i will not shed a single tear
over such dust and ashes
add to the culmination of this tragic misfortune
the loss of all my offspring to a mighty wind
i shave my head in mourning their deaths
and tear my remaining robe
to pray in my great despair

i will depart this world as i came
naked and without possessions
everything is yours to give
and yours to take away
even with nothing, empty-handed
i praise your holy name

i will never curse you
i will always honor you
i will, till the end of time, abstain from evil
although this mass of tragedy befalls me
for reasons i know not
i will remain strong in my devotion to you

even as my flesh is afflicted with pain
my skin tortured by spoils from head to toe
marred by such sensitivity
that even when a gentle breeze blows, it hurts
not even sitting or laying down offers comfort
even as dust and open air replace my walls
my roof is now the sky
and ashes, my chair
even when my wife betrays me
telling me to curse you and die
i will not
i refuse to fall into sin
if i accepted the gift of your blessings
how can i now flee these hardships
love and faith are love and faith
and endure even what is unwanted and trying

nothing happens except by your will
even if your will is to allow it
may my faith and heart remain
in sincere devotion to you
even if what is before me
is beyond my comprehension



2.
i am unrecognizable to myself
in the midst of this trauma
you send me comforters, who upon sight of me
fall into misery for my fate's affliction
for seven days and seven nights, they cry with me
and sit in silence
but their lack of words soothes not my misfortune
my despair overruns the cup of my composure
so great is my suffering

i curse the day i was born
i wish that day to have no place on any calendars
let the sun of its dawn rise not
nor the night which birthed it be kissed by starlight
oh, those who issue forth curses
unleash your fury upon that day
for if the doors of my birthing womb remained shut
or became a tomb
i would be free from this misery
i would be asleep, at rest with ancient rulers
who lay in the dust of their ruins
untouched by this brutal bitterness
that longs for death but cannot find it

why shine the light of life upon suffering souls
who hunger for the grave but will not be soon enough sated

those whose ways to happiness and serenity are hidden
peace and rest are denied me, turmoil consumes my
whole being



3.
my complaints uttered invoke a response
from one of the three who come as comforters
yet in what he says i do not find peace
only the repetition of words i once spoke
as if such words are the gold of god
“was it not you who said to others in discouragement
that your virtues should be your confidence
your innocence, your hope
have the innocent ever suffered the wrath of divine justice
have the righteous ever been destroyed”

unspoken in his words is a clear inference
that only those who sow evil come to suffer and perish
this friend of mine cuts me where no blade can touch
insisting that i have sullied my servitude of you

“can a human be more righteous than god
more pure than our creator
even angels can be found to be in error
how much more these walking houses of clay
broken to pieces upon the earthly stage
resentment is a chosen poison of fools
who can you call to who will help you
you need to surrender and appeal to god
to humbly lay your case before divine mercy
it is god who performs wonders that cannot even
be imagined
and spins endless miracles from infinity and beyond

it is god who denies success and peace to the sinful
and protects needy servants from their own self-destruction

“blessed is the one whom god corrects
resist not this sacred discipline, endure it with patience
for though it may tear the flesh,
it will also bandage all your pains
though it may unleash calamities,
it will bring an end to all your hardship
that you may come to dwell in such a protection
that allows you to fearlessly laugh at all the dangers of
the world
even the dangers of the earth will make treaty with you
and the wild animals regard you as a cherished friend
your life will be secure beyond risk
to enjoy only prosperity and suffer no more
such words have you, yourself, spoken to others
this is the truth, so now apply it to you
and sincerely appeal to god”



4.
such concern misplaced cannot go unresponded
so i confess: my anguish is beyond measure
your unyielding terror is upon me
do those who are unharmed cry
or do they save their wails for when wounds arrive

my wish is now this: let my life be taken from me now
at least this way i could depart with the consolation
that i never denied or violated your precious commands
this could be my last joy in this unending suffering
my strength is not everlasting nor my hope secure
my patience fades because i have no power to help myself
your loving grace has been removed from me
and those sent to comfort have proven great
disappointments
these, my so-called brothers, see me in this wretched state
and speak only from their own fears after crying their
own tears
they came in confidence but arrived distressed and
distraught
i ask of them nothing and still their help is worthless

but this i now ask of you
i need not fear but truth
show me where i have been wrong
withhold not a speck of dust from honesty
even if it brings more pain to my great pains

show me if there is even a whisper of wickedness upon
my lips
as i endure the hardships of this mortal existence
i live as a hired hand awaiting my deserved wages
as the nights drag on and on to troubled dawns
my broken skin wearing scabs and boils and worms
for clothes
my breath, an unrelenting and increasing burden
this life is but a breath that has forever exhaled happiness
whyfore extend my suffering

i refuse to be silent, i will not censor my speech
i will proclaim the bitterness that afflicts my soul
i despise my life, there is no meaning in these passing days
where even my dreams offer no relief in sleep
i wish to be left alone

what are we humans that you make so much of us
that you search our souls from dawn to dusk and dusk
to dawn
that you leave us to be tested every breath of every moment
never looking away, never granting us a break
if i have sinned, how does that hurt you
could you not forgive me instead of serve me this burden
why make me suffer when soon enough i will lie in the dust
and those who come to search for me will find me gone
❖ ● ❖

5.
the problem with disturbing comforters
is that the more they seek to comfort,
the more they disturb
oblivious to their effect for the sake of their intent
even if their intent is ill-informed

so spoke the second comforter, an old friend
condemning my words as shameful
he declared, “god does not taint justice
or unbalance the scales of righteousness
even as your festive children received death for their sins
you are receiving the penalty you rightly deserve
but grace provides that if you plead to god
in purity and virtue
you will be restored to prosperity and peace
so beautiful will be the blessings that descend upon you
expanding your future to paint your rich past as meager
neglect not the lessons of our ancestors
our life is but a day but the book of their teachings spans
many years
our life is but a breath quickly exhaled before learning
much
but the sacred book of our ancestors
is the collection of many seasons
which teaches that those who forget god
cannot help but perish in their hopeless forgetfulness

“trust not in your own life’s learning, which is easily
broken
lean not upon a web that feebly gives way
be not a plant that wraps its roots around a pile of rocks
in the sun
roots are better served by lowering themselves deep into
fertile ground
thus, we are taught by our ancestral teachings
that god does not reject the innocent or strengthen the
wicked
embrace these lessons and your mouth will be filled with
laughter
and your evil enemies removed”



6.
i cannot refute what has been said
but how can i prove my innocence to you
who can be justified before you, who can dispute with you
your wisdom and power are beyond approach,
beyond all measures
beyond all concepts and even perfect human understanding
who can resist you without being harmed
you who can move mountains without their knowing
and can veil the sun
and perform the impossible within what is possible
when you pass by me, i cannot see you unless you reveal
yourself
none can perform your wonders or restrain your anger
even the best of my words will not suffice in arguing
with you
even in my innocence, all i can do is plead for your mercy
even my innocent words would condemn me in disputing
you
to find me guilty in my blameless state
even if i demand it of you, i doubt you will give me a
hearing
you would only punish me more and increase my pain

no strength is stronger than you, no justice more just than
you
what claim can i make to you who already knows all
although being without blame, i no longer care for my life
i despise myself and have nothing to lose by lamenting

that you destroy the innocent and the wicked
to you, the despair of the righteous is no worse than
protecting sinners
if this is not allowed by you, then who is responsible
that i may bring my complaints to the appropriate party
in your eyes i am already found guilty
even if i cleanse and purify myself,
you cast me in the pollution of evil
you serve this fate and justify my suffering
leaving me no reason to struggle in vain

you are not a person that i can confront you
no one can i call on to arbitrate between us
what power can remove your afflictions from me
there is no one i can approach to resolve my complaints
regarding you

this life means nothing to me, i will not restrain my tongue
i will give unyielding voice to the excruciation of my soul
i say to you:

do not judge me before listing your charges against
me
will you oppress me while the wicked enjoy their days
do you have the jealousy of a human that you search out
my sins
that you persecute me as guilty knowing no force can stay
your hand
will you destroy me after having made me to be as i am
will you return to dust that which you molded like clay

will you torture me after showing me great kindness
will you abandon me after showering me with protection
and providence
if i am guilty then woe to me, i deserve what you serve
but if i am innocent there is still no escaping your affliction
upon me

why do you make yourself an enemy against me
why do you unleash your furious might upon my weak life
why did you bring me out of the womb
or deny my first breath the destination of the grave
my remaining days are within my count
look away that i may search for a moment's joy within
them

before i am cast into the realm of no return
where even light lacks any illumination



7.
the third comforter spoke, as if chirping with the dawn of
dawn
his case not to go unheard, he said to me
“your words are not to go without comment
neither will they be vindicated by my silence
therefore, i speak
you who proclaim your acts to be flawless
and pure by your own measure
but if god spoke you would see
that in mercy, god has already forgotten some of your sins
there are no two sides to wisdom
and the mysteries of god are beyond us all
there is no sight of the end of such endlessness
which extends beyond the summit of heaven
and the depths of the grave
if god imprisoned you, who could oppose that
would you then say that god is blind to evil
and unjust to the innocent
be not a fool who places one’s self beyond the reach
of receiving the grace of learning and applying wisdom
make god not conditional, surrender your heart and repent
release the sins that still stain your hands
make no hiding place for evil within you
and god will lift you up to stand without fear

“troubles are not without end
if you take hope in that which is lastingly secure

but the wicked are doomed to fail
there is no escape for those whose hope
is already a decaying corpse”



8.
i am attended by those so arrogant
they unspokenly proclaim that wisdom will die with them
but do i not have a mind of my own
i am not inferior to these in knowing
surely i have become a laughing stock
i prayed for comforters, and this is what appears
their counsel reflects that they jest with these serious
 matters
while i suffer in innocence

those without burdens hold contempt for those enduring
 adversity
to paint my fate in sin and deserved judgment
yet so many who commit evil and profane god
walk the earth untouched, relishing in comfort
comfort,
 these comforters reject my guiltless testimony
so let the animals, birds, and creatures of the sea affirm my
 claim
or let them ask the earth and hear its testimony
that this which is done to me is done by your hand,
 not my sin

there is not a single creature whose breath and life
exist beyond the warmth of your hand
to you belong all wisdom, all power, all understanding
all strength, all insight, the all of all
who can protect or rebuild what you destroy
who can liberate what you inflict with bondage

who can end the parched spell of that you cast with drought
or still to peace the floods you release
to you all beings belong, not one excluded
from those led astray to those who lead astray,
 including poor comforters
from those who fall from high places by their own
 foolishness
to those scarred by human injustice that they may stand
 again
from nations graced with greatness to those you render
 to ruins
from those who walk the path of wisdom,
 to those lost in the pathless desert of ignorance
what can we know from that you would deny us to know
how can we see anything if you deny us light
how can we be sober if you stagger our steps with
 drunkenness
my eyes and ears have witnessed this and i understand
this is why i wish to state my case directly to you
not to worthless comforters who smear my name with lies
 and misunderstanding
if they would be quiet that would be wisdom for them
imitating wisdom, they have only uttered wicked words on
 your behalf
statements full of deceit and partiality for you
would that they were being judged,
 would they then seek to deceive you
but you cannot deny the secret partiality they display
can partiality rightly argue for justice

these comforters' counsel is nothing more than psalms
of ashes
let your judgement burn away the molded clay of their
tongues
let them be weighed by the justice they proclaim
or at least let them be silent that i may talk to you
i lay my own life on the line with full awareness of the risk
i place my hope in you who may slay me
let me defend myself to your face, i have confidence in the
verdict
for no evil one would willingly step before you
my case is prepared, i have trust i will be vindicated
if anyone can honestly charge me, let me be silent and die

oh my lord, only this i request
that you stay this calamity and remove from me
my fear of your cruelty
with these removed, call for me and i will stand
to face whatever wrongs you show me to have committed
hide not your face from me, cease this concealing torment
leave me not as a windblown leaf left to the tortures of the
wind
why do you impose upon me in adulthood the sins of my
youth
why do you place such a close watch on my life
are not the days of us humans short and full of struggle
to blossom like a flower in childhood only to wither away
in age
will you judge us by the expectation to produce purity
from a life marred and scarred by that which is impure

it is you who sets the limits to our days
and restricts us within barriers we cannot break
is it not enough to leave us to the destiny you impose
upon us
one we cannot escape until its terms are served
it is you who place us in this impossible situation
such that when we die, we do not awake or arise to the
same life again
even a cut down tree is granted the grace to sprout new
growths
or blossom new buds still when its roots are old
but not humans, our lives made finite
therefore, hide me in the grave until your anger subsides
if you will grant me a second chance at this life, i will
patiently await
perhaps then you will cherish me who you created
and not be an adamant accountant of my sins
but instead like a mountain crumbling, you destroy my
hope
and overpower me until i am gone
you leave my legacy enshrouded in unanswered questions
and many concerns
i feel only the pain of my afflicted body,
and mourn in pity for myself



9.
oh, now i've done it
the first comforter is moved to rage
as he has now relinquished the role of comforter
to become an assailant, claiming:
"your words are useless, without value
you undermine piety and devotion
your own mouth condemns you, not our counsel
evil controls your tongue to utter crafty nonsense

"are you the firstborn of creation, will you god's advice
you have no monopoly on wisdom, nor insight beyond our
knowledge
the teachings of our elders and ancestors stand with us,
not you
why then reject the gentle counsel of holy, humble
comforters
vent not against god, who is your only salvation
who are we humans that we can even lay claim to purity
and righteousness
name me one human in whom god places complete trust
not even the inhabitants of heaven are given such
confidence
then how much less us mortal humans who crawl upon dust
who are so corrupt that we drink evil like water
how much have you drank that you proclaim yourself pure
and innocent
and ignore the wisdom we share with your ears

"has not the wisdom of our ancestors stated plainly
that the wicked spend all their days suffering affliction
they are attacked and marked for misfortune,
they live without the ease of peace
they are the promised meals of scavengers, wandering
blindly
agony and despair remain their unescapable companions
they are constantly overwhelmed because they shake their
fists at god
they live in ruins, like you, and all their wealth is scattered
their houses crumble, they tear their own shirts to sit among
ashes
the roots of their former fruits wither away
barren, they have no escape from the breath of god
be not like those who deceive themselves by trusting that
which avails nothing
including arguments against that which cannot be argued
before death claims them, they are served what justice
deems they deserve
to be infertile, dying trees stripped of all their remaining
fruit
they are the cause of their own troubles and birth more
hardships upon themselves
these teachings of our ancestors apply to all, including you"



10.
these words are nothing new to me
is there nothing original from these horrible comforters
what pains have they that sustain their unending speeches
as on and on and on and on and on and on they go
if i were in their place, i could condemn their suffering
 with counsel
i could judge them as deserving their fate
but instead i would be determined to encourage their
 endurance
and offer my tongue as a source of relief
yet to speak my pain or dwell in it silently
brings not relief nor sends the pain away
it is you who has devastated me and my entire household
in your unbreakable chains i am bound

my bondage has become a witness against me
my desolation testifies in favor of my suffering
you tear me to pieces in your fury
and leave me an open target to my enemies
inspiring others to join in denouncing me scornfully
you cast me as a captive of the ungodly
the prosperity you gave me you shatter and scatter
my gut pierced and split to spread my insides out
 afflicted with unrelenting blows
blinded by my tears, i cry in rags, a pauper begging for
 mercy
yet, in my despair, i refrain from harming others
with prayers pure, i beg that the earth never cover my blood
nor my pleas ever dissolve into silence

oh, the one who advocates for me is in heaven
my interceding friend knows to whom i cry
on behalf of me, may that friend speak
perhaps you will hear those words since you ignore mine

i am old and near death
what i hold myself to be is broken
i hear the grave singing my name
why surround me with mockers
why must i endure their hostility
fulfill the promise of justice you proclaim
the minds of humans you have closed to understanding
therefore, triumph remains beyond us
such that we betray friends in search of rewards
our children inheriting the burdens of our wrongs
yet worse do i receive, as people spit in my face
my sight diminished by grief, my life reduced to a fading
 shadow
yet the righteous must remain righteous
even in face of appalling injustice
where are those who will comfort me
is there not any wise among the living

send me not those who will turn night into day
for my plans are already ruined, my opportunities
 extinguished
if my only hope is for the grave or surrender to evil
what then is my hope

is there none who can guide me to the hope of hope
or should i follow my so-called hope to the threshold
of death
will this be my only companion to the dust of dust
oh my lord, answer me this despair
❖ ● ❖

11.
my words have stirred the second comforter who responds
“when will your babble and insanity cease
until then our conversation cannot even begin
especially when you declare us to be stupid
is it not you who, by your own rage, destroys yourself
will you too have the earth be emptied because you suffer
will you cry for mercy when you are the cause for its need
have you forgotten that the evil have no light which lasts
their homes reduced to tents that become their temporary
abode
where there they burn out their own light
their strength leeches away by their own weakness and
schemes
they place their own feet in the nets that entrap them
there is no escaping the traps that await them
terror surrounds them, calamity licks its lips for them
disaster is their awaiting bed, and even if they tear off their
own skin
the children of death will be fed their bones
there is no security in their tents, even those will be torn
away
safety becomes a stranger to them, hardship a familiar face
the wicked are trees that wither away upon the soil of
burning sulfur
and even the memories of them will perish,
to leave their legacy forgotten

they will have no future generations, no one to carry on
their lines
and even the people who will soon forget them will be
disturbed by their fate
this is what becomes of the evils ones
those who know not god, nor honor god”



12.
although these comforters assail me with arrows
i know who moves their hands
over and over they attack my fallen body without shame
will they also leave me for dead
if i have wandered off the path of righteousness
is that not my concern alone
why do you continue to allow them to humiliate me
raising themselves above my innocence

oh lord, you wrong me with this tradition of sending
comforters
their comforting is affliction to the afflicted
i wail of the wrongs unleashed upon me and you do not
reply
where are you, who are justice, to answer my calls
yet you are the impassable barrier to all my paths
roads you blind me to so i know not where to go
my honor has been stripped from me, no prestige is near
i am an uprooted tree surrounded on every side by your
burning anger
without a broken treaty, you have declared me your enemy
already fallen, your troops still advance against me without
resistance
all my relations are gone or have estranged themselves
from me
even my wife finds my presence offensive to her
there is no path of rescue from this burning tent
where even my servants dismiss me as a stranger from a
foreign land

little boys make me the object of ridicule
and everyone i loved who remains regards me as a
despicable sinner

with only skin and bones left, i can find no pity anywhere
because you have struck me with your mighty hand
will there ever be enough of my suffering to content you
can your hunger for my torture be sated
oh, may these words be written on a scroll that is never lost
or etched into the walls of mountains to be a testament
forever

i have no doubt that you are, the only one who can redeem
me

and that you will come before my eyes, because you must
even if only after my skin has left me naked to exposed
bones

i know i will see you with my own eyes because my heart
yearns so

and if any of these comforters will afflict me more
blaming me as the cause of my own punishment
let the wrath of your hand fall upon them with inescapable
judgement



13.
perhaps i should be hired to awaken the dead
for now all these comforters are riled against me
the third one proclaiming, “i am greatly disturbed
your words spur thoughts that trouble me, that dishonor me
but i will reply with understanding
surely you do not doubt what has been learned since the
days of old
the joy of the wicked is but a brief passing season
even if their pride reaches up to heaven
they will perish in their own dung
they will be forever wiped away like a dream departed
like a vision unremembered in all that is eternally forgotten
their children will inherit the debt of their wrongs
for justice demands that all iniquity must be repaid

“although evil may taste sweet in the mouths of the wicked
for now

all food they devour will turn and upset their stomachs
their sustenance will become poison that flows through
their bodies

and they will be touched to vomit up all they seek to hold
they will not bathe in the honey-filled waters of the garden
what they gain from their evil deeds will not be theirs to
enjoy

although nothing they do will benefit them
they will remain slaves to their craving

and not a penny of their treasures will be able to purchase
their salvation

“desolation will be their lot, loss will be their destiny
even with what they acquire, misery and distress will
 overwhelm them
the burning anger of god will fall upon their necks like
 unrelenting rain
even if they outrun the sword, they will be struck by arrows
 in the back
terror will be their clothes, fire their greedy, devouring
 companion
heaven will expose their guilt, the earth will join in
 testimony
the wrath of god will wash away all their possessions with
 a great flood
such is the fate allotted to them, a promise destiny fulfills”



14.
oh, must i play teacher to these comforters you send
and will they continue to mock me after having been taught
should i bear them patience when i bring not my complaints
 to them
but to you, who hesitate not in serving me this torture

my present fate terrifies me and yet i am forced to live it
to think about it now makes my body tremble in great
 tribulation
yet the wicked are allowed long lives, increasing in wealth
 and power
as generations of their offspring prosper free from fear
your firm rod doesn't even approach their presence
their wealth breeds them more wealth upon their wealth
their children dance to foolish melodies as i now cry on
 my knees
they make frivolous mirth while i, in innocence, suffer
the expanse of their lives bathes in prosperity
to come to a pleasant end in peaceful graves
they boast in telling you to leave them alone
exceedingly proud in their desire to not even be told
 how to live righteousness
they honor you not and offer you no prayers or obedience
is the fate of their lives within their hands or yours
how often are they put out, how often does your anger
 come down upon them
how often are they blown away by the winds of your justice

if it is true that you reserve punishment of the wicked for
their children
pay the wicked the price of their evils in their own lifetimes
so they may know it
let their own eyes see their own destruction, their own
tongues drink your inescapable wrath
why would the wicked care about punishment left for their
offspring

since you have not taught me
who can teach me the logic of your justice
one dies with wealth and in ease
another is dragged to the grave in bitterness
having never known anything good
yet both end up covered in dust
their flesh and bones food for worms
is this equanimity justice
i await your lessons to clarify this
to explain when the evil die
if they are spared of calamity or delivered your wrath
are they reprimanded for their wrongs
and forced to serve amends for all the harm they caused
instead i see that they are laid in graves within good soil
followed by many mourners, their tombs kept clean
please, you answer me this because these comforters only
speak falsely
and i refuse to be consoled by nonsense



15.
by now, you have to know some response is coming
so the first comforter opened his mouth yet again to say:
“can any human being be a benefit to god
not even the wise are such a treasure
are you so precious in your innocence that you are a profit
to god
can it be for your exceeding virtuosity that you are
punished
is your wickedness so great that it knows no ends
not even the hedges of righteous restraint
or have you forgotten your former place in wealth
one that bartered the labor of others for your security
were not others stripped naked while you wore flowing
robes of affluence
did not others suffer thirst and hunger while your table
overflowed, ignoring the cries of the empty-handed
perhaps these sins you did not see in the eminence of
wealth
but from the heights of heaven our sovereign sees this all
there are just reasons why these perils surround you
although they appear sudden, they are sprouts of seeds
planted
yet you question the knowledge of god, declaring justice
confused
will you hold god to judge in ignorance
your arguments remain firm on the age-old path of sinners
who were swept away from the foundations to the apex

they too told the lord to leave them alone
rejoicing in wealth as their riches contained engulfing
flames

the righteous will live to see the ruin of the evil
to witness the complete destruction of sinners

“my friend, submit to god and receive peace
prosperity comes from the teachings of the lord,
store these in your heart
purge yourself of all evil, throw the memory of your riches
to the wind

give up all your gold and god will be your gold and silver
in the lord is all happiness, your face facing the throne
then your prayers will be heard, and your vows honored
then you and those you petition for will be saved
even if your hands are stained by sin”



16.

oh, your hand remains heavy on me despite my wailing
if i could come to you, i would say all i have to say directly
i would make my arguments and listen to your rebuttals
with care

and then reflect and deliberate

i fear not that you would oppress me or make false charges
against me

surely you allow the righteous to prove their innocence

i know, with all my heart, that you are a fair judge

that your verdicts are justice everlasting

but if i go east or west, north or south, i cannot find you

although your work is evident, your hand remains unseen

yet every single step i take you are aware of

and surely you will affirm that my steps have remained

upon your path

when you measure me upon the scales of justice

your probing eye will see that i am pure gold

i have not ventured from or altered the slightest of your

commands

your words to me are more than my daily sustenance

delivered

but when you alone are the supreme sovereign, who can

oppose you and win

you have free will to do what you wish

and yet you are not done with me, this suffering completes

not your work

which makes me fear in terror

contemplating you, i am filled with cowardice and fright
yet i cannot remain silent in this pestilence
at least proclaim a definite time for the day of reckoning
that my accounts with you may be addressed
for many are the ways in which the wicked carry out evil
and many are the ways in which their victims suffer
land and property are stolen, widows and orphans abused
the poor and needy ignored and driven away
workers work and yet their wages are not enough to feed
 them
children scavenge the wastelands for edible stuff
unfortunate ones are bathed by midnight rains
 and have the night cold as blankets
and hug the dust for warmth as rocks become their pillows
babies are torn from their mothers' breasts to pay manmade
 debts
others wear rags for clothes or tarry naked
others prepare the oils and yet their skins remains dry
and yet others make the wines and still suffer parched
 throats
the cries of the victims of evil echo from the cities and
 from the fields
their wails for help i hear, so i know you hear them too
yet no one is charged with doing them wrong
why is no one charged for these wrongs committed

the night remains a parade for those who rebel against you
from murderer to thief to adulterer, their dawn is in the
 sun's absence

their victims are the poor, the weak, the needy, and the
 desperate
who suffer human terror unimpeded
as the reign of evil rides the crest of waves for a portion
 of time
a delicate rule that will not forever last
for the grave will wrest away the lives of sinners
unremembered, they become the feast of worms
you do extinguish the wicked with your sovereign might
what they gain is only for a passing season
even if they reach great heights, even if you grant the
 comfort of false security
eventually they will be gone and brought to justice
 eventually, not immediately

are not my words true
if not, you prove me false and render my words worthless



17.
the second comforter was quick in retort, declaring:
“all power and wonder are with god
who but god establishes order in heaven and beyond
with a light that covers and penetrates all
who then can claim to be righteous when the proof of our
 evil is evident
who can claim purity when the sight of god sees otherwise
even the moon and stars in their celestial places meet not
 god’s purity
how much less then humans who are as maggots and
 worms in the dirt”

and then the comforter quieted
his brevity quite surprising



18.
is this how you help the powerless, the afflicted, the weak
is this how you answer one seeking wisdom and insight
what spirit speaks the words these comforters utter
i ask for help yet have received no meaningful response

deep anguish overwhelms the deceased
death, destruction, and hardship flamboyantly parade naked
 before you
the skies hang over the earth and the earth hangs over
 nothing
this is done by you, in submission to your will
water is placed in clouds and yet the clouds burst not with
 water
the always full moon is hidden by these same clouds or the
 shadow of sight
you paint the horizon on what is indistinguishable to human
 eyes
to portray distinctions upon the indiscriminate space
 between darkness and light
with just the twitch of your admonishing finger the pillars
 of heaven shake
how much more befalls when you lift your hand or even
 whisper
by your force the oceans rage in swirling fury
and yet the peace of your breath makes all the day calm and
 beautiful
all this is but the outer shade of a greater potency
the whispers of whispers, not even your words spoke aloud

who then can understand the thunder of your power
i know you are beyond my understanding

yet even still as you are and as your power is
and as you have denied me justice to impale my fate with
the bitter of bitterness

as long as life enlivens my bones and your breath tickles
my nose

i will speak no wicked or deceitful word, not even to you
serve me death if you will, but i will never admit this fate
served is just

i will not compromise my integrity, i will unrelentingly
hold to my righteousness

my conscience is wedded to my lifeforce, a vow i will not
divorce or betray

hence i stand, come what may

may all that stands against me and my righteousness
be served the hopeless fate of the wicked

will you hear their cries when affliction overtakes them
will you beget them relief for their due suffering

i can testify about your power and will conceal nothing

i know the fate you unleash upon those who do evil

to have their children perish, their survivors toil in hunger

even their wives and widows will not weep for them

all that they gather up will find its way into the hands of the
innocent

what they build is only a cocoon waiting to be burst
through

they will go to sleep at night in wealth and awake in the
morning, poor

overtaken by floods and storms unseen by their evil dreams
from plagues to loss to pain to terror to swords indulged in
blood

they will be served what they deserve and removed without
mercy

there is no hiding place from this once the winds of justice
blow

let this be served against those who stand against me and
justice

there is a place where base metals are transformed into
what is precious

where silver is mined, gold refined, iron dug up, and copper
smelted

are inquirers of wisdom to search for it therein

in those forgotten places far away, beyond where humans
normally dwell

even the food that sprouts from the earth is transformed by
a warmth below

and wondrous minerals transmuted from dust within buried
rocks

hunting animals cannot decipher the scent of such place

nor loins use their roars to scare this place's disclosure

must i tunnel through hard rock to find the hidden treasures
of wisdom

or swim back upstream the rivers to their enshrouded
source

oh you, tell me where wisdom is to be found and
understanding met
for these humans know not the worth of things beyond the
land of their living
i questioned the deepening depths and they said wisdom
and understanding do not live here
to the same question the sea provided the same response
i found these not in the marketplace with the finest
imported jewels
i couldn't even find a trader who could determine a price
for these loving siblings
again i ask, where is wisdom to be found and
understanding met
are even the scanning eyes of the hawk blind to their sight
even death and destruction say they have only heard rumors
of these
that is why i come to you, who alone know where these
dwell
for you see from the ends of the earth to heaven and
beyond
you who measure to the drop all the water in the seas
and place a covenant upon the rain
you alone can appraise wisdom and confirm what
understanding is
for as it has been said,
"complete surrender to you is wisdom
and to refrain from all evil is to understand"



19.
oh my lord, this rant will not be shortened
nor my longing for the days that have passed
when your light shined upon me to guide my every step
and i was immersed in the unending intimacy of union with
you
those sweet days when my living children were my
adornments
my path laid with rose petals, and even dry rocks poured
out oil to anoint me
when all the people revered me and afforded me great
respect
their words and actions restrained to honor my presence
those days when my reputation reflected my dignity
because i tended to the poor to assuage their pleas for
assistance
and gave my care to the orphans, contented the widows
even those upon the last breath of life offered blessings
to me
i wore righteousness as my robe and held justice as my
walking stick
i served as escort to the blind, messenger for those who
could not walk
i was an enemy to the wicked, that their oppression may
cease
and their victims be granted freedom from evil's dominion
i had complete trust that i would die under my own roof
after witnessing my days approach the number of grains of
sand

for the roots of my life drank from precious underground
streams
and even your mourning dew sated the thirst of my trunks
and branches
i lived in peace, my every need met
because your glory enveloped me every single day
and the people saw this, awaiting on my words in silence
even after my counsel was delivered, they dwelt in silent
appreciation
they used to receive my smiles as abounding grace and
mercy
i was received as a sovereign among devoted soldiers
i was a true comforter to all who mourned
how the former taste of these days remain as a fading
residue

but now instead i am mocked, even by younger men
even by the children of those i would not allow my dogs to
sleep with
those who roamed and lived in wastelands, banished from
society
the sons of these now have complete freedom to disrespect
and mock me
i am not even an afterthought to them, i am abhorred and
kept at a distance
they spit in my face without any fear
it is you who afflicts me, so now these people show me no
regard
they attack and steal from me because you grant them such
success

i am left in terror and ruin as they continue their onslaught
you have allowed even the wind to blow away all my
dignity
my safety is a cloud dispersed into the ether, my suffering
is granted free reign
your abandonment of me has become a piercing blade
exacting a pain that never rests

you trample me in the mud to be nothing but dust and ashes
i cry out to you for a response and not even echoes reply
i stand before you yet remain ignored
i look out for you but even blindness rejects my sight
you have brutally turned your hand upon me to attack me
i am tossed about in tempests to be delivered at the feet of
death
what happened to the custom that those in great distress
where afforded mercy
did not my past tears fall upon the tears of others' suffering
did i not share grief and mourning for the poor
is there now no one alive to do the same for me
i hope for good, but only evil comes with lasting fury
i look for your light, yet only confusion and ignorance
attend me
this inferno of pain within me ceases not with its burning
and even my skin is marred by the sensitivity of unending
agony
with no relief, i am made an outcast among wild animals
my flesh peeling to expose the bones that burn with
consuming fever

my flute only blows sounds of despair, my drum only beats
of gloom

my voice only emits indistinguishable moans of misery
it can only be because you do not hear me that you do not
respond

for not even you could acknowledge and yet ignore this
pain

tell me, is this suffering part of my covenant with you
a covenant in which it is clear that ruin is reserved for the
wicked

one in which you promised to watch and witness my every
act

and bring me to a fair account for what my life accumulates
did you not see how i refrained lust from my leering eyes
never went astray into lies or chased the winds of deception
place me on your honest scales, let me be weighed and
judged

for then you will know beyond all certainty that i am
innocent

if i have taken a single step astray or altered your path
if i have conceded the sovereignty of the heart to the
waning will of flesh

if i have sullied my hand by eating the stolen crops of
others

let all my harvest be uprooted and ripped away from
my hands

if i have hankered for women other than my wife or stalked
the possessions of my neighbors

let my wife labor for other men and be their plaything

for surely these are sins, shames that should be judged
iniquities

flames rightfully doomed to the fire of destruction
if i have denied justice to anyone, including my servants
or placed myself above them when our mothers' wombs
make us equal

if i ignored the needs of the poor and left the widows to
fend for themselves

or wedged my wealth and guidance from the orphans
if i have watched the naked go bare while clothes hang in
my closet

or left the cold to winter's breeze when my sheep have
extra fleece

if i have raised my finger to exact influence for unjust gains
let my arm be severed from my shoulder and broken at the
elbow

it is my fear of losing your glory that prevents me from
doing such

but even still, if i have deemed my wealth to be my
protecting grace instead of you

or if i have given the sun or moon any praise that belongs
to you

let any such wrongly directed humility be a sin you judge
against me

or if i have made the misfortune of others, including my
enemies, reason to celebrate

or allowed the looseness of my mouth to utter curses upon
anyone

if i have allowed the members of my house to depart the
dinner table with any hunger
or left the traveling stranger to sleep on the street when
there was room in my home
if i have hidden any sin or guilt, as many do, to favor my
reputation
or if i have been silent to the wrongs of others to remain in
their good favor
or if my land testifies that i have abused or overused it or
the tenants i rent to
let weeds be the crop that rises for me and bitter roots
become wheat for my bread
if i have committed any range of other things you regard as
wrong
let the fruit of my soul be rotted from the seed to the skin
if i have compromised in any way the perfect standard you
placed upon my life
let your wrathful judgement torture me until you choose to
have me devoured

i proclaim my name upon my defense and ask you to
answer me
let all who deem me wrong bring forth their indictments,
i will wear them as a crown
my account is given in full with complete respect
thus, here my words end



20.
perhaps mercy and my pleas are not far from deliverance
because the three comforters have been moved to be silent
but as they shook their heads, a young man who had been
quiet all along
opened his mouth in rage underneath the approaching
clouds
“although i am young in years and it is not proper
that i should speak to correct the shortcomings of my elders
truth affirms that it is the spirit of god in us that gives
understanding
wisdom is not reserved to age, therefore, i will speak
for none here stands affirmed: not you, job, who are wrong
and neither these comforters who have failed to prove your
guilt
let us not be content to say we shared wisdom,
let god who is my god rebuke him now
no, job, your words are an affront to me and i will answer
them

“i have listened to all that has been said
now that all my elders are done with words i will speak
the spirit within compels me to unleash what is ready to
burst forth
hear these words which seek no partiality or flattery
dismiss me not because i am young, give my words full
weight
a righteous heart is the source of my voice, and sincerity is
on my lips

the spirit of god has made us both by molded clay
therefore, fear me not but confront me as an equal
for i only speak what is fair

“i have heard from your own mouth your bold
proclamations
that you hold yourself to be pure without sin, clean without
guilt
you claim god has wrongly found fault with you and treats
you with unjust enmity
that he keeps an unnecessary close watch on all that you
have done
how dare you make such complaints, are you greater than
god
and in your foolishness you say he does not answer you
will you place limits on how god speaks simply because
you don't perceive it
god speaks to us in countless, countless ways that we
ignore
today it may be a vision in a dream,
tomorrow, a whisper in the ear
another time a pain that restrains to the bed or a distress
that quivers in the bones
in a bounty of ways that change the lord constantly speaks
to us
even as peeling flesh upon your protruding bones, oh job
if an angel comes to speak to you, as rare as such occurs
or if an angel comes not, the message remains the same

to pray to god to receive god's favor and be restored to
righteousness
repent and be revived in the glory of mercy
then you will be able to testify that you did sin
but were redeemed and did not suffer what your iniquities
warrant
for suffering is not the full price to be paid but a message
the final cost of sin is absolute death
but god speaks to us over and over and over again
that we may turn away from going astray and come to the
lord
if you have any response, speak now, job, i only seek your
redemption
if not, continue in quietude and i will continue to teach”

i had nothing to say



21.
after a short pause, the young man resumed with speaking
“oh, you learned ones, continue to hear me
and discern my words as a tongue tastes food
that we may all realize what is good, what is true
job declares his innocence and says god denies him justice
that although he is right, he is stricken with undeserved
 pain
do we not know the like of humans who say such things,
 is their path any other than evil
those who state there is nothing to be gained by pleasing
 god
i boldly state: it is impossible for god to do evil or commit
 any wrong
fate only pays humans what they are due, their accounts
 written by their deeds
it is complete ignorance to think god would be unjust when
 god is justice
how can the just and mighty one be other than just and
 mighty
if the breath of god were withdrawn, what human could
 refrain from returning to dust
who is more fit to be the ruling sovereign than the holy and
 supreme one
will you condemn the justice of god which shows no
 preference or partiality
who says to evil kings and paupers alike, ‘you are wicked
 and worthless’

we are all handiwork in the palm of the lord, we can be
 touched without any contact
our every deed is plainly within god’s sight, where then can
 evil be hidden
having seen all, there is no need for god to examine or hear
 arguments from humans
just judgement is already evident to our lord
the wicked need not be tried to be punished and have what
 is theirs distributed to others
god punishes us only for our wickedness, our disobedience,
 our going astray
yet if god chooses patience over immediate justice, who are
 we to question
whether revealed or hidden, god watches over us for our
 benefit
will you demand god to be god to you on your terms, even
 as you refuse to repent
this is why i boldly profess: job, you speak without
 knowledge or insight
be happy to be tested for your wickedness, and stop adding
 rebelliousness to your sin
cease in speaking foolishly against god, but answer me if
 you dare”

again, i had nothing to say



22.
after even a shorter pause, the young man went on with
more words
“do you think you show due honor by saying god will
vindicate me
yet in the next breath asking what is to be gained by
refraining from evil
let me speak to the confusion of these contradicting
statements
set your gaze beyond the heavens and see if sins affect
the lord
or even if our righteousness moves the hand of god
your wickedness only affects you, your righteousness only
other humans
be evil or good, the lord remains unmoved by what we
humans do
yet when our self-created oppression falls upon us
we cry with wailing voices to the supreme lord
the one who bestows upon us the distinctness of being
human
god is not the cause of the suffering we suffer,
even when we are punished by the lord
should god then answer the arrogant laments of the
wicked’s suffering
no, such empty complaints will receive no attention from
the ears in heaven

then how much more should your words which state god
takes no notice of the wicked
job, your mouth overflows with hypocrisy and stupid talk”

again, i remained quiet
❖ ● ❖

23.
will this young man not shut up, he goes on and on
i have better appreciation for the elders' custom of
 restraining the speech of the young
even as storm clouds fill the sky, a sign of nature calling for
 silence
he remains eager in his own words, even as i offer no reply
 to his insults
“yield patience a little longer,” he says, “for i speak on
 god’s behalf
there is more that needs be said, these words come through
 me but not from me
justice protects my words from falsity, my tongue a tool of
 the lord
so rest assured that one arrived to perfection in knowledge
 stands among you
although god is supreme, the lord takes advantage of no
 being
god sustains not the lives of the wicked, but delivers those
 wronged what is theirs
never is the caring eye of god taken off of the righteous
god sees to it that those precious ones are nobly exalted
but those who find themselves in punishment, the lord
 alerts them to their sins
god makes known to them, even if they ignore, the ways to
 repent and make amends
if the wicked obey, they will come to rest contentedly in
 prosperity and forgiveness
if they heed not god’s words, they are thrust to death in
 ignorance

those who do not obey god resent the restraint god imposes
 upon their lives
they die as young prostitutes abused by the evils they
 worshiped
for those who suffer, even their suffering is a message from
 the lord
will you listen or die the worst of deaths and suffer the
 most horrible pains
do you not see that god is calling you even within your
 abominable afflictions
from the torturous jaws of death, god offers to lead you to
 the content of righteousness
you are only within this judgement because you did not
 heed prior callings
yet even as justice has this hold on you, be deaf to god no
 more
be not allured by the temptation of embracing more evil or
 arrogance
think not that wealth or even your own actions can replace
 humility to god
seek not what others have, face and deal with your present
 fate
for you, job, have shown that you prefer evil over god’s
 correcting chastisement

“god’s own power exalts god, tell me: who can teach like
 our lord
who can correct correction, fill your mouth with praises
 instead of complaints

the greatness of god is beyond all our understanding
seek not to bring to account that which is beyond measure
even this rain that begins to fall upon us, who can draw it
to the sky
to then have it return as clean waters from the clouds to
sustain earthly life
can you place the clouds in the sky or echo like the thunder
that just struck
or send down lightening from above to pierce into the
depths of oceans
with just rain which gives us drink and draws forth food
from the earth
this is but one of the many ways god rules over all nations
with the flash of lightening and roar of thunder, storms
announce their approach
even so god proclaims forthcoming punishments, which
even the animals note
hear now how the thunder shakes the heavens, hear this
majestic voice
does it not move your heart to pound, if so be moved to
repentance
when god speaks, nothing we need to know is held back
even as divine acts exceed our understanding
but we need not understand to act in obedience to our great
lord
the one who merely says 'fall' and the snow or rain
descend
god puts storms in our lives that we may stop to
contemplate and reflect

limitless are the types of such tempests, from driving winds
to freezing ice
even if they seem to swirl recklessly, they abide within
god's complete control

“even when the storms come to punish our behavior
the rain given still nourishes the earth
pause to reflect on the wonder of god
how even during this discourse the sky has been completely
repainted
the sun now hidden behind clouds red with the rage of
lightening
who else can do this but god
even this blustering wind bids us to be quiet
to be still, to hear the message of god
oh job, not a single one of us is fit to stand before the lord
we, with incomplete understanding, cannot place any case
before god
we cannot say what god should say or even listen to, for
god is beyond our approach
the great, just, awesome lord should be revered with our
surrender
for god has no concern for those who are
wise in their own minds”

in the midst of this pouring rain
i remained silent



24.
the young man's words ended in a storm of rain and wind
and then, to the wonder of us all, you spoke
a voice resounding from the heavens that encompassed
everything
immediately, all i had said and heard was rendered
to complete irrelevance
"who is this who questions me in ignorance," you said
"you requested audience with me
hear my questions and answer them in your defense
as you demanded of me and promised you would
were you here when i laid the foundations of the earth
show me the limits of its dimensions, point out its
cornerstone
tell me who else was here to witness creation
with the angels singing glorious praise of joy..."

then all went blank
i went beyond hearing your voice
to dwelling within your voice
that peace that exceeds all understanding
glimpses of words danced in and out of my awareness
the previous unseen limits of my mind revealed
and you within and beyond the limits of my mind
what answers to you could i give when i disappeared
no, i know not of what you make the garment of the clouds
nor ever showed the dawn its place
nor have i seen the gates of death
or the way to the realm of unending light

i do not know where you store the snow, the rain,
the wind or the lightening
or how you make desolate lands fertile
or transform abundant soil to wastelands
i know not the time of birth of wild beasts that roam
nor can i tame untameable beasts to bow in complete
humility to me
i cannot give flight to birds, strength to the strong, or speed
to the quick
of all these things and more that you ask, i am impotent

when the timelessness of all the time you took to pose your
questions ended
you concluded by demanding one more thing
"let the one who would accuse and correct the almighty
answer me now
the opportunity you pleaded for is delivered"

i wanted to bow but could not move
i tried to think but my mind had already dissolved into your
presence and was no more
so i merely surrendered and the words spoke themselves
to proclaim
i am nothing
i am not worthy of responding to you
i spoke before in my ignorance
i will not make that mistake again by breaking this rightful
silence

then, as if to be overwhelmed by you once was not enough
you unleashed upon me again your voice with more
 unending questions
i could comprehend nothing, my awareness fixated only
 on you
only on you, only you
what a fool am i to even allow myself to speak against
 your justice
to condemn my lord, whom i love, to justify myself
there is no my innocence, my righteousness, my integrity
there is only innocence, righteousness and integrity
 which dissolves me into you
all pride will be brought low, even if veiled in righteous
 innocence
the waving of my arms mean nothing if they are not in
 accord with your motionless finger
a billion voices do not even approach the thunder of your
 silence
how much more then when you are moved to move your
 finger and speak
as images of behemoths and leviathans revealing their
 strength appeared
their combined strength not even approaching your
 strength, how humble and weak i am
countless displays of strength created by the source of all
 strength
evaporating all sense of self-righteousness and pride in me
i sat helplessly before your voice crying for mercy
yet blissfully enraptured by the mercy of experiencing you
 directly

how could i ever make anything more important than you
this unspoken revelation could not be contained, so i stood
 and proclaimed
oh lord, my lord, my god
it is you and only you who can do all things
your will is never averted
forever beyond the influence of any other's change
i was a fool to speak of things beyond my ability to
 understand
yet now i understand my lack of understanding
just a glimpse of your wonder makes
the limits of all my knowledge a worthless speck
i had heard of you but not understood
yet now i am a witness of you, forever humbled
and can do nothing but dwell in unending shame for all i
 hold myself to be
forgive me, oh please, forgive me my precious lord
 as i repent in dust and ashes



epilogue

what greater is there than submitting to your will
whatever that may be
 regardless of what i think, feel, or want
whether you would have me dance in joy or drown in
 despair
is there any greater justice,
 any greater wisdom,
 any greater understanding,
 than surrendering to you

the world's deliverance can in no way compare
 or even approach
to dwelling in your voice, your presence
even if to bear your chastisement
the only innocence is submission to your will
all else is guilt even if the world deems me pure
and such was my foolish questioning of you
only after witnessing you directly can i truly say
that you are all there is
 everything else is nothing in comparison
if the children of the wicked inherit their parent's sins
let the future generations of the righteous inherit my faith
to never doubt what direct experience of you offers
even if they have yet to experience you directly

oh, of what worth is your restoration of my prosperity
to be established in fortune and good reputation again

or even that you commanded my comforters to seek my
 repentance
for speaking wrongly of you on the behalf they assumed
 of you
all this is nothing -- absolutely nothing!
because i have heard the voice of my glorious lord
which has reduced my sight of the world to dimming
 blindness
making this world an unimportant diminished background

you are all i see
because you have revealed yourself to me
 what an astounding treasure
i am forever humbled and grateful
even in these new and flowing robes
 i forget not my place among the dust and ashes



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Ma'at.