

JOB'S WIFE**Aron Pinker**

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ABSTRACT

Internal textual evidence, as well as external evidence drawn from behavioural patterns in the ancient Near East, shows that the book of Job contains not only a theological conflict between man and God, but also one between man and the society to which he belongs. Job's physical affliction (שָׁחַן רַע) made him into a social outcast because of fear of contagion. The role of Job's wife has to be understood within this context. In particular, this paper is focused on the speech of Job's wife in the Prologue (2:9), allusions to her in 19:17, 30:12–13, 17–18, 31:1, 10, and her absence from the Epilogue. These sources suggest an image of Job's wife that is at variance with the negative character usually ascribed to her.

INTRODUCTION

Job's wife makes a cameo appearance in Job 2:9 saying six words. Usually, such unnamed "bit players" in a book are quickly forgotten. Not so is she. Seow (2013:292) rightly observes, "Job's wife who has only one line in the entire book (2:9) has fascinated readers of Job through the centuries. ... Despite the almost obsessive curiosity about her identity and emotions, and the passionate debate about her character, Job's wife is arguably a minor figure in the story." It seems as though the author wished to leave Job's wife in obscurity, and that this desire should be respected. At the same time, it is also obvious that the *Sitz im Leben* alluded to in the narrative might have been so common when the book was penned that the author did not feel compelled to elaborate. Finally, one has to admit the possibility that the great author of the book has erred in leaving the part of Job's wife so undeveloped.

Indeed, the drama in the book of Job is centred naturally on Job, his righteous nature, and his unfortunate fate. Yet, the reader understands that Job's personal space is embedded in his family, his household and the community in which he resides.

When God subjects Job to a test by ordeal all are profoundly affected. Covered from head to toe with bad boils (שחין רע) Job became an untouchable, forcing on all his associates and community at large a drastic change in attitude.

Henry (1991:28) observes that the single verse spoken by Job's wife (2:9), though brief, is "never quite forgotten, either by Job or by the reader", and it stays in the background through the entire book. Her words have also fed a gamut of characterisations, mostly unflattering to her. Cox (1894:50) aptly noted,

... to infer an entire character from a single sentence uttered in a moment of intense excitement, is assuredly very hazardous, and is likely to be very unjust. Yet *this* is the measure which has been meted out to Job's wife, not only in the popular, but also, as a rule, in the scholarly, estimate of her character. For one passionate utterance, because she once spoke 'as the foolish women,' *i.e.* the impious or irreligious women, speak, she has become a byword and a reproach, and figures as a kind of Scriptural Xantippe in the general imagination. That is very unjust.

Certainly, the author skilfully guides the reader to focus his attention on a righteous person's struggle to understand his misfortunes in a world ruled by an omnipotent, omniscience, and just God. However, simultaneously, the author allows daily interactions between Job and his close associates to drift into Job's grand edifice of arguments and complaints. These snippets of human reality imbue his speeches with poignant concreteness and highlight his daily suffering. They also shed some light on Job's wife and the relation between wife and husband. Recent insights into vv. 30:17–18 suggest that these verses might form such a useful snippet, allowing a more realistic assessment of the predicaments in which a woman such as Job's wife would find herself, and a more balanced perception of her actions.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse rationally these "snippets of human reality" that pertain to Job's wife and extract from them the perspectives that Job and his wife might have on each other's duties. Job and his wife are not real human beings, though we have to treat them as such. Moreover, we have to project our thinking backwards to the approximate time when the book was written and conjure in our minds typical

behaviours of man and wife struck by catastrophic events. Unfortunately, as is usually the case in biblical literature, the text per se is suggestive rather than explicit.¹ Little direct interaction between Job and his wife is described in the book. For this reason, the stated effort would necessitate exploitation of allusions and omissions, as well as some speculative reasoning. Nevertheless, this internal textual evidence, as well as external evidence drawn from behavioural patterns in the ancient Near East, shows that the book contains not only a theological conflict between man and God, but also one between man and the society to which he belongs.

DISCUSSION

The particular allusions to and omissions of Job's wife in the book will now be considered. This discussion is focused on the complicated role that she plays in the book. Though there are only a few direct references to Job's wife in the book, her introduction into the narrative is forceful, and reverberates throughout the entire book. In particular, this paper is exploiting the speech of Job's wife in the Prologue (2:9), allusion to her in vv. 19:7, 30: 17–18, 31:1, 10–11, and her absence from the Epilogue.

Job's wife in the Tanakh and ancient tradition

Job's wife is not named in the book, though the three daughters in the Epilogue are. Dhorme (1967:xviii) observes, "Tradition was no more able to remain silent on the subject of Job's wife than on his ancestors". The cameo appearance of Job's wife in the Prologue is encapsulated in just two verses (2:9–10), and she utters only six Hebrew words. Unfortunately, "the majority of commentators on the MT of Job 2:9 have given a negative assessment of the wife's role and of her advice to Job".²

¹ Weiss (1983:70) notes that "one cannot consider her [Job's wife's] character or the emotional context of her words without exceeding the bounds of scholarship. The narrator did not reveal his opinion of Job's wife, for he had no interest in her — she is not even given a name — although her torment was doubtless equal to Job's. As is customary with the biblical storyteller, he relates only those details that can shed light on the matter at hand. Of Job's wife we are told only what is necessary for our proper understanding of how Job faced his trial."

² Cf. Mangan (2002:227).

We read

9. His wife said to him,	וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ
“You still keep your integrity!	עַדָּךְ מִחֲזִיק בְּתַמְתִּיךָ
Blaspheme God and die!”	בְּרַדְךָ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת
10. But he said to her,	וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ
“You talk as any shameless woman talks!	כְּדַבַּר אִשָּׁת הַנְּבָלוֹת תְּדַבְּרִי
Should we accept only good from God	גַּם אֶת־הַטּוֹב נִקְבַּל מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים
and not accept evil?”	וְאֶת־הָרָע לֹא נִקְבַּל

From this short exchange between Job and his wife emerge a number of details about her. She seems to be Job’s only wife. For a rich man such as Job, having one wife when he could afford a number of wives reflects positively on Job and his wife. The Tanakh recognises the possibility that several wives in a household could be a source of discord (Deut 21:15). It would be in character for Job to avoid this possibility by having only one wife and to demonstrate control over his sexual drives.³

It appears also that his wife brought him much love, happiness, and satisfaction so that he did not need any additional wives. Indeed, in his final oath (31:1) Job can confidently declare “I have covenanted with my eyes, not to gaze on a maiden” (ברית בתולה לעיני ומה אתבונן על בתולה). According to Jewish law (and similar Near Eastern law) Job was not forbidden to eye an unmarried woman, since he could marry several wives. However, according to the midrash he rationalised “If I were to look at her today, and tomorrow another were to come and marry her, in consequence I would have gazed upon a married woman”.⁴ The midrash saw in Job’s choosing to include this statement in his final oath a demonstration of his piety. However, it is also possible that the rhetorical ומה אתבונן shows that he had no need to let his eyes wander because he was deeply in love with his wife. Moreover, if his wife gave birth also to

³ Ginzberg (1956:276) mentions a midrashic reason for Job having one wife, which highlights his piety. Job used to say, “If it had been intended that Adam should have ten wives, God would have given them to him. Only one wife was bestowed upon him, whereby God indicated that he was to have but one wife and therefore one wife would suffice for me, too.” Cf. Schechter (1967:Chapter 2).

⁴ Cf. Schechter (1967:Chapter 2).

the second set of the ten children, then she probably was a very beautiful woman, since her three daughters were exceedingly pretty (42:15).

It is possible that Job's wife was not the mother of the first ten children. However, the bitterness and forcefulness of her words in 2:9 suggest that she was the mother of at least some of them. If she was the mother of all the ten children, then it would seem that the couple had a sound marital relationship. Clines (1989:13) notes, "Job's wife is not mentioned among his blessings [1:2–4], not so much because of her ambiguous role as because it is dramatically more effective to postpone her appearance to the crucial juncture of 2:9". One might also add that the reader would easily recognise a blessing even if it is not pointed out to him. A fruitful wife that can have many children was considered a blessing in the ancient Near East (Ps 128:3), and the mother of many children could expect to have an enhanced status in the family (Gen 29:32–35).

When tragedy befell Job it was obviously also shared by his wife. The reader can appreciate the author's intent to dramatize Job's suffering and his reactions, but the story suffers from the exclusion of his wife. One is naturally puzzled that she is not mentioned in v. 1:20 partaking in some manner with Job in mourning the death of their children. Job does not hear from his wife words of sorrow, comfort, encouragement, support, or hope. She does not say *נברך אלהים ונמות* "Let us curse God and die" but urges only Job to do so.⁵ Almost two decades ago Sasson (1998:87) articulated clearly the gamut of unfulfilled expectations that a modern reader might have had of an ideal wife in Jobian circumstances:

Job's wife is not a conscientious, devoted, sensible, compassionate wife like, say, Portia (the wife of Brutus). If she were such a wife, she would embrace her husband's suffering as her own. She would tell her husband it is God's will to submit oneself to adversity. She would be a tower of strength to him. We do not expect her to be the perfect, ideal wife — portrayed in chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs —, one who speaks

⁵ Orbach (1994:243) says, "The wife projects her own anger with God onto Job and encourages him to commit suicide as a protest against God".

nothing but wisdom and lovingkindness; but we do expect her to be a sensible, God-fearing woman. The Prologue to the Book of Job, however, makes it quite clear that she is fickle and sacrilegious. In fact, she only adds to her husband's suffering, distancing herself from him. She has developed a loathing for him. In the words of Job himself: My breath is noisome to my wife (19,17a; *NEB*). She is, indeed, a foolish woman, speaking like one of those foolish female chatterers. She makes an outrageous, blasphemous suggestion: to curse God and incur the penalty of death. In a sense, she joins hands with the Adversary, Satan. By seeking death for her husband, she seeks the easiest way out of a marriage and a commitment; the easiest way out of a test.

Similar sentiments with regard to Job's wife might have led the Church to view her in a negative light. The Church Fathers emphasised the role of the wife in the temptation. Ambrose (circa 340–397) felt that she acts as the intermediary between Satan and Job, as she was between the serpent and Adam (Migne 1844–80:col 698–699). St. Thomas Aquinas (circa 1225–1274) thinks that the devil spared her, “*ut per eam viri justam mentem pulsaret, qui per feminam primum hominem dejecerat*” (Aquinas 1989:94–95). Augustine (354–430 CE) in his *Exposition on the Psalms* called Job's wife “assistant to Satan” (*diaboli adiutrix*; Anon. 1969:193), Chrysostom (circa 349–407) “the devil's best scourge”, Calvin (1509–1564) *organum Satanae*, etc. (Calvin 1569:43). This tradition might be drawing its negative attitude from midrashic sources such as the one (Midrash Rabba 19:21) in which Job says: “I am not as the one that said *the woman you put at my side*. He listened to his wife but I did not listen to my wife” איני כאותו שאמר האשה אשר נתת עמדי הוא שמע לדברי אשתו אבל אני לא שמעתי לדברי אשתי” (Migne 1844–80:col. 2006–2007). The Midrash finds similarities between Job's wife and Eve. Both wives try to convince their husband to consciously sin and in both cases they exhibit considerable power of persuasion.

Later Jewish tradition generally portrays Job's wife sympathetically, since it was guided by the view that “God does not withhold from the righteous suitable wives” אין מונע מן הצדיקים נשים כשרות (cf. Buber 1893:111). In an unknown midrash, preserved by

Meir Arama and Isaac ben Solomon Hacoen, we find:

Said Rabbi Eliezer: 'God forbid! That righteous woman would not have said this unfitting thing. ... Is it possible that he was righteous and his wife was not righteous? Why did she speak to him thus? She only said to him: Pray before God that you die, so that you leave this world perfect and righteous; before you sin, bless God and die, because you cannot suffer and would go astray.'

אמר רב אליעזר חס

ושלום שאמרה אותה כשרה הדבר הפגום הזה...

אפשר שהיה הוא כשר ואשתו לא היתה כשרה ולמה

אמרה לו כן אלא אמרה לו התפלל לפני המקום שתמות כדי שתלך מן העולם הזה שלם

שלא וצדיק עד תבוא

⁶לידי חטא אלא ברך אלהים ומות שאין אתה יכול לקבל את הצער ותהיה תוהה

Samuel ibn Masnuth, a twelfth century commentator from Aleppo, says:

Since she saw him suffering so much, she said to him the words ברך אלהים; i.e., beseech him with words perhaps He would quickly exact his punishment and you would not have to suffer so much. ... Some say that she told him to confess before God and thank him, and [ask] that you would not be sick, and you will live long, that He removes from you the suffering

כיון שראת אותו מצטער ביותר אמרה לו בכנוי ברך אלהים הפיח דברים כלפי מעלה אולי

יפרע ממך במהרה ולא תצטער כל כך ... ויש אומרים שאמרה לו התודה לפני הקב"ה ותן

⁷לו תודה ולא תוחיל ותאריך נפשך שיעביר ממך היסורין

Job's wife was well aware of her husband's exemplary character and by suggesting to him ברך אלהים ומת she merely sought to help him maintain his innocence.

In the Targum on 2:9 Job's wife is named Dinah (דינה). This midrashic association of Job's wife with Dinah the daughter of Jacob rests on the use of the word נְבָלוֹת in

⁶ *Apud* Spiegel (1991:228 note 101).

⁷ Cf. Buber (1898:9).

2:10 and of נְבִלָה in Gen 34:7, in connection with Dinah's rape.⁸ It is also notable that the Targum tries to disassociate Job's wife from Satan by giving different meanings to בָּרַךְ in 1:11 and 2:9. It renders יברכך = "blaspheme you" (ירגונך) in 1:11,⁹ but takes בָּרַךְ = "bless" in 2:9.¹⁰ Recently O'Connor adopted a similar position,

We may consider that the wife, in calling on her husband to bless God, really wishes him to continue in his religious attitude which he himself already expressed in his famous 'May the name of the Lord be blessed' (1:21). This is an unusual formula which seems to call on other people (especially his wife who was the only one to hear his original prayer) to

⁸ Wiernikowski (1902:27 note 2). We find in the Talmud (*bBaba Batra* 15b): "There are those who say that Job lived at the time of Jacob and married Dinah; it is written there *you talk as any shameless woman talks* and it is written there *because he committed an outrage in Israel*" (Gen 34:7) (יש אומרים איוב בימי יעקב היה ודינה בת יעקב נשא כתיב תמא כדבר אחת הנבלות) (תדברי וכתוב התם כי נבלה עשה בישראל). This statement, attributed by the Midrash to Abba bar Kahana, might have been a homiletic effort to restore Dinah's good name. Despite what happened to her she was able to marry a prominent righteous man. In another midrash Job was a gentile. Dinah married him and he converted to Judaism (Buber [1983:Vayishlah 19]). In the apocryphal *Testament of Job* Dinah was Job's second wife. Job had two wives, Uzit (Sitidos in Greek transliteration) who, according to the appendix to the Septuagint, was an Arab woman. Job's second wife, Dinah, bore him his sons and daughters when the Lord blessed him, at the end of the book.

⁹ Cf. Jastrow (1903:1447b).

¹⁰ Buber (1978:341) notes that the verb ׀רר is a "leading word" in the Prologue-Epilogue. Indeed, Satan's argument is anchored in the diametrically opposite meanings of the verb "esruc" dna "sselb" בָּרַךְ. He claims that Job's "blessing" of God is the consequence of God's "blessing" Job's enterprises. However, if God would do unto Job the opposite of "blessing" so would also Job do (1:10–11). Linafelt (1996:168–169) observes, "had it not been for the great blessing bestowed on Job, the decidedly 'curse-like' things which befall him and his family would not have been necessary to test him ... Blessing for Job, is bound up with curse." Mangan (2002:225) notes: "In all cases, critical editions of the MT suggest that 'blessing' be taken as a euphemism for 'cursing' and this has been considered by most commentators on the Book of Job to be the general understanding of the text down the centuries". The verb ׀רר occurs first in its negative sense when Job expresses his fear that his sons/children may have "blasphemed God" (1:5). The next two times Satan uses ׀רר positively in 1:10 and negatively in the following verse. Then Job uses ׀רר positively in 1:21. This is followed by two negative uses of ׀רר by Satan (2:5) and his wife (2:9). Finally, ׀רר is used positively in 42:12. The alternate uses of opposing meanings of ׀רר and making the wife's negative sense of ׀רר follow that of Satan's was assumed by many not to be accidental. They argued that the author tried by means of the literary device of a "leading word" to convey to the reader that Job's wife should be considered in cahoots with Satan, and that at issue is the tension between "blessing" and "cursing".

bless God's name also.¹¹

The Septuagint apparently also sensed that the role of Job's wife is undeveloped in the narrative.¹² It adds significantly to the MT of Job 2:9, in an attempt to make her more realistic and humane. The Septuagint says:

And when much time has passed, his wife said to him, How long will thou hold out, saying, Behold, I wait a little while, expecting the hope of my deliverance? For, behold, thy memorial is abolished from the earth *even thy sons* and daughters, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows; and thou thy self sittest down to spend the nights in the open air among the corruption of worms, and I am a wanderer and a servant from place to place from house to house, waiting for the setting of the sun, that I may rest from my labors and my pangs which now beset me; but say some words against the Lord, and die.¹³

If the Septuagint expansion reflects some substantial traditions, then Job's wife is not one that acts on impulse without thorough and patient consideration. Also, she is not such an emotionless figure as the MT might suggest. The Septuagint text depicts a woman that is utterly distraught. She can find no rest and no place to be. She cannot stay at home, where everything evokes happy memories obliterated by tragedy. Going from house to house that belonged to her sons (1:4), the sorrow is only exacerbated. She is trying, but cannot escape her memories. She tries to avoid seeing her husband's physical degradation, leaving home during daylight and returning in the dark to her

¹¹ O'Connor (1995:28–29) also considers 2:9a to be an expression of wonderment rather than a condemning question, as most commentators do.

¹² Barton says (1911:67), "Some ancient editor, as the Greek, Sahidic, and Ethiopic versions show, felt that the question of Job's wife is altogether too brief to express the feelings of a bereaved and loquacious woman; he therefore inserted an addition to the text for the purpose of supplying what he felt to be an artistic defect in the form of the story."

¹³ Cf. Brenton (1987:666–667). The speech of Job's wife consists of two lines in the MT. In the Septuagint these two lines are expanded into a lament consisting of 12 lines. Beer and Horst claimed that a Hebrew or Aramaic midrash of Job had been used to extend 2:9. Cf. Beer (1895:11) and Horst (1983:22). Witte (2007:43) believes that "it is ... fair to assume that sections were borrowed from the broad stream of the haggada of Job, similar to the haggada's manifestations in the *Testament of Job*".

bedroom while Job sits outside cooling off his inflamed body. Escapism is natural when tragedy occurs, and it is also tragic that diversion and escape are usually impossible. Most importantly, according to the Septuagint she did not suggest to her husband “curse God”, but only to “say some words against the Lord” (εἶπὸν τι ῥῆμα εἰς Κύριον), which he did in the debate.

The tenor of the Septuagint’s expansion has much in common with the account of the *Testament of Job*, which names Job’s first wife Sitidos.¹⁴ Surburg (1975:136–137) writes that Sitidos in this book plays a more important role than she does in the biblical book of Job.

She defends her husband, though he is reduced to wretched poverty and near starvation. She lives to see her husband vindicated by God but dies before his health and riches are restored. Sitidos departs this life in comfort and peace after she sees her children in heaven. ... After the death of Job’s first wife, Job marries Dinah (the name also given her in the Targum), who becomes the mother of three daughters that are inspired and chant hymns.¹⁵

The *Testament of Job* sees Sitidos being led astray because of her concern for her husband. Her love for Job makes her succumb to Satan’s tricks and have her hair cut to obtain bread for her husband. She says: “Rise take the loaves, be satisfied and then speak some words against the Lord and die. Then I too shall be freed from weariness that issues from the pain of your body” (*Testament of Job* 25:10).¹⁶

Job’s wife is also viewed positively in the Islamic tradition.¹⁷ Seow (2013:292)

¹⁴ The *Testament of Job* is an apocryphal reinterpretation of the story of Job by an unknown author that was composed in Hebrew sometime in the pre-Christian century. The conclusion in the *Testament of Job* echoes the final section of the Septuagint on Job. Two Greek versions, based on a Hebrew original, were discovered in the nineteenth century. Cf. Kohler (1897:263–338).

¹⁵ In the *Testament of Job*, several of the misfortunes that are ascribed in the Bible to Job happen to his wife. She voices some of Job’s complaints, and is portrayed as being more afflicted than Job. During the 48 years that Job sat in ashes outside the city she bore the burden of the family’s livelihood.

¹⁶ Some detect similarities between Job 2:9 and Tobit 2:14 and 3:6.

¹⁷ There is no reference to Job’s wife in the Qur’an. However, in later Islamic tradition both Job and his wife were given expanded roles. Cf. Eisenberg (1922–1923:*ad loc*).

notes, "In Islam, she is seen as an ideal Muslim woman, a faithful wife who was critical to her husband's survival. Indeed, according to one tradition, her name was Raḥma ("Grace"), the term mostly used in the Qur'an for God's intervention on behalf of human beings".¹⁸ Raḥma's character is, however, different than that of Job's wife in the biblical narrative and in the *Testament of Job*. MacDonald (1898:150) quotes from ath-Tha'labī's (d. 1035) *The book of the stories of the prophets* that, being hit with large and itchy warts, "the people of the town thrust him [Job] out and put him on a rubbish heap and made over him a hut, and all God's creatures abandoned him save only his wife Raḥma bint Ifrā'im b. Yūsuf b. Ya'qūb (Upon them be peace!). She kept repeatedly coming to him with what would help him, and honoring him." When Job's health was restored, ath-Tha'labī tells:

His wife came up and kept seeking him in his lair and found him not. So she became confounded; like one distraught, and passed by him and said, 'O servant of God! Hast thou knowledge of him who was tried by God, who was here?' Then he said to her, 'Wouldst thou know him when thou hadst seen him?' She said, 'Yes, and how should I not know him?' Then he smiled and said, 'Lo, I am he!' And she knew him when he laughed, and she embraced him. Said Ibn 'Abbās: By Him in Whose hand my soul is, she did not cease embracing him until there had come to them all that had been theirs, of wealth and children.¹⁹

¹⁸ According to MacDonald (1898:143), Al-Bayḍāwī (thirteenth century), in his commentary on Sura 21:83, notes: "It is handed down by tradition that his [Job's] wife was Mākhīr bint Mīshā b. Yūsuf, or Raḥma bint Ifrā'im b. Yūsuf (Raḥma daughter of Ephraim son of Joseph). She said to him one day, 'Suppose you were to call upon God?' Then he said, 'What was the duration of our state of ease?' And she said 'Eighty years.' So he said, I am ashamed before God that I should call upon Him when the duration of my state of trial has not reached the duration of my being at ease." Also, MacDonald (1898:144) observes that Al-Bayḍāwī in his commentary on Sura 38:40–44 writes: "It is handed down in tradition that his [Job's] wife Lāya bint Ya'qūb—and she is called also Raḥma bint Ifrā'im b. Yūsuf—went away for some purpose and delayed to return. So he swore that if he were healed he would strike her with a hundred blows; but God annulled his oath." Job's wife attended to her husband with great patience, and supported him with what she earned. Cf. Sale (1889:247).

¹⁹ MacDonald (1898:155). Cf. Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Tha'labī (1954:132–142). Similarly Al-Ḥasan says: "And there remained to him [Job] no wealth or children or friend and not

MacDonald (1898:162–163) ends his overview of Islamic traditions regarding Job with the following observation about Job’s wife. In Islamic traditions,

Job’s wife has been much developed. There seems from very early times to have been a feeling that more could be made of her, that there was here a waste of good artistic material. Even the LXX appears to have felt the fascination that had led some to write of the girlhood of Shakespeare’s heroines and to speculate on the character of Don Quixote’s niece. It is curious to note, in view of the supposed oriental attitude towards women that she develops, in some respects, more amiably than Job.

In conclusion, the author presents to the reader Job’s wife as a woman who lived in the shadow and background of her husband, his prestige and his success. The Septuagint, *Testament of Job*, and Midrash provide nuanced and mostly favourable depictions of Job’s wife. Patristic tradition and Reformed Christianity largely view her as being a “foolish” woman at best and “Satan’s agent” at worst. In Islamic tradition Job’s wife is viewed as being an ideal wife and sometime as being gullible.²⁰

Perspectives of modern scholarship on Job’s wife

Job’s wife in 2:9 takes the initiative and is commanding. Low (2013:1) observes, “Perhaps no other words spoken by a woman in the Hebrew Bible carry more bite and bafflement than those of Job’s wife in chapter 2, verse 9—‘Curse God and die!’ Her apparent lack of spousal commitment leaves readers wanting more, especially since she disappears from the story after uttering her infamous words.”

At the turn of the twentieth century, Peters (1919:418) reviewed the perspectives of modern scholarship with respect to the image that Job’s wife conveys. He writes:

Einmütig brechen die neueren wie die älteren Erklärer den Stab über Jobs Frau. Sie werfen ihr ‘leichtfertigen Spott’ (Welte) vor, ‘bitteren Hohn’

one drew near him except Raḥma, his wife. She was patient along with him, serving him and bringing him food and praising God with him when he praised Him”. Cf. MacDonald (1898:156).

²⁰ Cf. Yee et al. (2014:522–523).

(Leimbach), ‘beißenen Spott’ (A. Schulz), ‘bittere Ironie’ (Bäthgen). Am schärfsten verurteilt sie Franz Delitzsch. Sie ist ihm die ‘höhnische Gegnerin der standhaften Frömmigkeit Jobs’, die ‘eine ihrem Manne ungleichartige Gemütsart hat’. Von ihrem Worte an ihn schreibt er: ‘Welch hämisches Urteil über Gott, welche Unbarmherzigkeit gegen ihren Mann liegt in ihrem verzweifelten und sarkastischen Wort!’ Seine Kinder hat Job verloren, aber dieses Weib hat er behalten.’

Budde sucht ihre Rede wenigstens psychologisch ‘durch Schreck und Entrüstung’ zu entschuldigen. Dagegen hat der alte Hengstenberg, wie ich Delitzschs Kommentar entnehme, in seinen Vorlesungen, die nach seinem Tode herausgegeben sind, die Frau günstig beurteilt.²¹ Auch ich bin in der Frage nach dem Charakter der Frau Jobs zu einem günstigeren Urteil gekommen, als die große Mehrzahl der Erklärer des Buches vom Dulder Job.

A decade ago, Seow (2007:350) published an excellent study “Job’s wife, with due respect”, which deals with the gamut of opinions on Job’s wife in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions, and in particular depictions of her in early Christian literature and art. He introduced his study with the following observation:

The unnamed wife of Job has only one line in the entire Joban drama, according to the Hebrew text: עָדָה מִמְזִיק בְּתַמְתָּהּ בְּרַף אֵלֶיהִם וָמָת, literally

²¹ Cf. Delitzsch (1881:71). Delitzsch says: “Hengstenberg, in his *Lecture on the Book of Job* (1860) [Clark’s Foreign Theological Library], defends her [Job’s wife] against the too severe judgment of expositors. Her desperation, says he, proceeds from her strong love for her husband; and if she had to suffer the same herself, she would have probably struggled against despair.” However, Delitzsch claims that if it were true then: “love hopeth all things; love keeps its despondency hidden even when it desponds; love has no such godless utterances as to say, Renounce God; and none so unloving, as to say Die.” Hengstenberg gives a somewhat less flattering description of the wife’s advice in his commentary on Job. He says: “Sein Weib, anstatt ihm Muth in seinen Leiden zuzusprechen, wird selbst mutlos und fordert ihn auf, dem Gotte zu entsagen, der ihn so unverdient unglücklich gemacht habe und der ihn doch nicht vom Tode erretten werde. ... ‘Segne Gott und stirb’: der Tod ist dir unvermeidlich und nahe, Gottes Gnade für dich unwiederbringlich ferloren. So halte dich doch jetzt nicht länger mit ihm auf. Klüger hattest du gethan, ihm längst ein Lebewohl zu sagen.” Cf. Hengstenberg (1870:112).

‘You are still holding fast to your integrity. Bless God and die!’ (Job 2:9). Despite the brevity of her speech, however, she has been roundly condemned by interpreters through the ages as an unthinking fool, an irritating nag, a heretic, a temptress, an unwitting tool of the devil, or even a personification of the devil himself. Yet, alongside such antifeminist readings, there are alternate representations of her that together constitute a dissenting “minority report,” as it were. This minority report has largely been overlooked, thus skewing her place in the history of interpretation and reception. A recovery of this variant tradition may, in fact, contribute to a more balanced and richer reading of her place in the book.

Indeed, modern exegesis, in general, did not take kindly the words of Job’s wife. Dillmann (1891:18–19) sensed a weakness and presumptuousness in the wife’s character. He observes:

Die Krankheit war schon soweit entwickelt, dass sie als das Übel, das in besonderem Sinne ein Schlag Gottes (19,21) hiess, als die schlimmste Art desselben erkannt und ihr wahrscheinlicher Ausgang schon vermuthet werden konnte. Das genügte, um zwar nicht Ijob selbst, aber sein Weib zum Wanken zu bringen. Sie, der schwächere Theil (Gen 3,1ff.), gibt nicht blos alle Hoffnung auf und sich selbst der Verzweiflung hin, sondern wird auch zur Versucherin des Mannes, indem sie ihm das zu thun räth, was Satan beabsichtigt hatte.²²

Most commentators agree with Hitzig (1874:12) that Job’s wife “ist hier keineswegs als ein schätzbare Gut betrachtet, sondern wie des Weib überhaupt Sir. 25,23. 1 Tim. 2,14. Pred. 7,26.28.; und wie jenes erste 1 Mos. C. 3. unterstützt sie Satans Absicht, den Mann zu bethören.” Barton (1911:67) says “the wife in her despair became an unconscious ally of Satan”. Similarly, Buber (1969:61) considers Job’s wife to be the unwitting agent of Satan: “What Satan designed for him [Job] ... Job’s wife

²² The Septuagint explains that “much time had passed” (χρόνου δὲ πολλοῦ προβεβηκότος).

recommended to him". Hakham (1981:15) finds Job's wife agreeing with Satan that anyone suffering such pain as Job did would blaspheme God. Whybray (1998:34) believes that "Her advice, 'Curse God, and die', is a deliberate echo of the Satan's predictions in 1.11 and 2.5; and, though its intention was probably to bring an end to her husband's suffering, it was a temptation to him to sin. Job's wife recognised his integrity, but called on him to abandon it. Not surprisingly, she has been called 'the mouthpiece of Satan'." Andersen (1976:93) sees Satan being more devious: "The Satan's temptation did not reach Job openly, so that its evil source would be recognised; it came more subtly, through the solicitation of a loving wife". Habel (1985:96) says: "Lest the hero himself entertain this drastic option the narrator has Job's wife as the earthly mouthpiece for the hidden Satan".

A number of commentators disassociate their characterisations of Job's wife from Satan, though they still consider her negatively. Ewald (1882:92) depicts the wife as a scornful rude woman. He puts into her mouth the following words: "Thou who under all the undeserved sufferings which have been inflicted upon thee by thy God hast been faithful to Him, even in fatal sickness, as if He would help or desired to help thee who art beyond help,—to thee, fool, I say: *Bid God farewell* (who will not deliver thee from death as thou believest)—*and die!*" Similarly Hahn (1850:42) says that Job's wife's words "enthalten den bittersten Hohn auf Hiob's Frömmigkeit, bei der er sterben müsse, vor der er gar nichts habe". Kissane (1939:10) describes Job's wife as being "convinced that God has afflicted him without reason, and so he has no longer any reason to be pious towards Him". Pope (1986:22) says that she "perhaps, meant to suggest that since he was not long for this world, he might as well give vent to his feelings, or hers, and curse God". In Dhorme's opinion Job's wife "is prepared to accept good but not evil at the hand of God (v. 2:10)".²³ Good (1990:200) is certain that Job would not utter v. 2:10a "if he thought his wife were being supportive".

Arnheim (1836:10), as Rashi (1040–1105), felt that Job's wife was forcefully demanding (לשון צואה) that her husband should bless God and die a pious man as he was. Duhm (1897:14–15) seems to view the wife's advice practical. In his view: "Das

²³ Dhorme (1967: 20) echoes Ramban (1194–1270) who says, "It seems to me that this woman feared God for gain" והנכון בעיני כי היתה האשה הזאת יראת ה' על מנת לקבל פרס.

Weib aber meint, der augenblickliche Tod, der die Folge der Gotteslästerung sein würde, wäre nicht so schlimm, wie die langsame qualvolle Sterben. Ihr *fluche Gott!* Spricht sie natürlich nicht aus eigentlicher Gottlosigkeit, sondern aus jener hoffnungslosen Erbitterung.” Terrien (1957:41) thinks that Job’s wife is “moved by compassion more than contempt”. Clines (1989:50–51) considers Job’s wife to be ambiguous; she is a temptress, but she also believes in her husband’s integrity. Gordis (1978:11) agrees with the positive view of Job’s wife in the Midrash. He says, “Actually, as the Midrash recognises, her reaction is dictated by her love and loyalty to her husband”.

This relatively small sample of opinions, which exegetes expressed about Job’s wife, shows that most of them viewed her negatively. Unfortunately, most of these exegetes assessed her actions from Job’s perspective. From the wife’s perspective Job was the cause of her ruined life. Yet, she never blamed him. She stood stoically at his side through all the trials and attended to him in his disease. However, Job refuses to admit that he might have sinned. He does not accept the possibility that “there is no man on earth always in the right, who does the proper thing and never errs” (Qoh 7:20).

Some feminist scholars were challenged by the role that Job’s wife has in the MT, but were gratified by the tenor of later expansions.²⁴ For instance, Maier and Schroer (1998:196–197) say,

For a feminist reading of the book of Job the wife is a challenge in various respects. Through her, the patriarchal character of the book becomes dramatically apparent. Although she is inflicted by the same disasters as Job, apart from the disease, her suffering is not recognized; in fact, she is hardly mentioned. Contrary to all biblical role-conventions her advice is not accepted by Job: she is called foolish and dishonorable, and is removed from the story that follows. At the same time, however, the later narrative traditions show that this important gap had a stimulating effect on readers’ imagination and called for more details. ... A Job so

²⁴ Cf. Norton (2011:56).

devoid of relationships as the one in the Hebrew tradition was not acceptable.

In general, feminists viewed Job's wife positively. For instance, Newsom (1998:140) lauded her "religious radicalism".²⁵ In Tribble's view Job's wife "broke the bounds of orthodoxy" because she questioned Job's doctrine.²⁶ West (1991:107–131) sees Job's wife as a model for the assertive voice of faith. McGinnis (2001:136) suggests that Job's wife played a positive role. She verbalised the option of cursing God so that Job would not do so. Magdalene (2006:232–233) theorises that Job's wife intends with her words to spur her husband into action; i.e., a confrontation with God and the retributive justice system.

Though many commentators agree that Job's wife unwittingly played a role supporting Satan's purpose, her motive was entirely different. In assessing her character, it is obviously her motives that count, not the concurrence of a single word with that of Satan's assertion.

Wife–husband dialogue in Job 2:9–10

Job's wife makes her appearance after the second catastrophe occurs. Berlin (1994:42) minimises her role in the book arguing that "Job's wife is introduced for contrast. She represents the normal reaction, and Job's, of course is extraordinary." In 2:9 of the MT Job's wife says with amazement, "You still keep your integrity"²⁷ and suggests to her husband "Blaspheme God and die".²⁸ Is this a wife's "normal reaction" to a calamity

²⁵ In Newsom's opinion Job's wife holds on to the view that alienation from God is an appropriate reaction to catastrophe. See also Newsom (2003:59–60).

²⁶ Cf. Tribble (1975:9–10). This would be the case even when it is assumed that she holds on to retribution doctrine but urges him to go on with his own theology.

²⁷ Seow (2013:292) observes: "Her opening words have traditionally been interpreted as an unmarked interrogative, that is, a question indicated only by tone. That is probably correct." It is difficult to imagine that the author could have relied on tonality of reading for conveying intended meaning. Gaab (1809:1) says that 2:9a "kann nicht frageweise genommen werden, die Worte stehen sarcastisch".

²⁸ Terrien (2005:108) believes that 2:9 can be understood in the following three ways: "(A) Can you always be a man of integrity? Don't you see that your calamities prove that you are a sinner? It serves no purpose to ask anything the man of faith. Curse God and die! (B) Do you believe really that your piety is recognised by a just God? That blasphemy would

of the kind that befell Job and his wife? Was it the “normal reaction” in antiquity? The gamut of characterisations that have been given to her words suggest that they are taken as anything but normal. Schindler (2006:24) notes, “Job’s wife’s anguished *cri de coeur*, ‘Curse God and die’ (Job 2:9), has evoked an amazing array of interpretative responses, from a vitriolic condemnation of her character to an embracing of the feminist possibility of her speech”. What is the nature of Job’s wife’s observation? Brown (1996:59) says,

The question is whether her observation is meant to be a form of approval or indictment. If the latter, then Job’s wife is clearly admonishing Job to compromise his integrity and curse God in order to insure a quick death. If the former, then Job’s wife has introduced a new nuance to integrity that can provide the rationale for Job to curse God, the element of uncompromising honesty.

Many commentators found the behaviour of Job’s wife to be inappropriate in the context. In ancient societies consorts were submissive, subservient, and deferential in public. Job’s wife seems to be independent, judgmental, and commanding. However, while Job has been sitting in a public place, there is no compelling reason to assume that her advice was heard by others. Moreover, there is little doubt that wives have

shorten your suffering! (C) If you continue to maintain integrity, then have a ‘nice end’: bless God and die! [(a) *Prétends-tu toujours être un homme integer? Ne-vois-tu-pas que tes calamités prouvent que tu es un pécheur? Il ne te sert à rien de poser à l’homme de foi. Maudis Dieu et meurs!* (b) *Crois-tu vraiment que ta piété soit reconnue d’un Dieu juste? Que le blasphème abrège tes souffrances!* (c) *Si tu continues à maintenir ton intégrité, alors fais une “belle fin”: bénis Dieu et meurs!*].” Terrien believes (b) is the best understanding, saying: “The second seems preferable, if it is assumed that the latter, misled by the pain, but still confident in the integrity of such husband, offers him by sympathy one theological method to practice euthanasia. ... If this is the case here, then the council of Job’s wife is inspired by the good sense and conjugal love. Yet, it is an opinion contrary to the faith.” Indeed, it seems that Biblical tradition implies that suicide is a grave sin against God, and later Jewish tradition is explicit about this. Davis notes that the challenge of Job’s wife “is commonly heard as a mocking question (‘Do you still persist in your integrity?’), implying that Job’s vaunted integrity has availed him nothing. But it may also be read as a statement rather than a question: a sad affirmation that integrity is the one thing of value which Job has left, and that very integrity demands that he curse the God who senselessly destroyed everything else.” Cf. Davis (2001:104).

spoken their mind (sometimes forcefully) since time began. One should not be surprised that Job's wife had her own view on their tragic situation and voiced it, privately.

It is notable that she speaks about Job's integrity with confidence. As a person who was intimate with her husband's thoughts, attitudes, and actions, she knows him. Unlike Satan she is certain that Job is a man of integrity. Still, accepted mores dictated that a man as afflicted as Job must have sinned to incur such anger from God. Her dilemma is to bow her head and follow common sense or join Job in what seems to be a futile battle. As a pragmatic and practical woman she chooses common sense. Her offer is presented by the author to the readers as a "justifiable reaction".²⁹

It is possible that the wife's decision was influenced subconsciously by anger at Job, seeing him as one who destroyed her own good life, and particularly was instrumental in the death of some of their children.³⁰ Schindler (2006:24) felt that her cry in 2:9 "points to the part that anger plays in grief, with a sense not far removed from the cry of dereliction on Golgotha. Her words raise a challenge that is not answered in the Book of Job, that of where is God to be found in suffering, and how to live in a world with such suffering in it." It is possible that Job's wife "has immediately, or (shall we say?) instinctively, seen what Job will take some time to realise, that he cannot *both* hold fast his integrity and bless God; either Job or God must be guilty".³¹ It is difficult to imagine and comprehend all that must go on in the mind of an individual who is subjected to as rapid a succession of catastrophes as Job's wife was.

This choice, not to stand the ground with her husband, marks Job's wife as a person who makes her own decisions.³² Many saw her joining forces with Satan. However, her perception of "integrity" and that of Satan's do not coincide. She seems

²⁹ Cf. Dell (2007:6).

³⁰ One notes that Job's wife says nothing when all the children perish tragically, and speaks only when Job was smitten by a terrible disease. The accumulated anger directed at him, as the cause of the calamity that befell their house, might have suggested to her that he should take the honourable path and commit suicide.

³¹ Cf. Clines (1989:52).

³² Sasson (1998:91 note 3) says, "Job's wife is obviously a woman of independent thinking".

to be judging her husband by his deeds, while Satan suggests that he should be judged by his deeds and motives. Satan is sure that Job would turn against God once he realises that God's protection has been removed from him. However, Job's wife wants Job to turn against God so that he would perish and be relieved of his misery.

There is nothing more that Job's wife shares with Satan but a single word; Satan says *אֵל־פְּנִיךָ יִבְרַכְךָ* and Job's wife says *בֵּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת*. Moreover, Job's wife is compelled to use the dual meaning word *בֵּרַךְ* not to implicate herself in a blasphemy case, but Satan could have used any word he wants. The fact that Satan chose the word *בֵּרַךְ* in anticipation that Job's wife would use it, allows the author in a clever way to depict Satan as a manipulative being, rather than make Job's wife Satan's accomplice. Still, Clines (1989:51), like many others, believes

her invitation to 'curse God and die' can certainly be seen as a further 'temptation' of Job; it cannot be accidental that such have also been the words of the Satan—not, indeed, as his recommendation to Job but as his prediction of Job's ultimate response to being deprived of possessions and health. Her taking up these words implies that she too belongs in the camp of those who believe in the causal nexus between piety and prosperity.

However, Job's wife does not "take up these words" to associate herself with the Satan (she is unaware of them), and "these words" by themselves have nothing to do with retribution theory. If "taking up words" is a measure of association (or taking sides) then it should be noted that her words "You still keep your integrity" (*עַדְךָ מַחְזִיקַיְכֶם בְּתַמְתְּךָ*) echo remarkably God's words in 2:3 "he still keeps his integrity" (*עַדְנֹו מַחְזִיקַיְכֶם בְּתַמְתֹו*). In this context Job's wife appears to be the earthly conduit for God's assessment of Job's current integrity. Seow (2013:296) assessed that the "textual" association by Job's wife with God and Satan is about even: "Job's wife at once expresses celestial confidence and celestial doubt—three forms in the Hebrew for the former and three for the latter". It seems that the score, in terms of Hebrew forms, is actually 3 to 1 in God's favor.³³

³³ However, Job's wife and Satan share a measure of presumptuousness. Satan presumes to

Moreover, Clines makes it sound as if belief in retribution theory is a negative trait and stains Job's wife. A Jewish audience, at the time that the book is generally believed to have been written, would not consider this belief an error. Nowhere in the Torah is the fulfilment of the commandments predicated on unselfishness of motive.³⁴ The only clear statement on the desirability of unselfish piety is Antigonus' (first half of the third century B.C.E.) saying in *m. 'Abot* 1:3: "Be not like servants who serve the master on the condition of receiving reward. Rather, be as servant who serve the master without the condition of receiving reward; and let the fear of heaven be you."³⁵ There is no reason to castigate anyone for adherence to any generally accepted beliefs. Indeed, as Clines (1989:41) states, "if she recommends Job to 'curse' God and so bring death upon himself, it can only be because she feels that sudden death must be better for Job than lingering pain from which no recovery seems possible".

Finally, Job's wife's suggestion that Job die would undermine the "rules of engagement" set by God for Satan. If Job accepted his wife's advice and died, then Satan would be considered to have set up a situation that led to Job's death and thereby transgressed his perimeters of free action (2:6). How could Job's wife be considered Satan's accomplice if she advises her husband to perform an act that would make Satan break an agreement with God?

In Weiss' view, the author's choice of words, though it leaves a great deal unaccounted for, does after all reveal a little about Job's wife:

... the verse is structurally woven from sentence remnants of the deliberations that took place in heaven. His wife says to him "You still hold on to your integrity"; God said of him "He still holds on to his integrity" (2:3). His wife suggests "'Bless' God"; Satan expresses his

know how Job would react and Job's wife presume to know what is good for her husband.

³⁴ Several commandments have specific gains attached to them. See, for instance, Exod 20:12; Deut 22:7, 25:15, etc.

³⁵ Even the followers of Antigonus had difficulties with unselfish piety. They asked "what prompted our forefathers to say such a thing? Is it possible that one works all day and does not take his wages in the evening?" (אנטיגנוס איש סוכו היו לו שני תלמידים שהיו שונין בדבריו והיו) (פועל מלאכה כל היום ולא יטול שכרו ערבית). Cf. *b'Abot* d'Rabbi Natan, 1a. See also Sigal (1986:46) on the possible motives for this saying.

opinion of Job “He will ‘bless’ You to Your face” (1: 11, 2:5). By assigning to Job’s wife two sentences whose origin are the two opposing attitudes to Job in heaven, the narrator clarifies what appears inexplicable: her feelings, her suffering, her role in the drama. Thus it appears that her suggestion to her husband is identical to what Satan said about Job, but her motivation is different. Satan speaks out of pure apostasy; Job’s wife speaks out of pity. This is evident from the one “original” word in her speech: the verb *מָוָה*, “and die”, which indicates the purpose of her advice, different from that of Satan. Satan wishes to prove that Job serves God only in order to receive reward. Job’s wife wishes Job to be relieved of his suffering. Her intention is good; her action is not.³⁶

The suggestion that Job’s wife makes to her husband seems cold in its pragmatism and practicality.³⁷ Some felt that its fatalism reflects deep alienation. Newson (2002:128) says,

Job’s wife reads his situation as a sign of alienation, of brokenness in the world to which the appropriate response is an answering act of alienation. The narrative is not interested in making a plausible case for her viewpoint, however, but simply in discrediting her through her alignment with the *satan* and her opposition to God and to Job. The nihilism of the position that she and the *satan* embrace is evident from the one word in her speech that is not an implicit quotation of the heavenly voices: “die.” According to the perspective of the narrative, the values shared by the *satan* and Job’s wife cannot sustain life in the face of catastrophe and acute suffering.

It must, however, be obvious to the reader that such suggestion is not made lightly. Many days and nights must have been spent in hope that Job’s disease would run its

³⁶ Cf. Weiss (1983:70).

³⁷ Camp (1985:84) says: “Job’s wife proffers the most practical, if fatalistic, of advice to her husband”.

course and he would recuperate (see Septuagint's expansion). Concurrently with these hopes loomed also the spectre of "What if not?" Much agonizing thinking went into the wife's decision process, knowing that the solution is not going to be palatable to either of them. The three words בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמַת seem to be uttered as a relieving burst; short to be over quickly, necessary to be said, and anticipated to be fully rejected. It takes a very wise and courageous woman to do it.³⁸ Moreover, the three words that Job's wife says to her husband offered him an exit strategy that emboldened him to advance arguments that approach בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים to an unprecedented degree and reduce the asymmetry between God and man.³⁹

What did Job's wife offer to her husband specifically? Berechiah ben Natronai (twelfth century) was puzzled by the question "How could Job's wife know that he would die if he were to curse God?" He says:

Many wicked people do so and live. But it could be that she said this on her own account; when she saw the boils on him, that he could no longer be firm and live, she counselled him thus: although thou doest not blaspheme in private, for thou fearest God; yet, curse him in public, so that people shall hear it and kill thee—after the manner when *Naboth cursed*—for this will be better for thee than living with such plagues.⁴⁰

Melsheimer (1823:10, in note) is convinced that Job's wife urged him to commit suicide (*durch einen Selbstmord*). In Dhorme's view the suggestion does not refer to an action and reflexive reaction. He says: "It is not necessary to see death as the consequence of the suggested cursing. It is simply succession in time. Curse God before dying!"⁴¹ It is difficult to see what benefit such cursing would be to Job. Indeed, Clines (1989:5) thinks that Dhorme's understanding is improbable, and in

³⁸ McGinnis (2001:136) suggests that Job's wife played a positive role. She verbalised the option of cursing God so that Job would not do so.

³⁹ Terrien (1957:42) says: "In the poem, however, if Job no longer blesses God, he does not curse him either. He merely asks to be put out of his misery, yet he never takes any practical measure toward suicide. He calls for death and even 'non-being' but he does not curse God."

⁴⁰ Cf. Hirsch (1905:13).

⁴¹ Cf. Dhorme (1967:20).

2:9b “the second imperative most probably indicates the consequence of the first”. Dhorme (1967:20) suggests, “Resignation is not the virtue of Job’s wife. She is prepared to accept good but not evil at the hand of God (v. 10).” Dhorme is in part correct. Job’s wife does not act as a person resigned to her fate. However, there is no evidence for Dhorme’s second assertion.

It seems more likely that Job’s wife wants Job to perform an act which will automatically lead to his execution. Among most nations, at the time the book was written (600–300 B.C.E.), blaspheming was considered one of the gravest crimes, punishable by a mandatory death sentence. This was also the case in the Mosaic polity where God was the King and Lawgiver of the Israelites, and blasphemy was a crime against the state punished by stoning. One finds in Lev 24:15–16, “And to the Israelite people speak thus: Anyone who blasphemes his God shall bear his guilt; If he also pronounces the name Lord, he shall be put to death. The whole community shall stone him; stranger or citizen, if he has thus pronounced the Name, he shall be put to death.” In Judges 6:30 an attempt is made to apply the law to Baal, “The townspeople said to Joash ‘Bring out your son, for he must die: he has torn down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred post beside it!’” See also Exod 22:27, 1 Kgs 21:10, Matt 26:65–66.

Why did Job’s wife suggest to her husband this particular method for committing suicide? It seems that she might have been guided by Job’s behaviour following the sons’ parties. Each such party was promptly followed by cleansing rites for fear that his children “have sinned and cursed God in their heart” (ברכו אלהים בלבבם). This obviously did not work. Job did not bring any sacrifices when he was inflicted with bad boils. Knowing her husband’s defiant nature (2:9a), she felt that her suggestion would be more in line with it, and thus have a better chance of being implemented. She might have thought that Job could have cursed God in his heart and is now ready to do it with his lips.⁴² In this case, it seems that she miscalculated. Orbach (1994:243) suggests, “The wife projects her own anger with God onto Job and encourages him to

⁴² Note the Targum’s addition “but Job thought things in his heart” (ברם ברעיניה הרהר במלין). Barton (1911:67) notes, while such behaviour would be “true for most men under these conditions, [it] is foreign to the thought of the tale, which pictured Job as an example of resignation”. Job’s wife might have assumed this normal behaviour.

commit suicide as a protest against God". However, he notes, "The most potent motivational force against suicide can be attributed to his unwillingness to give up the search for meaning in life, namely, in the relation of man to God".⁴³

Weiss (1983:70) opines, "Job—at least this time—does not understand his wife, and takes her words not as she intends, but literally".⁴⁴ It seems though that Job and his wife misunderstood each other, because they viewed their situation from different perspectives. Job's reaction to his wife's drastic suggestion is: "You talk as any shameless woman talks! Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?" Job's statement reveals his high expectations from his wife. She was not a "foolish woman". Being the wife of a person such as Job necessitated an unusual level of intellect, articulation, and theological rationalisation. She was apparently an extraordinary individual. He expects her to understand that he is driven by a stubborn search for meaning in his life and needs her as a companion in this endeavour. Thus, in the Jobian context, Job's rhetorical question must have seem to be a double entendre; having both theological and interpersonal connotations.⁴⁵

Naturally, the main theme of the book directed commentators to focus on the

⁴³ Cf. Orbach (1994:245). Orbach (1994:246) says, "Attitudes of self-righteousness, the stubborn search for meaning, holding onto hope for finding meaning can constitute the psychological aspects of inhibition and create a psychological hardness against mental breakdown and suicide". Frankl has described the search for meaning as a life-sustaining force in the most traumatic personal and historical tragedies. The power of meaning lies in the ability to see oneself as a part of a transcendental existence or when one's behaviour is related to a set of transcendental values. Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life and not a "secondary rationalisation" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning. Cf. Frankl (1984:117–159).

⁴⁴ Job's wife wishes Job to be relieved of his suffering.

⁴⁵ According to Yalkut Shimoni (Exodus, Jethro Parasha, comment 302), Job's notion, that a person should consider whatever befalls him with gratitude, is in line with ancient Israelite religion. It notes, "But you [Israelite], if I brought upon you the good show your gratitude, and if I shall bring upon you suffering show your gratitude. So says David *I raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the name of the Lord* (Ps 116:13) *I came upon trouble and sorrow and I invoked the name of the Lord* (Ps 116:3–4). So too says Job (1:21), *the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*, on the measure of good and on the measure of punishment" (אבל אתם אמהבאתי עליכם את הטובה תנו הודאה ואם אביא) (וכן איוב אמר יהוה נתן ויהוה לקח יהי שם יהוה מבורך על מדת הטוב ועל מדת הפרענות).

theological aspects of Job's rebuke to his wife. However, the careful reader could not but notice that Job's words might be also a plea for loyalty from Job to his wife. While marriages in Job's time would not include vow's such as "I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health", the ancient custom of dowry (מִקְהָר, Gen 34:12, Exod 22:15–16, Deut 22:29) implied a loyalty not lesser than the one articulated in standard medieval marriage vows. Indeed, Job allows himself to offer his wife as a quid pro quo if it can be shown that he coveted another man's wife (31:9–10). Job wanted his wife to stay with him, and she wanted to distance herself from him; this is obvious from 2:9–10, 19:17a, and the Septuagint expansion on these verses. Sasson (1998:89–90), speaking from Job's perspective, says:

Job, undergoing extreme torments of body and mind, had also to suffer the estrangement of an unfeeling, self-centered wife (19:17a)—the woman he loved and cherished. In his downfall, she added to his humiliation before the eyes of the world. This was the most unkind cut of all. For one can forgive God for an undeserved test. One can even try to understand Satan's difficult position—that of a professional Adversary. But how can one forgive the treachery of the wife of one's bosom at a time when one needs her most?

Many noted that Job's reaction to his wife's words is rather mild. He only warns her that she sounds as an impious fool but does not accuse her of being one. This shows that Job's wife was held in high esteem by him. Seow (2007:372) raised the possibility that Job's rebuke to his wife is ironic. He says: "He [Job] rebukes his wife for what he thought was outrageous counsel, yet the vitriol of his own speeches to follow, beginning with his malediction in the next chapter, is certainly no less outrageous".⁴⁶

From Job's perspective (and that of the ancient reader) his wife spoke "outrageously" as one of the נבלות.⁴⁷ From the wife's perspective she was realistic and

⁴⁶ Seow (2007:372 note 109) states that this suggestion was communicated to him privately by Alan Cooper.

⁴⁷ Job characterises his wife's words to him as being of the kind spoken by "foolish women" (כדבר אחת הנבלות תדברי). Seow (2013:292) notes, "the translation of נבלות as 'foolish women' is unsatisfactory, for it connotes to modern readers of English a lack of intellectual

practical. Peters (1919:422) describes her attitude thus:

Wir verstehen es also sehr wohl, daß die Frau dem Job anrät, Gott dazu zu bringen, daß er ihn sofort tote als Strafe für seine Lästerung. Denn das erscheint ihr gegenüber den langsamen, schmerzvollen Absterben durch diese fürchterliche Krankheit als das geringere Übel. ... Sie läßt den Glauben an ihres Mannes Tugend nicht fahren. Denn sie weiß aus ihrem langen Zusammenleben mit ihm (10 Kinder!), wie gut er ist, wie selbstlos, wie gerecht, wie wohltätig, wie kein unrecht Gut an seinen Händen klebt, keine Sünde seinem Leib befleckt. Sie könnte, wie er selber für sich in Kap. 31, auch ihrerseits den Reinigungseid für ihn ablegen. Sie ist eine fromme Frau; denn sie hat—das muß aus dem Schweigen des Buches erschlossen werden—nicht gewankt in der ersten harten Prüfungsreihe, als aller Reichtum verloren ging, die ganze Kinderschar an einem Tage ins Grab sank. Sie wird nicht als Törin, d. i. als frevlerin, als Gottlose (vgl. Ps 14,1) bezeichnet, nein, nur ihre erbitterte Rede ist dem Job Törinnenrede!⁴⁸

Cox (1894:50–51) made the following arguments in favour of Job's wife:

1. It is impossible to infer the character of a person from a single statement made in a moment of intense excitement.
2. Few, men or women, could be favourably compared with a person considered "the perfect man" by God.
3. Job's wife shared in all the calamities without complaint.
4. Job's suffering because of the bad boils "was even heavier to her than to him; for

capacity, whereas the term more likely suggests a theological ethical lapse. The word in Hebrew typically refers to someone who speaks, acts, or is simply outside the accepted theological, ethical, and social norms, most frequently, someone who flagrantly disregards the community's dictates, hence 'outrageous.' Job's point, therefore, is not that she speaks 'foolishly, as women are wont to do.' Rather, his caution is against reckless reaction and disregard for theological, ethical, and social norms." Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta deba-Hodesh, Yithro 10.

⁴⁸ In Peters view: "Jetzt ist sie abgefallen von dem alten Gott, weil sie ihren Mann nicht aufgeben wollte. Ihm halt sie die Treue und bricht sie Gott."

to the sensitive womanly nature it is often harder to see another suffer than to endure suffering”. She might have endured his sufferings, but not seeing him suffer them.

5. What Job’s wife said to her husband was shocking. However, those were the words of a person “half-maddened by an intolerable misery”.
6. God did not rebuke or punish Job’s wife for what she said to her husband (2:9b).
7. “It makes *for* Job’s constancy and patience, not against them, to adopt the nobler rather than the baser conception of his wife”.
8. The more closely we study her words the more we find in them which denote intelligence and largeness of soul.
9. Even if we put the worst possible meaning into her words, she should not be condemned for a single passionate outburst.⁴⁹

Job 2:9 indicates that Job’s wife is not a woman who is in a self-sacrificing, romantic love relation with her husband. That does not mean that there is no love between them. After they raised a large family together, their love probably moved from the idealistic and intoxicating to the mature and practically sustaining. She impresses the reader with her decisiveness and initiative. Her words are few and to the point, and her message is concise and clear. Unwittingly she spurred Job onto a path to intellectual greatness. Pardes (1992:151) aptly observes: “Much like Eve . . . Job’s wife spurs her husband to doubt God’s use of his powers, but in doing so she does him much good, for this turns out to be the royal road to deepen one’s knowledge, to open one’s eyes”.

Societal distancing

Job refers to his wife again in a verse that culminates his disappointment in those that were supposed to form his “safety net” (19:13–17). In these verses, Job lists “my kin” (אָחִי), “my acquaintances” (יְדֵעֵי), “my relatives” (קְרוֹבֵי), “my friends” (מִיֵּדְעֵי), “my dependents” (גְּרֵי בֵּיתִי), “my maid servants” (אֲמָהוֹתַי), “my servant” (עֲבָדִי), and “my

⁴⁹ Cox (1894:51) understands 2:9 as saying: “Do not any longer stand on your righteousness, but confess your sin—confess anything God wants you to confess, say anything He wants you to say, lest you perish You blessed Him before (Chap. i. 21), and He did but send new disasters upon you; bless Him again, and you will lose all that is left you—life”.

children” (בְּנֵי גֵיְתִי) as those who shunned him and treated him as a stranger.⁵⁰ Modern readers must puzzle why three of Job's friends, with whom he must have had only tenuous contact, come to console him (2:11),⁵¹ but none of his local associates, dependents, and family do so when he lost his children (see Gen 37:35).⁵² However, the readership for which the author wrote knew from personal experience that to be normal. Job's local support system was so traumatised by Job's catastrophe that they were paralyzed by fear. Moreover, all the associates and dependents, which Job perceived as being disloyal and estranged, might have been convinced that their actions, intended to force his self-isolation, are absolutely necessary for the preservation of their community.

Malul suggests that in ancient Israel, where bodily wholeness stood parallel to the wholeness of society, Job's “non-whole” body impinged on the ordered structure, fullness and harmony of society and endangered the corporate character of the social group. Because Job's body brings about disorder and disequilibrium to the social matrix, Job must be excluded from the social milieu. He observes (Malul 2002:440–441), “From the direction of society as an ordered body of laws, any afflicted person has by his deformed body violated the social order—epitomised by fullness, integrity, and wholeness ... Being no more of full and whole constitution one by definition is no more part of society.”

While Malul defines societal rejection in general metaphysical terms, in the case of Job the main driver might have been raw fear of contagion; that the community's existence is endangered by a contagious disease, which they cannot confidently diagnose and control. In such cases, the best a community can do is to isolate the afflicted, and we do that to this day. Basson (2008:287–299) writes, “The physical

⁵⁰ Words for stranger (גֵּר, נָכְרִי) occur four times in these verses.

⁵¹ Cf. Pinker (2006:8).

⁵² Ahrend (1988:7). Kara might be anticipating this question by noting that the friends did not think that Job's disease was so severe. To the best of my knowledge, no commentator has asked why only friends from outside of his country come to console him (2:11). Why after Job's health was restored do his kin and acquaintances come to console him (42:11), but not when he was inflicted with the bad sores? What was the message that the author tried to convey by this obvious omission? It seems to me that the author tried to convey by this omission the fear of contagion that gripped the community.

distress experienced by Job is exacerbated by the attitude of his circle of acquaintances. His deteriorating body has led to severed social relations. As a diseased person, suffering from bodily defects, the lamenter becomes so repulsive to his fellow kinsmen that they practically push him to the margins of society.”

Job 19:13–17 presents Job’s perspective; he feels deserted. The ancient readers, however, knew that the actions of his community and inmates reflected fear and the need for distancing. The community attempted to isolate the diseased using rude and insulting speech, gestures, and acts of minor assault (30:1, 12–13).⁵³ Some practiced avoidance, estrangement, and persuasion. However, while a healthy Job might have understood the community’s health requirements, the beaten-up Job knew that he needed to be supported, and that his chances for survival outside his community were at best marginal. Malul (2002:440) says: “Since corporate identity is deeply embedded in the ancient Israelite mentality and the corporate unit becomes the primary locus of identity and meaning, individual existence is predicated on membership in the kin group and survival outside the bounds of society is almost impossible”.

The fear that gripped Job’s associates had naturally its effect on Job’s wife. She probably thought that she was spared for the moment. But she might have wondered whether her immunity would last despite constant exposure to him. It does not take much to imagine that she was deeply apprehensive. Yet, she did not distance (הִרְחִיק) herself from her husband, she did not become alienated from him (זָרוּ מִמֶּנִּי), she did not leave him (תָּדַלֵּן), she did not forget him (שָׁחַכְנִי), she did not regard him as a stranger (לֵזֶר תִּתְקַשְׁבֵּנִי), she did not regard him as an outsider (נִכְרִי), and did not consider him loathsome (חֲנֻתִי). The only thing that his wife finds repulsive is his odour (רִיחִי), perhaps because she attended to him from close by. Surprisingly, this wifely dedication, which went on for at least months, has been missed by exegetes, who consider Job 19:17 as complementing the negative image in 2:9. Commentators are also insensitive to the likelihood that she had to withstand community and household pressures to isolate her husband outside the community. Thus, while everyone distanced themselves from the sick Job, only his wife stood by him, and stood close

⁵³ Cf. Pinker (2015:489–496).

enough to him that she smelled his odour.

The tension between Job and his wife in Job 30:17–18

The popular image of Job, sitting all the time among the ashes scratching himself, is rather unrealistic and does not agree with Job's words in the dialogue.⁵⁴ Kissane (1939:10) notes that at the end of 2:8, "The Greek text adds 'without the city,' and this has given rise to the common view that Job retired outside the city. But the text itself does not say this, and the presence of his wife would rather indicate that he was still at his own house."⁵⁵ Indeed, as we have seen, Job 19:13–17 assumes that Job resided in his own house, and tried to interact with its household. Additional indications such as this can be found in the text.

Recently Pinker (to appear in SJOT 2017/1) suggested that the difficult verses in 30:17–18 might be cogently understood if it is assumed that they deal with Job's closest circle of intimates and his tragic disappointment in them. Verse 17 refers to the nocturnal activities of Job's wife and those who want to uproot him from his home, and v. 18 refers to their duplicitous behaviour during daytime. Pinker argues that the reading

17a. At night my bones gouged my fraud	לֵילָה עֲצָמֵי נֶקֶר מֵעָלַי
17b. And my gnawers/up-rooter never rest.	וְעֲרָקֵי לֹא יִשְׁכָּבוּן
18a. With great craft disguises my close one	בְּרַב־כַּחַץ יִתְחַפֵּשׂ לְבוֹשֵׁי
18b. As the mouth of my tunic they gird me.	כְּפִי כְתָנֹתַי יֵאָרְנֵי

can be obtained from the MT by making minimal changes in the consonantal basis. Moreover, עֲרָקֵי associates by metathesis with עֲקָרֵי "my up rooters" forming a double entendre. This suggests that the purpose of Job's wife and his gnawers was to up root

⁵⁴ Lewis (1979:132) notes that a similar custom to sitting in ashes is found among tribal societies where the sick lie in the dirt to identify with their plight and smear their bodies with dust and ashes. Nowhere else in the Bible has a similar act been reported. The closest parallel is probably David's fasting and lying on the ground all night, in empathy and grief for his ailing son (2 Sam 12:16).

⁵⁵ Habel (1985: 96) says, "The Septuagint identified these ashes with a 'dunghill' outside the city, thereby introducing the idea that Job was an outcast, like a leper ... Thus Job does not hide his sickness or exclude himself from the community, but highlights his condition by sitting on the ground among the ashes, an action which provokes the response of Job's wife."

him from his house and his community and place him in isolation. In the emended text Job refers to his wife using clothing terms, which suggest enwrapping and closeness to the body. He calls his wife “my fraud, my disloyal” (מַעֲלִי), which echoes מְעִילִי (“robe”), and “garment” (לְבוּשִׁי), i.e., one as close to the body as a garment. These metaphoric names express Job’s desires and longings for protection and care, perhaps reflecting a past of conjugal closeness, tenderness, and love, which was shattered.

From Job’s perspective the new reality is that his wife is disloyal and at night, in the privacy of their bedchamber, she is “boning through his body”, perhaps trying to convince him to retreat into isolation or join a colony of lepers. During the day she is cleverly (בְּרַב-כִּנְיָהּ) play-acting (יְתַחַפֵּשׂ) as the loyal wife, but Job sees her to be in cahoots with those that want to uproot him (עֲקָרִי), girding him to suffocation.⁵⁶ Worse, her words are no more an impulsive reaction (“Curse God and die!” 2:9), and her alienation is not just an occasional natural recoil from some symptoms of his disease (“my breath is offensive to my wife” 19:17). Now she has become a constant nocturnal feature, subjecting Job to an annoying, deeply probing introspection. Job’s wife has become to him an adversary at home, persistently pursuing her goal of uprooting him from his environment, trying to isolate him, and perhaps push him to commit suicide. Job lost his confidence in her, he calls her “my unfaithful, my fraud” (מַעֲלִי).⁵⁷

From Job’s point of view his entire social safety net (19:13–17) has turned against him and become his unremitting gnawers; i.e., those who incessantly nag him. He sees himself being abandoned by a deceiving wife and by his intimates, who scheme his up-rooting and isolation. Job’s words in 30:17–18 project his disappointment forcefully, but they are only his perspective on the situation at hand. The ancient reader knew that there was another side to the coin. He probably understood that Job’s wife was taking the practical view of the situation and was urging him to take a dignified way out, as the practice was. He likely considered with great respect Job’s

⁵⁶ עֲקָרִי associates by metathesis with עֲקָרִי “my up rooters” forming a double entendre. This suggests that the purpose of Job’s wife and his gnawers was to up root him from his house and his community and place him in isolation.

⁵⁷ Cf. Pinker (forthcoming).

intimates who tried to isolate him. He viewed them as people who with a heavy heart are trying to protect their community; safeguard it against infections, epidemics, and plagues.

The rift between Job and his wife in vv. 17–18 is the eternal schism between personal loyalty and communal good, between yielding to feelings and emotions and being considerate and practical. Only when these verses are understood from this perspective is the Jobian drama elevated to the level of timeliness and depth that it deserves and the role of Job's wife is truly appreciated.

Job's wife in the epilogue

The fact that Job's wife is not mentioned in the Epilogue is annoying to the modern reader. She seems to have returned to her standard function of rearing a family, running a household, and staying in the shadows. Her contributions to the restoration of her family are all subsumed under her husband's name, as was the case in the patriarchal family.

There is no reason to preclude Job's wife from being the mother of all his 20 children. If this is correct, then she was a very healthy, sturdy, and fruitful woman. In particular, this feat is amazing when one takes into account the frequency of death amongst women giving birth in antiquity. Also, rearing 20 children in an environment of high child mortality is an unusual achievement. Indeed, all these would make Job's wife a remarkable woman, unparalleled by any in the Bible.

It is notable that many judged Job's wife negatively and harshly — but not God. She is not approvingly assessed by God as Job is (Job 1:8), but she is also not rebuked as Job's friends were (Job 42:7–9). It is, however, obvious that she fully shared in the blessing of the restoration with her husband, and perhaps more so. In all these, outspoken as she was, she probably often reminded her husband, “How regrettable the loss, and unforgettable ...” (חבל על דאבדין ולא משתכחין). She must have ended her life as a happy but deeply bruised woman.

CONCLUSION

From the little that we are told about Job's wife she impresses us with her strong character and dedication to her husband in times of extreme hardship. Stewart (2012:219–220) observes, "Job's wife takes on a life of her own in the history of interpretation. Her character gathers different names, various characterisations and larger speeches. Despite the diversity among them, each tradition continues to grapple with the serious issues the biblical woman raises as she witnesses both the integrity and the anguish of the one who suffers. ... Job's wife and her cadre of interpreters teach that egregious suffering denies straightforward response." It also denies categorical judgment of behaviour and character in such cases. In particular this is true when Job's wife, who has been directly and drastically affected by what had happened to Job, is given such short shrift in the book.

According to Driver and Gray (1921:25), "subtle psychological analyses, however, whether to heighten or diminish her [Job's wife's] weakness, are probably as foreign to the author's intention as the lengthy harangue attributed to her by G [Septuagint]". While this might be true, it is really of little significance. The reader would normally complement the author's narrative intuitively in accord with his personal experiences and societal mores. The voluminous literature on Job's wife is ample attestation to the interest that she evokes, the importance that she commands, and the marginal treatment that she was accorded. Readers are well aware that the setting of the main theme is concocted and unrealistic, while the underplot of tensions between Job and his wife is realistic and tragic.

Job's story, set in a far off time and unknown place, does not allow us to contemplate whether a realistic solution existed that could have bridged the rift between Job's needs and his wife's fears. Many commentators expected Job's wife to exhibit self-sacrificing romantic love. However, no such demand was made of the righteous Job. Was it because of the asymmetry in the husband/wife status? Was it because most of the commentators were male and the female perspective was not given a chance to be expressed? Was Job's wife the first to do so?

Seow (2007:373) concludes his study of Job's wife with the words: "She is neither

hero nor villain. Her function in the book is, rather, a literary and theological one: to present before mortals a dialectic. How a human being like Job responds to that dialectic is another question altogether, however.” This study suggests that Seow only points to the artificial, concocted, and abstract function that Job’s wife has in the book. However, the sensitive reader feels that hovering over the lofty debate in the book is a real human drama, which is ageless and acute. One should not be surprised that in this drama our sympathies are with the wife.

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