How tempting it is to reduce the themes of Job to the obvious :: Suffering as inherent to the human condition; the Problem of Evil as (apparently, after three millennia!) nexhaustible grist for the mill of theodicy, and Patient Faithfulness to God as the final test of the soul's nobility.

And how imitative those temptations of the very characters, Job's supposed friends Bildad, Zohar and Eliphaz, who wind up at the end of the tale getting cast not as his wizened helpers, but with the likes of Ha Satan, as his ultimate, if ineffective, adversaries.

And, in the face of the delicious complexity of this 100-years-in-the making epic, how presumptuous of any writer to propose that he or she has nailed it.

Yet, the beckoning of the Wisdom Literature is to exploration and conversation, so explore and converse we ought.

Of the apparent themes, the one that speaks most clearly is the notion of the triumph of faithfulness. But, between the alternating stylistic devices of soliloquy, diatribe, exposition and court room interrogation, it seems the writers are calling us to a deeper understanding of what noble faithfulness is.

The Patience of Job

In fact, with the self-professedly omniscient friends as foils, we see that it is NOT a blind *Faithfulness to* God which eventually brings Job to reconciliation, but a deeply seated humble and abiding Emunah, *Faith in* God. It is, precisely, NOT Job's deeds which cause his afflictions or warrant his success, but his (eventual) understanding that he is man, and God is God, and the Plan of God (yes, Big "P") is more powerful (and more satisfying) than the plan of man. And the Plan of God is for Job to seek not his own god, but the good of the Other. It is in the moment of prayer for his adversaries that Job is finally "saved," restored. His connected Yezer Tov is proved to outweigh his dis-integrated Yezer Ra, and that is the source of his Tikvah, an unbounded hope which proves to be the source of his happiness.

In the Covenant as Subversive Paradigm model of Brueggemann, there is here the boldest denial of the common "religious' assumptions of the "plan" and principles of reward and retribution. God is neither the vengeful deity destroying those who fail to honor him, nor the teacher handing out stars and lollipops to students who recite the "right" answers. Rather, God is the God of Relationship, not the God of doing right.

Job's is the triumph of Faith over Theology, relationship over authority. It witnesses the movement from a world-view of destiny and fate, where powers beyond human connection manipulate and dictate the Universe, to a concept of choice and progress, where humans take part in Tikkun Olom, the shaping and healing of the world. Job's story so well illustrates Torah as the ever-unfolding and organic/dialogic experience of God's conversation with Humanity, and Humanity's engagement with God. It is the perfect platform for the dance of Aggadah and Halakah, the crucible in which are mixed the graces of humanity and divinity. The mirror in which the B'tselem and the image of man reflect, reconcile and embrace.

As an integral part of the Jewish Master Story (some scholars place Job, the non Jew, in the company of Abraham and Moses as the quintessential trinity of scriptural figures) the tale of Job both informs and forms those who drink it in. As Elie Wiesel, in his essay "Job, Our Contemporary," puts it, "In him (Job) come together legend and truth…silence and the word…He belongs to our most intimate landscape, the most vulnerable part of our past."

Job's story is Mythic, but not in the sense of it being "untrue." On the contrary, because of its insights into such timeless and all-traditions-embracing questions, it holds the deepest of truths., bearing out the beauty of the Rabbinic wisdom: "The Truth is much too important to be limited to the facts."

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, in his "The Jewish Way," similarly extrapolates on the "truth" of story and ritual when he suggests that Shabbos is intended to be a play-acting of a Utopian future, just as Passover is a play-acting of the Exodus from Egypt)

Perhaps the most telling of the conversations between Job and God is in Chapter 38, from the beginning verses all the way through 39 and into 40, where Job finally "gets it."

In 38: 4, after a full chapter of Job's "reminding" God of who He (God) is, God retorts "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?" As if to say, "Listen, Mr. 'I'll tell God who He is.' I'll tell YOU who I am—not to put you in your place as a child, but to remind you that you fit into a MUCH gander context than your amazing (but inadequate) mind can comprehend!!"

God's intention here seems not merely to humble Job, but to remind Job, and us that, more important than understanding whether God is just or not, is observing that God is ever Present in our lives.

In 40: 4, Job attempts a response to God's declaration of omnipotence with his humble "See, I am of small worth, what can I answer you." And God's response is the anything-but-coddling "Gird your loins like a man!" It might have read "Job, you still don't get it! I'm not letting you act like a child and claim ignorance. Be a man here! Challenge me. Engage me. RELATE to me as the adult you are. I do not want your blindness: I want your vision—a vision informed by your observing the complexity of My World, and the anything-but-static place you hold in it. Don't be such a Wuss!!"

As the story ends, Job is vindicated, not because of his righteousness, but because of his movement from a place of "earning" relationship to God, to a place of simply "being" with God.

To be with God, one must observe, and see with the heart, not merely hear with the ears. It is this understanding that places Job in the Company of God, as "servant," yes, but not in the hierarchical structure of dominance and oppression, but the order of one who is cared for, and one who learns of what the household is about from the Master of the House. The friends of Job, in their assumptions of knowledge and insight, have been too arrogant to see themselves as servants—it is only Job who ends up speaking with TRUE wisdom by saying, in 42: 4: "I will ask, and you will inform me."

Even in the earlier chapters, Job's faith is stronger than the friends', more imaginative and adventurous, and, as a result, more exacting and painful. Job explores his way into God while the friends merely watch and talk. Job listens to the friends' words, but then goes far beyond it. He replies to Bildad's speech with a tribute to the magnificence of God that makes Bildad's

easy-to-talk-about deity seem puny and trivial.

As Job notes in 9: 4, God is "wise in heart and mighty in power." The Hebrew text of this verse yields several interesting insights. It is not God's superior intellectual firepower that interests Job; it is God's wisdom ***in relationships.*** In Hebrew thought, the heart was the seat of the will and thus of commitments. Among the mix of blessings and curses that have come with the Enlightenment and the Age of Science is that we tend to think of God's wisdom in terms of facts, propositions that can be argued, and impenetrable logic. The Tanakh sees God's wisdom operating in the dynamism of commitments and relationships, not in the stasis of rationality.

William Blake, G.K. Chesterton, Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross among many literary luminaries, have commented on Job and his ever-difficult dance with the question of human suffering . Kubler- Ross brought to the table the notion of grief as a staged experience, moving from Denial to Anger, to Bargaining to Depression and, finally, Acceptance.

In her "After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes," Dickinson describes how emotional numbness follows great grief. She speaks of it as a "formal feeling," in which the "Nerves sit ceremonious like Tombs"" and the "Feet, mechanical, go round." Confusion reigns as the "stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore, and Yesterday, or Centuries before?" Formality shows itself in incredible coldness and distance and hardness. A "Quartz contentment, like a stone" overtakes us."

But the dead weight of grief, experienced at first, will not stay bottled up forever. She concludes her poem, "As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow--First--Chill--then Stupor--then the letting go."

So it is with Job. The brutal assault on his secure fortress in the early chapters, first brought the mechanical response, "Blessed be the name of the Lord (1: 21)." Next came the hollowness and numbness as he sat for several days without speaking to his three friends (2: 11-13). Finally, in the third chapter, the torrent of grief comes forth, the "letting go." Now we get to hear Job, for real.

This early acceptance Job experiences is that of abandonment—and it is precisely this feeling of him abandoning his own life, and his sense of God's absence which casts him into despair.

The triumph of Job is that he realizes that he is in Covenant with a God who NEVER abandons, who, though not fully comprehensible, is fully accessible and never invisible, IF we make the effort to be humbly informed. As Albert Camus, claimed as devotedly by Agnostics as by believers, speaks it: "In the depths of winter, I learned there lay within me an invincible summer." Job indeed had his winter, and in the depths of it, learned that there was a summer—a warmth reached NOT through his focus on his own plight, but his identity with the plight of the others around him

The sin of Job, as was the sin of Adam, and perhaps of all of us, is the sin of thinking that we can see it all in our time-ingrained and limited perspective, To "have the knowledge of good and evil."

And the Redemption of us all is the willingness to truly see, as did Job, what is within our ken, and to ask each day for a wider view of that which is beyond it. As was the case for Job, it is in the prayer for and actions toward the saving of others that we find the warmth laden within the chill of real life. The trick is not to avoid the chill, but to move through it to the core of warmth that is at its heart. The quintessential Mitzvot through which the Other, and our selves, are healed.