

Eric Butterworth Speaks

Essay #22
JOB'S INSIDE JOB

In Tennyson's "Ancient Sage," we find the words, "My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,/ So dark that men cry out against the heavens./ Who knows but that the darkness is in men?" This is a fundamental truth, of course, but there are times when it is pretty hard to accept because we are preoccupied with feeling sorry for ourselves. Like Job we are asking, "Why? Why did this come to me?"

The Book of Job is really a play, with a prologue and an epilogue. In it Job was the very model of a pious, prosperous man, with his flocks of sheep and his large, happy family, and as it says he "feared God and turned away from evil." In a figurative heavenly council, Satan says that Job is pious only because he has been blessed, and that he would renounce God if his possessions and good fortune were to be taken from him, so Satan is permitted to deprive Job of all of it, including his health and the lives of his children.

As an adversary, Satan's role is to represent something akin to the the wrestler who struggled with Jacob in the night. In each case what appeared to be a great evil was striven with by a man until it appeared at last as a great good. If Job had been left alone by the adversary to live out his life in peace and security, Job would have remained a worthy and conventional man, honoured and self-satisfied, but the action of "Satan" forced him out of his safe piety into a hunger for the truth so great that it absolutely demanded satisfaction. Thus was Job done the greatest service of his life by changing him from a mere believer into an active seeker. Job went through a lengthy period of self-pity, feeling that since he had been a good person he didn't deserve the misfortune that came to him.

Just what do we mean by "good?" It has been thought of partly as keeping certain religious codes and adhering to moral laws or perhaps supporting a church. This is all very commendable, but in an orderly universe life is not caprice but the unfolding and expression of law. Job's bad experiences were not punishment for wrongs but demonstrations of the law of consciousness. Satan represented a state of consciousness in Job. He believe in error, in sickness, in poverty. He even feared it saying, "That which I have feared hath come upon me." The good suffer because in the spiritual sense they are not good enough.

Consciousness precedes experience. Without consciously breaking one of the Ten Commandments, unconsciously to entertain an awareness of evil as part of one's thinking will bring about suffering of one sort or another. Throughout Job's long struggle, he continued to justify his human, moral qualities and tried thereby to save himself. When eventually the light did come, he discovered that salvation could only come through losing Job. When Job stopped asking the "Why of Self-pity," symbolized by his conversations with the three comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, when he stopped trying to justify himself, then the way was open for the Spirit to try to lead him through his challenges into growth and healing.

This new step was symbolized by the introduction of the new character, Elihu, who leads him on the quest for truth, a quest for good. Elihu has noticed that the three friends condemned Job but offered no real remedy for his difficulties. Job had suffered; his three friends had too, and their mutual discussions fastened their sufferings in their consciousness. The truth is that that upon which we meditate will ultimately be experienced. Had these specialists in trouble gone on this way, so would their troubles. How often those who have suffered like to gather and talk about their troubles; how they have been wronged and imposed upon; who has been exploited the most. Experiences are repeated by acknowledged memories. What an important truth this is! Elihu had listened with patience to the pointless recital, then he interjected with a suggestion from a higher plane to meditate on that which is. Elihu said that Job had justified Job; the friends had condemned Job; Elihu justifies God. Job gets closer to the center of consciousness, he catches a glimmer of light which he is soon to experience, and Elihu succeeds in leading Job into a loftier way

way of thinking. Finally, through his inspiration, the voice of God speaks through a whirlwind, the symbol of the action of God within and as the individual.

Up to this time Job has been meeting the problems on the effect side, the appearances, the suffering, but suddenly, he hears the cause side, the action of that which is, his own soul, or individuality, and Job begins to lose Job. Job had to lose everything tangible before he could lose Job. Finally Job realizes, "I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained. Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore, have I uttered that which I understood not. Things too wonderful for me which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak. I will demand of thee and declare thou unto me. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeeth thee." In the end Job did just what had been urged by his friends, he repented, but not in the way nor for the reason they had advanced, but by changing his mind, altering his thoughts, correcting his consciousness. His repentance came by losing his life in order to save it. We are told then that Jehovah gave to Job twice as much as he had before, blessing the latter end of Job more than his beginning.

The question raised by the drama of Job, "Why do the good suffer?" is not completely answered. We are, however, carefully made to realize that the suffering is not by divine decree but rather by man's consciousness. We do gain this clearly from reading Job...that despite the suffering and chaos recounted in it, there is implicit the opportunity for growth and betterment. And in the final counting Job had twice as much as he had before.

In the play J.B. by Archibald McLeish, there is the same story in a modern setting. Theologically, this was a controversial play, but it had much to commend it whatever one's beliefs. After much interesting dialogue consisting of reasoning and questioning, J.B. says of God, "He does not love. He is." His wife replies, "But we do, and that's the wonder." This was rejected by some who saw it as forming the conclusion that the good suffer because God is not good, because God does not love man. That is not really what it says. The first statement seems to say to me that God is not loving as man is loving, that is loving one and hating another; rather God is love, and wherever love is, there is God. God is the source, the principle. God is the capacity, the potential, but man releases it through his love, his faith, indeed, his works.

We need to go on asking the question of Why, but it needs to be a Why of insight, not simply trying to justify ourselves or to feel sorry for ourselves. We should really be seeking to find answers in humility and in childlikeness which will lead toward the willingness to accept the answer and to profit by the experience. No happening is of itself either bad or good; it becomes to us what we name it, what we determine it will be. If we determine that all things work together for good, we will see good in things and will gain great blessings through them. Not only will we struggle to go through them, but we will seek to grow through them.

Hold with you Job's inside job. Remember that nothing ever just happens and that there are no circumstances unrelated to consciousness. Paul says, "God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able, but will with the temptation provide also a way of escape." No matter what the problem, no matter what the difficulty, there is an opportunity for growth in it. There is a growth possibility for you in each and every experience. This is the divine appointment for us, and we do not want to miss it. As Tennyson says, "Men may rise on steppingstones of their dead selves to higher things."