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**When Fast-Held God-Images Fail To Meet Our Needs:
A Psychoanalytic Read of Job Chapters 6 & 7**

In light of the deuteronomistic theology across the Hebrew Bible and in particular in the first and second cycle of Job (Job 1 – 21)¹ the character of Job comes to us as a subversive critique. As the friends of Job are adamant that Job's condition must be a punishment for wrongdoing per the deuteronomistic covenant, we witness a community unable and unwilling to deconstruct a deeply held image of God. Given the limits of this paper, I will look at one of Job's speeches in response to Eliphaz, namely chapters 6 and 7, in an attempt to analyze how psychic splitting both protects self and communal ideologies formed as modes of survival and yet perpetuates oppressive ways of living in the world. I will explore how one person's trauma and the way he moves toward wholeness through dismantling the sabotaging inner God image can challenge communal constructs and open up new ways of envisioning one's own self and one's relationship with the divine. I will make a case for how, through this speech, Job begins to articulate the effect rigid ways of living can have on one's own psyche, body and core identity. By showing first how these speeches highlight the theological and psychological tensions potentially at stake in the postexilic community possibly responsible for constructing this text I will then look at how these issues inform the way we in pastoral, educational or mental health occupations may understand the necessary and yet potentially oppressive God-images that dominate the professions we inhabit and communities in which we serve. Finally, I will suggest ways in which we might begin to assist in the deconstruction of such oppressive images in an effort to move toward health and wholeness individually and communally.

From the perspective of developmental psychoanalysts the growing individual works hard during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood to differentiate from family and religious systems of origin in order to establish a sense of personal identity and a sense of one's self in the world.² Along this journey are various stages of

¹ 1:5; 1:22; 4:69; 5:25; 8:4; 11:6b; 11:13-20; 18:5-21; 20

² For a more detailed understanding of development read Erik Erikson's brief summary of his psychosocial developmental theory in *The Life Cycle Completed* or developmental psychoanalyst Calvin A. Colarusso's *Child and Adult Development*.

individuation that require both the developing individual and the parent, guardian or faith community to negotiate new ways of being with one another.³ However, individuation can be a painful process both for the caregiver and for the child or growing individual. If the care giving system is unable to handle the individuating human in a way that allows for her “no” to be heard and received without shaming the child or giving the child fully over to her instinctual demands than unhealthy modes of being in the world and knowing of one’s self can get established. This growing child learns early on what is acceptable and how one receives reward. As more experiences of this kind are provided the growing ego splits as a means of survival. There remains the ego at work in the world interfacing with external reality referred to as the reality or central ego.⁴ Split off from this ego at work in the world is another ego that functions unconsciously fueled by repressed traumas or bound psychic energy that, without being brought to consciousness and actively dealt with wrecks havoc on the conscious life of the individual.⁵

One way a person can keep the central ego functioning in the world without too much interruption from the unconscious life is to seek solace in activity. In ritualistic abidance of law, extraordinary productivity or extreme intellectualizing one both shuts off the valve of the unconscious life and protects the self at work in the world from becoming overwhelmed by the pain of earlier trauma or the vulnerable and needy internal self that seems too desirous or hungry than one believes is acceptable to the external world.⁶ D. W. Winnicott talks about this as protection for the false-self at work in the world, the insistence on doing in order to keep from being, a way of protecting the hidden true-self that was never allowed to flourish in earlier development.⁷ Being, according to Winnicott is the crucial foundational experience in a growing human for all true creativity and authentic work throughout one’s life.⁸ If one is unable or not allowed to experience authentic being, which is experienced first in ultimate dependency upon a reliable caregiver, one is unable to develop a true self and unable to live truly creatively in the world. One seeks satisfaction in doing tasks, juggling many

³ Margaret Mahler, “On human symbiosis and the vicissitudes of individuation,” *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association* 15:740-763 and Rene Spitz, *The First Year of Life* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).

⁴ The reality ego according to Heinz Kohut, the central ego according to Fairbairn and Guntrip.

⁵ Different theorists describe this split in different ways. Heinz Kohut explains this split as a parallel narcissistic development fueled by the energy from the repressed grandiose self. Kohut differs from Winnicott, Fairbairn and Guntrip in that his theory is primarily focused on the selfobjects side of development under the narcissistic split as opposed to the object-relations theorists who describe splitting in terms of object relations rather than selfobjects. Fairbairn describes the split in terms of the anti-libidinal and libidinal ego. And Guntrip, following Fairbairn adds the withdrawn or regressed ego to more intricately describe Fairbairn’s libidinal ego.

⁶ W.R.D. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Routledge, 1952), 104-106.

⁷ D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Karnac, 1965), 140 – 152.

⁸ D. W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 39 – 54.

hats, pumping up one's intellect, even perhaps finding one's salvation in ritualistic acts rather than allowing oneself to genuinely and authentically *be* first, which would enable access to the true source of life and creativity.

I believe we can see the dilemma between Job and his God, and Job and his friends, through this analytical lens. Through perhaps a mode of survival or of warding off the vulnerable and needy internal ego, what we would call splitting in psychoanalytic terms, Job lived a ritualistically rigorous life (1:1, 3b, 5, 8). His insistence on obedience promised him safety and a long and fruitful life, or should have according to his friends (4:6-11; 5:25; 8:7; 11:13-20). The point at which this worldview began to collapse something new began to break open in Job. Throughout the first cycle of Job we witness first Job's silence and stillness followed by Job's outrage and then slowly Job's disintegration as his being is not allowed nor mirrored back by his friends.⁹ By taking a snapshot of the first few speeches of Job found within the book I will look at how Job's harsh and disciplining internal aspects of his ego have been projected upon God and reintegrated internally leaving Job with an accusing and shaming god-image. I will then look at where there are glimpses of his regressed and repressed exciting and needy ego bubbling up and how this is where he begins to make progress toward integration. Rather than isolating Job and using Job as a mere case study I will play with the idea that Job as a character is being used within this postexilic text to articulate a broader issue among the exilic community. Job is being used as a critique against the dogmatic rhetoric claiming perfect obedience and submission as a way toward salvation as seen in the Deuteronomistic tradition.

In order to articulate the nature of this critique, I will use W.R.D. Fairbairn, an early post-Freudian object-relations psychoanalyst, and in particular his discussion of ego maturation and growth. For Fairbairn all human beings go through a stage of infantile dependence and in fact may go through this stage at various points throughout life.¹⁰ It is a natural stage of development or growth in that all humans need to experience it, however one can get stuck at this stage and this is where one becomes schizoid or split. One may get stuck here at this stage of ego development as a result of his early experiences of not having his own love received by his care-giving object. Another reason is due to the experience of not having one's budding and, at times, impulsive self loved unconditionally. This stage of ego development is characterized by the need to incorporate the other, the external caregiver, as a movement toward ego strength. External objects are not seen as whole objects at this point however, but part-objects split into good and bad or loving and destroying reflecting the early ego's own internal experience.¹¹ In infantile dependence one simply desires to incorporate the other. Taking all of the other in, gobbling the other up in order to protect the good within and keep out the bad or sometimes visa versa. If one gets stuck here as a result of not having one's love and being valued by the caregiver then throughout life one

⁹ Job's silence is seen in 2:13, his rage in 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 16, and his disintegration in 16, 17, and 19.

¹⁰ Fairbairn, 34-41.

¹¹ Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude & Other Works* (England: Hogarth Press, 1975), chapter 1.

desires objects, things that can fill her but do not satisfy her.¹² The growing ego splits and the conscious ego that starts to take up residence in the external world is the central ego or reality ego. In this ego lies the idealized object. The external object that was bad, the caregiver who did not love or receive love, is internalized and starts to wreck havoc on one's internal world while the growing ego bestows upon the external caregiver idealized aspects. The external caregiver then becomes the idealized object one wishes she had while all the time underneath she internalized the actual bad object. Underneath this central ego lays the repressed ego comprised of the libidinal or exciting and needy energy and anti-libidinal or the shaming and oppressive energy. The libidinal ego is hungry, needy, it wants and desires, is aggressive and demanding. This is the primary one to get established during infantile dependence according to Fairbairn, and if its desires are held and negotiated in development it does not get stuck or repressed. In response to this ego the anti-libidinal ego is established and is characterized by the rejecting object and is often established based on the rejecting external object. This ego is angry, it hates the libidinal ego - the needy, weak, desirous and hungry ego - and wants to beat it up, punish it for wanting and needing too much.¹³ The libidinal ego is characterized by Harry Guntrip, follower of Fairbairn, as the regressed or lost ego because it was split off so early on and is kept under submission by the anti-libidinal ego rarely, if ever, to be found.¹⁴

Job had spent a lifetime imbibing the belief that if one serves God and is upright than one will be rewarded and if bad things happen there must be a purpose (1:5). Job lived this belief and taught others in this way (4:3-4; 29). Job's internal life was structured around such belief. In order to protect himself and his loved ones from harm he experienced an internal imbalance, splitting off the needy, vulnerable, and impulsive parts of his self living in service to the idea of perfection, and having had everything taken from him he began to notice this imbalance. Where God was felt as his protector before, when crises fell upon Job God became his enemy. In 6:4 Job says: "For the arrows of Shaddai are in me; My Spirit drinks their poison." Job had begun to understand God as the one responsible not only for his external trauma but his internal agony as well. Perhaps Job started to experience his previous idealized object, God, as his harsh and judging ego, the part of the repressed ego that, according to Fairbairn, continually punished him. As Fairbairn says individuals are unable to reject bad objects because they need them for their own internal equilibrium. He says,

"However much he may want to reject (bad objects), he cannot get away from them. They force themselves upon him; and he cannot resist them because they have power over him. He is accordingly compelled to internalize them in an effort to control them. But, in attempting to control them in this way, he is internalizing objects, which have wielded power over him in the external world; and these objects retain their prestige for power over him in the inner world.... he not only internalizes

¹² Klein, chapter 10.

¹³ Fairbairn, 101-105.

¹⁴ Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena Object-Relations and the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1969), 40-42.

his bad objects because they force themselves upon him and he seeks to control them, but also, and above all, because he needs them.”¹⁵

Job worked his whole life in order to ensure his purity but one may wonder where Job put all of his aggression, all of his desires, all that was perhaps not acceptable to this idealized image of God. It seems from the text, as Job had his possessions and children taken from him and his body bathed in disease and infection that his aggression, which had previously remained silent, perhaps deeply repressed as it was not acceptable to his internal nor his external framework, began to enter the scene. When Job first speaks in chapter 3 he curses the day he was born wondering why he was not allowed to be aborted calling for a reversal of creation.¹⁶ At the end of chapter 3 Job proclaims in vs. 25, “The terror I am terrified of has come upon me and that which I am afraid of has come to me.”¹⁷ Perhaps the very thing he worked his whole life to protect against did not prove a failsafe.¹⁸

What is striking about chapter 6 is Job’s vulnerability. In 6:5 he says “Does the wild ass bray over its grass or the ox low over its fodder” Job’s use of animals are animals that are vulnerable, weak and needy like the wild ass.¹⁹ Job’s use of these animals not only indicates his own vulnerability but also his innocence – the reason he is crying out is not because he is strong and arrogant or like a predator (like the Lions in Eliphaz’s speech) but because he does not have what he needs to survive.²⁰

Job has begun to let his libidinal ego -- the weak, vulnerable, hungry and aggressive ego out of hiding and he starts to call out to his friends in his time of need. He asks that God would cut him off or bring him to an end (6:9). Leong Seow suggests that the verb *batsa* is used by Job as a metaphor for hope.

“When one is “severed,” there is no more *tiqwâ* “hope”... In retrospect, the reader realizes that Job’s wish for God to grant him “hope” in v. 8 is not for the future, the way Eliphaz had been using the word (4:6; 5:16), but the very opposite, the end of a future, the end of *tiqwâ*.”²¹

¹⁵ Fairbairn, 67.

¹⁶ J. Gerald Janzen, *Job: Interpretation* (Georgia: John Knox Press, 1985), 61.

¹⁷ The translation of Job in this paper is based off my own work in consultation with C.L. Seow’s commentary in press.

¹⁸ Regarding 3:25, Robert Katz has an intriguing article discussing how this might be Job’s own internal anxiety – the terror that he dreaded coming from within – which relates in part to the ideas I lay forth in this paper about the internal repressed ego acting as an internal saboteur. Katz draws parallels from the Midrash that seem to support his argument. Robert Katz, “A Psychoanalytic Comment on Job 3:25” (*Hebrew Union College Annual*: 29, 1958), 377 – 383.

¹⁹ Seow, 692

²⁰ Seow makes a similar observation when he talks about the difference between the lions used in Eliphaz’s speech in 4 & 5 and the wild ass and the ox referred to in Job’s response. He says the animals in Job’s speech are the effect of not being provided for rather than the cause of their desirous hunger.

²¹ Seow, 694.

If Job's hope had in fact been linked up with the bad internalized object and become the internal persecutor than perhaps this desire to be severed is not as dire as it may seem but in fact a step toward growth. If we view it as Seow suggests that the granting of hope is an end of hope maybe this is Job's way of distancing himself from the internalized bad object and ending hope in the way he had understood it before – hope in one's salvation being found and experienced in one's religiously practiced rituals of purity and obedience.

In the next stanza it looks as if Job challenges his friends for their lack of true community or real relationship. 6:14 reads, "To the despondent steadfast love comes from a friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty." Job essentially tells his friends that just because a friend abandons God they should not abandon their friend. He calls his friends treacherous and vanishing whenever life gets too hard to cope (6:17). He speaks of travelers – perhaps a metaphor for his friends who have traveled to see him – that came to look upon him with hope (there is this hope again) but instead were disappointed – not necessarily in what they saw but in what they had believed before they witnessed reality. Job is utterly desperate for a witness or a mirror – for someone to see him, to look at him and recognize his trauma, his deeply felt injustice. Instead, his friends are seeking for Job to mirror back to *them* their ways of being that Job previously had lived. His friends are still drinking deeply of the rhetoric of punishment for disobedience and reward for obedience of the covenant and thus are not actually able to *be* with Job in his misery or hear Job's resounding NO to the injustice. The splitting Job experienced in his life up until this moment is still deeply ingrained in the life of his friends. In Job's hope to find comfort in his friends he instead realizes his friends had hoped they would find a mirror in Job – someone to affirm their own perseverance and religiosity.²² His life, it seems, caused too much pain for them to look upon. His life was emblematic of the postexilic understanding of righteousness in line with blessings and rewards bestowed on those that lived according to the covenant. If this life took such a downward turn, as Job's had, and his friends were to actually look upon Job they would be forced to engage with the possibility that their rigidity and discipline would also be called into question. Job begged his friends in vs. 28 – 30 to look upon him. Perhaps in claiming aloud his desire for God to cut him off Job has come to a new understanding of who he is and what his image of God has been. It seems as if Job begins to know, to know internally, that he is in fact – not wrong and not to be blamed for his calamity. And in claiming his own truth and asking his friends to look upon his life he is opening up a door to his true self.

In chapter 7, Job begins to challenge the ruling pedagogy or the entrenched god-image at work within the community. In 7:11 Job allows his aggression full reign at the

²² In using the term mirror I am referring to Kohut's concept of one's need for mirroring throughout life. In having others who can mirror us we are able to internalize our own selfobjects, objects that strengthen our developing and growing and at times fragile ego. However, one's compulsive need for mirrors and one's inability to internalize selfobjects causes one to live an impoverished internal life of their own and live in constant need of others to mirror him in order to feel real, alive and meaningful. For more on mirroring and selfobjects see Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 123 – 124.

disparity of the situation as he says, “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my life.” Perhaps the resistance of Job’s friends to enter into his pain allowed Job room for his aggression.²³ It seems, though, that it is his aggression his friends are unable to recognize or make room for, for such aggression flies in the face of one’s utter trust in the goodness of God’s ways. Since Job can get no comfort from his friends he tries to go to sleep, hoping his couch will comfort him and his laying place will lift his complaint but instead he is discouraged with dreams and terrified with night visions (7:14). When one begins to confront deep psychological splits often dreams are the way in which the unconscious begins to communicate. These dreams and visions can seem terrifying as they are confronting all that one has known as reality. While dreams signify a sign of health in that the unconscious is allowed space and recognition within some part of the psyche to communicate with the conscious life, it can feel terrifying. Maybe what we are reading here is the process of Job’s consciousness becoming aware of something deeper within, something that is being birthed, his own truth that has been held in submission for too long do to the shaming quality of his internalized god-image, prodding him toward perfection rather than toward wholeness.²⁴

After allowing his aggression to enter the scene and perhaps his confrontation with the unconscious, Job starts to question why he has been held or has held himself (?) to such perfection. In vs. 17 – 20 he talks about God’s relentlessness in expecting such perfection of Job and of humanity in general. This is where I argue we see how an image of God had become the internalized bad object, the harsh dictator not only within Job’s own ego structure but also seen in the larger community. As Job is beginning to pull the threads apart he is exposing his arduously lived righteousness in service to some internal God who is unrelenting. In Job’s speech the only way to escape is death. He posits that perhaps in death, in lying in the dust, he will be no more and if he is no more God will be unable to torture him. Fairbairn says the schizoid person’s wish to die is not really a wish to no longer be or live, but rather a wish to regress back to the womb to be reborn in a new and more whole way.²⁵ For Job, the way to rid himself of the harsh external dictator he experiences as God is to become no more, to die, to lie down in dust. He oscillates between gaining enough space to recognize the harmful and oppressive image of God, and conflating this image with his own psyche as

²³ In fact Jack Kahn suggests a similar notion in *Job’s Illness* chapter 5, (Kahn, 61-90).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that the word used to describe Job’s character and actions, *tam*, has diametrically opposed meanings within Hebrew. It can convey the meaning of complete or blameless and can also mean complete as in it is over, the end, referring to being finished. “Thus the root *tmm*, which is inherently ambiguous, simply denoting an absolute conclusion, gives rise to a well-developed semantic dichotomy. Around one pole are grouped the positive senses of perfection and completion, while around the other are gathered the antonymic senses of cessation, decline, and total destruction.” So one may wonder if Job was finished, was at his end, and therefore was “given up” by God to Hasatan because his days were already over or if he was given over because he was complete in the ritualistic sense of the world. Both have interesting connotations if we read this text in light of the postexilic community by whom it was constructed. Eds. Botterweck, Rigger, and Fairy, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Michigan: Erdmann, 2006), 703.

²⁵ Fairbairn, 271.

he says the only way to escape is to lie down in the dust. Perhaps echoing the hope that in death he may be reborn or may achieve some longed for wholeness he had hoped to achieve in his obedience.

The complexity of the Hebrew in Job leads us to believe the story is more complex than one may glean from the English translation. There are multiple voices, multiple perspectives and multiple meanings that can be derived from the characters.²⁶ One of the many voices we hear through these two chapters is Job's slowly maturing self. In the beginning we get a sense that Job projected all the good onto God and worked to maintain a sense of external validity for his righteousness. I am arguing this came from a deep internal split at a point where Job took in the bad object – the image of God that required rigid sacrifice and perfect obedience and exported the idealized object – the perfect God. This split created a dichotomy in his own inner life. Part of his ego was linked up with this bad object internally abusing himself and driving him into extreme perfection. Job's previous life personified a deeply entrenched God-image – one that required perfect obedience in order to enjoy reward. In beginning to peel this back Job began the journey inward toward his own true self. In this journey, Job did not toe the party line. He stopped doing, suspended his compulsive religious activity, and it seems in doing so opened up a new voice, perhaps his most authentic voice, inside himself.

I am not making a case for or against the goodness of God in this paper or a case on the side of Job or the side of Job's friends but rather trying to articulate for those of us in education, be it in the academic sector or religious communities, pastoral positions or health care professions to recognize what God-images may be at work within the psyches, religious practice, or relationships of people we serve. What Job has to offer as a story, and in particular Job's first speech in response to Eliphaz, is a way to understand on the one hand the damage done by God-images constructed from such a deeply split psychological state and on the other hand resistances to challenging one's concept of God or one's fixed religious practice. Rather than arguing that what we see in Job throughout the book is his own perpetuated splitting I believe this first speech gives some insight into the process that occurs once one begins to become aware of one's own psychic split and how one begins to make changes toward the path of healing.

However, what this story also shows us is the trauma that may occur when one begins to name the oppressive images and structures that have served as a defense against the more vulnerable parts of oneself. In naming the structures Job and his community lived by in his response to Eliphaz, Job was tapping into a deeply held communal belief found within the postexilic understanding of Deuteronomistic theology. What Job seemed to be looking for was someone to enter into his mourning and aggression with him, to recognize the disillusionment and to simply be with him. But Job's need to *be* rubbed up against his friends need to continue to *do* – to maintain their religious purity and practice or to find ways to point out Job's error - in order to keep from confronting their own internal splits, the ways in which they had projected

²⁶ Carol Newsom puts forth a brilliant and critical read of Job from a Bahktinian perspective, reading Job as a polyphonic text, in *The Book of Job: A Context of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

all of the good onto God and placed all of the bad somewhere else.²⁷ We might even say that Job became the placeholder for all of the community's "bad" for Job's life as it stood – seemingly forsaken by God and left in the rubble after believing he had done everything right – caused too much dissonance within the life of the community.

Winnicott distinguishes between his notion of the true and false self in the following quote:

"I refer to those people who have unconsciously needed to organize a false-self front to cope with the world, this false front being a defense designed to protect the true self. (The true self has been traumatized and it must never be found and wounded again.) Society is easily taken in by the false-self organization, and has to pay heavily for this. The false self, from our point of view here, though a successful defense, is not an aspect of health. It merges into the Kleinian concept of a manic defense – where there is a depression but this depression is denied, by unconscious process of course, so that the symptoms of depression appear as their opposites (up for down, light for heavy, white or luminous for dark, liveliness for deadness, excitement for indifference, and so on.)"²⁸

Or in referring to this last comment made by Winnicott and in relation to Job we might read, rigid religious obsession and activity instead of religious paralysis, apathy or worst – a void. Thus, the true self is often buried so deeply beneath the rigid construct of the false self that has learned to function in the world as a result of various modes of splitting in order to protect one's true self and one's being in the world. In the face of Job's trauma his false self constructs, constructs that had provided him with success and even led him to a certain place of authority in his community, had to be reevaluated. They no longer worked for him. The bold move on Job's part to speak and at times confront God and condemn his friends for not acknowledging the injustice and allowing the space for Job to reconstruct his God was a move on Job's part toward his true self. As his false self began to break open he was able to make more space, though the space created simultaneously allowed more pain to enter. The process of the false self being broken open is one that involves a journey inward and often a reconfiguration of external modes of being in relationship. It is here I believe we in academia, mental health professions and pastoral positions can learn something from the struggle found within the book of Job. By allowing space and time for people to be and providing moments to enter in with one another's aggression and mourning whether it be in writing a paper, working through issues during death or loss, or dealing with someone's understanding of grace in relation to his identity, we can help usher people into greater creativity as we allow them space to journey deeper into their own truth.

²⁷ A very interesting article summarizes a dissertation that analyzed Job through a Winnicottian lens, arguing that in Job we get God as the "good-enough mother" (a classic Winnicott term) who can handle our aggression and be destroyed and survive in order for both God and subject (Job and now those who read Job, primarily for this article he is dealing with men in particular) to change and grow. Nathan Carlin, "The Book of Job and Male Melancholia: A Bizarre Story about Hating Mother God and the Maternal Jesus, Featuring Mel Gibson," *Pastoral Psychology* (2007), 56: 121-141.

²⁸ D.W. Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), 33.

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