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Serenity of God and Stillness of Job

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ABSTRACT :

“I know that You can do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from You”, (Job 42:2). The conflict between God’s silence and human suffering is illustrated in the book of Job in the Holy Bible. This book even demonstrates how the seeming absence of God is a place for genuine spiritual struggle rather than a rejection of faith. This paper examines the book of Job from the perspective of the theology of protest, emphasizing God’s utter silence during Job’s unmerited suffering. In the end, the book of Job confirms that God hears the protester, answers and changes the person who raises the objection. Job’s tale demonstrates that in a world of suffering, people’s quest for justice, purpose and a relationship with God requires open mourning and even direct confrontation with the supernatural. This paper demonstrates how the serenity of God prunes a human by endurance through the trauma and trouble which God leads and guides invisibly holding the whole situation in control.

Keywords: Divine Absence, Human Suffering, Theology of Protest

Introduction

The silence of God in the midst of human suffering remains one of the most persistent and troubling dilemmas in theology. This issue, however, extends far beyond theology. Its echoes through literature, philosophy and psychology. Across different cultures and throughout history, people of faith have struggled with the paradox of a just and living God who appears silent in the face of pain, injustice and despair. To the question where were you, God, when we suffered? The divine response echoes, I have always been there, I am present, even in the midst of chaos and suffering. The book of Job approaches this divine silence not just as a theoretical or philosophical concern, but as a deeply personal and emotional crisis. Job, a man known for his righteousness, suffers the loss of his wealth, his children and his health, without any explanations. His life mirrors the universal human condition, where despair about the future causes faith to falter and the soul struggles to continue trusting in God amidst overwhelming hardship. In this context, Job becomes the voice of all who suffer, those who dare to question a seemingly unresponsive God.

This paper explores how lament and confrontation are essential aspects of a life of faith. Job’s physical and emotional suffering is inflicted by Satan but allowed by God, who holds supreme authority over all life. Job’s recognition that God is ultimately in control provides enduring encouragement to future generations, inspiring them to maintain faith regardless of their circumstances. He exemplifies a profound trust in God, even at his lowest point, a faith perhaps inherited from his ancestor Abraham, known as the father of faith. Through Job’s life, the Bible does more than acknowledge divine silence, it creates a sacred space where genuine human responses including grief, protest are allowed. Unlike interpretations that portray Job’s trial as a call to passive faith, this study contends that Job’s relentless questioning, lament and even defiance reflect a more profound spiritual engagement. This approach supports a theology that sees protest not as a disbelief but as a legitimate and faithful response to divine silence. Using insights from Scripture, trauma theory and modern theology, this paper argues that God’s serenity is not abandonment, but an invitation to deeper and authentic faith.

Literature Survey

The paper titled “*A Theological Phenomenology of Listening: God’s ‘Voice’ and ‘Silence’ after Auschwitz*” by explores how theology can interpret and respond to the silence of God, especially in the context of Holocaust (Auschwitz). God’s silence should not always be read as abandonment but sometimes as invitation, mystery and shared suffering. The silence of God does not necessarily mean divine absence or indifference. Rather calls the believers to deepen reflection, ethical listening and solidarity with the suffering. The article, “*The Theology of Hiddenness: J.L. Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness, and the Role of Theology*” by Marek Dobrzeniecki and Derek King, critically engages with the philosopher J.L. Schellenberg’s “*Divine Hiddenness Argument*” which claims that if God exists and is perfectly loving, He would make His presence clearly known to all, since many sincere seekers experience divine silence, Schellenberg concluded that such a God likely does not exist. Marek Dobrzeniecki and Derek King argue this in a theological perspective that Schellenberg’s arguments fails to account the richness and complexity of Christian Theology, free will, spiritual maturation, incarnation

and the role of Church, and many. The idea that God's hiddenness may serve a greater purpose, such as developing deeper trust, love and transformation within one self.

In the article, *"The Book of Job as a Thought Experiment: On Science, Religion, and Literature"* written by Yiftach Fehige, proposes that the book of Job functions as a thought experiment, similar to those used in science and philosophy. Job's suffering is presented not to explain why suffering happens, but it provoke reflection on how humans respond to suffering and divine silence. Fehige connects Job's narrative to both scientific reasoning and literary imagination where the author suggests the readers to suspend judgement and consider the deep truths.

Peter Hanes in his article, *"The Book of Job and Pastoral Intervention in Crisis"* explores the book of Job through the lens of pastoral care and crisis intervention, arguing that Job's story offers deep insight into how people of faith should respond to suffering and not with rigid theological explanations but with presence, empathy and silence. In the article, *"The Book of Job as a Theology of Isolation"* written by Heather R.F. Harper, explores the book of Job as a profound theological meditation on isolation. The writer argues that Job's suffering is not just physical or emotional but also deeply relational marker by social abandonment, divine silence and inner disconnection.

"A Trauma Theory Reading of the Book of Job: On Science, Religion and Literature" by Michelle Keener applies modern trauma theory and reflects that Job's speeches reflect the fragmented, nonlinear and repetitive nature of trauma testimony. The traditional reading overlook Job's role as a trauma survivor which challenges the theological systems.

"Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence" an essay written by Michael C. Rea, this essay challenges that a truly loving God must always make His presence obvious. Instead, Rea argues that God might communicate in non-obvious, personal or non-verbal ways. *"Rethinking Divine Hiddenness in the Hebrew Bible: The Hidden God as the Hostile God in Psalm 88"* written by Olga Fabrikant-Burke, this article reframes divine hiddenness within Psalm 88 as hostile divine presence rather than benign or passive absence, challenging traditional interpretations and inviting deeper engagement with lament and protest in the Hebrew tradition.

"The Experience and Correlates of God's Silence among Christians" written by Jacek Prusak and Jakub Wasiewicz investigates how Christian's experience and interpret God's silence during times of distress or unanswered prayer. God's silence is often linked to spiritual struggles, religion doubt, and mental health challenges like anxiety and depression. Through which this paper tells the reader that God's silence leads to spiritual growth, deeper faith reflection and renewed trust in God. The paper titled, *"Pathology and Pain, Disease and Disability: The Burdens of the Body in the Book of Job Peering through a Psychoanalytic Prism"* talks about the bodily suffering of Job. Through psychoanalytical thought, the author suggests that Job's diseased body enacts an unspoken protest. Its imperfection and suffering reflect and resist cultural injustice and critiquing social norms.

Job's Trauma

Job is introduced in the Holy Bible as *"...this man was the greatest of all men of the east"* which is mentioned in the book of Job chapter one and verse three. The trauma which Job faced physically, psychologically, economically, emotionally, altogether at the same time would have let him to the deepest state of feeling insecure within and outside of the himself. Job loses all of his ten children in a single catastrophic event which is mentioned in chapter one, verses eighteen and nineteen.

"While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house. And it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

A grief that is almost beyond comprehension. The depth of parental sorrow is hinted at when Job tears his robe and shaves his head. We can sense that his sorrow is replaceable. The loss of his children did not make him to curse or accuse God, but he said, in verse twenty-one he of the same chapter, Job says, *"the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* the affirmation which Job has on God that He will look after everything that happens in his life is authentically shown amidst all the loss in his life.

Possessing all the wealth in livestock and in servants, the sudden destruction of his property and loss of his social status, destroys not only his material security that is the loss of a great wealth, but also his identity in the society as well. How he would have handled his fall from being prosper in everything and suddenly losing everything out of nowhere. God teaches us through Job's life that how fragile the worldly success will be. God not only allowed the loss in his family and wealth, but also allowed a disease to him which made him suffer both internally and externally. In the book of Job chapter two and verse seven tells us clearly that Satan with the permission of God, brought heat boils in the body of Job from the sole of his foot till the crown of his head. These were all the trauma which he had as a human. Like the loss of his children, wealth and health. Amidst all this sudden chaos in his life, Job did not feel like being betrayed by God. But out of all his pain and trauma, he curses his own day of birth rather than cursing God. He says, *"Why did I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?"* (Job 3:11) even though his pain and trauma disturb him or challenges him to curse God, he does not.

Even his wife asks him to curse God and died rather to suffer the pain and trauma but he does not dare to speak even one word against God. The more he stood still, the more he was into God irrespective of all that is and was happening around him. Not only his wife suggested so, his friends also spoke to him which paved way for his soul to be weakened like, you must have sinned to deserve such suffering. Even though he himself was broken physically, emotionally, mentally and economically, he did not dare to speak a word against God about all that was happening in his life.

Job's lament as Theological Protest

Job's speeches, particularly in chapter 3, 10 and 23, do not conform to sanitized, reverent religious language. Instead, they are raw, emotional and often accusatory. Job does not sin by cursing God, but he does curse the day of his birth. His language borders on blasphemy, yet God does not condemn him. Instead, it is Job's friends, who offer conventional, pious explanations for his suffering, whom God ultimately rebukes.

Job's lament creates space for faithful protest where he teaches through his life the upcoming generation till date to look at God in every situation how hard it might be rather than looking at how complicated the situation seems to be. There are no acts of disbelief, but of bold engagement. Job refuses to accept easy answers, and in doing so, he honors a relationship with God that is honest and sometimes painful.

Furthermore, Job challenges the prevailing theological assumptions of his day, particularly the doctrine of retributive justice, the belief that righteousness is always rewarded and sin always punished. His suffering contradicts this framework, and his lament exposes its insufficiency. In this way, Job becomes a theological reformer within the text, opening a space where lived experience can challenge and refine inherited beliefs. Finally, Job's protest underscores the dignity of the sufferer. By refusing to remain silent in his pain, Job affirms his personal and spiritual agency. His voice becomes a model for all who suffer unjustly, a witness that insists on being heard, even when the heavens appear closed. His speeches suggest that true relationship with God does not depend on unthinking submission, but on a willingness to wrestle our faith and stand for God, to question and to speak truth from the depth of affliction.

Divine Silence

In the whole book of Job, God seems to be silent or undisturbed. This silence, however, is not the same as absence. Drawing from trauma theory, particularly the works of Cathy Caruth and Elie Wiesel, divine silence can be understood as an echo chamber in which suffering speaks and is heard. In Wiesel's writings, especially, *Night*, God's silence during the Holocaust becomes a defining spiritual experience, shaping a theology that holds both faith and protest in tension. Silence of God through the book of Job becomes a theological space in which the sufferer is invited to articulate pain without interruption. Job's cries echo through this silence, and it is only after Job has fully expressed his anguish that God finally speaks.

God seems to be silent in for a while when Job was facing the chaos in his life. Why was God silent? Was He not there when Job underwent the chaos? Of course, God was among and amidst all the chaos which Job faced, in fact, without God's permission all this chaos would not have happened to Job. So why was God silent after giving Job the greatest loss ever? God remained silent because He knew Job was able to sustain his faith in Him irrespective of what was going in and around him and his family. "...but God is faithful..." Of course, God allows an individual like Job to be troubled and tempted. But He never leaves the side of the same individual who is being tempted. Rather, God stays by the side of the one being tempted and helps the individual to come out or overcome the trouble or the chaos at the appropriate time which God has already fixed and directs us the same way.

So, what does the silence of God teach any individual? Like Job, any individual might have experienced the concept of not feeling God by their side in any situations of their life, through His silence and presence in the troubles or temptations or chaos that happen in an individual's life, God wants each and every one to hold on to Him patiently with all the faith in Him expecting least from the hands of humans but being assured that God's righteous right hand will never leave or forsake any individual irrespective of religion, caste, color, gender, etc., which we humans have created categories to identify ourselves.

The answer from God

God's response to Job in chapters thirty-eight to forty-one in the book of Job is majestic and enigmatic. Rather than explaining Job's suffering, God questions Job: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" These questions have been read both as divine evasion and as an invitation to humility. Yet, the significance lies not in the content of the answers, but in the act of response itself. God breaks the silence.

Job is not ignored. However, Job is not condemned for his protest, he is affirmed. The very fact that God engages with Job after his bitter outcries validates the legitimacy of protest within the faith.

This divine encounter from the whirlwind, through which God talks to Job can be seen as a moment of revelation, not of resolution. God does not justify Job's suffering, but redirects his attention toward the vast complexity and grandeur of creation. In doing so, God reminds Job, and the reader of the book of Job that divine purposes often transcend human comprehension. This is not a dismissal of Job's pain but an invitation into a deeper relationship where mystery, not certainly, sustains faith. In this light, God's whirlwind speech functions not as an answer in the conventional sense, but as a reaffirmation of divine presence and a call to humility and awe. The swift from courtroom debate to cosmic vision transforms Job's complaint into a doorway for spiritual renewal.

The Healing through the silence of God

Recovering from trauma seems to be harder and disturbing the concentration to do any work in life. Cathy Caruth in her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) says that, trauma is an experience that has not been fully claimed or integrated, a story which cannot be fully told or resolved. Same way, Job's phase of life where he was full of wealth and suddenly losses everything including his own children and health leads him to the phase of trauma while enduring it as well. But he does not let go but he lets God. The book of Lamentation from the Holy Bible, chapter three, verses from twenty-eight to thirty says,

"He sits alone and keeps silence, because He has borne it upon him. He puts his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He gives his cheek to Him who smites him: he is filled full with reproach."

An individual should not blame God for the problem, neither should he complain about his woeful situation, but instead keep silence and bear it with patience, believing that most surely the Lord will come to our rescue and deliver. Also, the individual will learn the lesson that the affliction is designed to teach, thereby, coming out the better man for the trial. The above scripture words “He puts his mouth in the dust” is an oriental manner of expressing submission, which is one of the lessons the Holy Spirit desires to teach. Even though Job was ridiculed by others, still, he knew that Lord is in control, and that victory most assuredly will come.

God allows trials and temptations into an individual’s life, to bring out the real character within us. Like how the fire refines the gold, so does God refine an individual’s life to bring out the best in the same individual which they themselves know not that they possess. For example, the quality of sustaining through hardships is difficult but through God’s grace, it is easy for an individual to sustain. God wants to intervene into each and every person’s life for which God makes people to be alone, face trials, put the trust fully in God instead of man, makes a person aloof and teaches the person who God really is. The book of James chapter one and verses two and three says, “*My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.*” which says that the temptation stays for a while for us to be pruned by the help of God. Therefore, whenever a person is tempted, it is counted on God as joy by which God establishes His strength and power to the individual to sustain and endure the temptation no matter what kind of temptation an individual faces. One last thing to remember when an individual is allowed to be tempted is that, God has chosen the individual to undergo some temptation through which that individual can pray for others who are suffering of the same. The Holy Bible says in the book of Second Corinthians chapter one and verse four, “*Who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*”

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