

b. Herman Wouk's (Aaron Jastrow's) answer:

In Job, as in most great works of art, the main design is very simple. His comforters maintain that since one Almighty God rules the universe, it must make sense. Therefore Job must have sinned. Let him search his deeds, confess and repent. The missing piece is only what his offense was.

And in round after round of soaring argument, Job fights back. The missing piece must be with God, not with him. He is as religious as they are. He knows that the Almighty exists, that the universe must make sense. But he, poor bereft boil-covered skeleton, knows now that it does not in fact always make sense; that there is no guarantee of good fortune for good behavior; that crazy injustice is part of the visible world, and of this life. His religion demands that he assert his innocence, otherwise he will be profaning God's name! He will be conceding that the Almighty can botch one man's life; and if God can do that, the whole universe is a botch, and He is not an Almighty God. That Job will never concede. He wants an answer.

He gets an answer! Oh, what an answer! An answer that answers nothing. God Himself speaks at last out of a roaring storm. 'Who are you to call me to account? Can you hope to understand why or how I do anything? Were you there at Creation? Can you comprehend the marvels of the stars, the animals, the infinite wonders of existence? You, a worm that lives a few moments, and dies?'

My friends, Job has won! Do you understand? God with all His roaring has conceded Job's main point, that the missing piece is with Him! God claims only that His reason is beyond Job. That, Job is perfectly willing to admit. With the main point settled, Job humbles himself, is more than satisfied, falls on his face.

So the drama ends. God rebukes the comforters for speaking falsely of Him, and praises Job for holding to the truth. He restores Job's wealth. Job has seven more sons and three more daughters. He lives a hundred and forty more years, sees grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and dies old, prosperous, revered.

The rich flow of literary Yiddish halts. Jastrow goes back to the lectern, pulls the notes from his pocket, and turns over several sheets. He peers out at his audience.

Satisfied? A happy ending, yes? Much more Jewish than the absurd and tragic Iliad?

Are you so sure? My dear Jewish friends, what about the ten children who died? Where was God's justice to them? And what about the father, the mother? Can those scars on Job's heart heal, even in a hundred and forty years?

That is not the worst of it. Think! What was the missing piece that was too much for Job to understand? We understand it, and are we so very clever? Satan simply sneered God into ordering the senseless ordeal. No wonder God roars out of a storm to silence Job! Isn't He ashamed of Himself before His own creature? Hasn't Job behaved better than God?

Jastrow shrugs, spreads his hands, and his face relaxes in a wistful little smile that makes Natalie think of Charles Chaplin.