

# SILENCE AND SILENCING IN THE BOOK OF JOB

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**Abstract:** This study examines the concept of silence in the Book of Job against the background of the concept of silence in Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, in which the silent man is contrasted with the hot-tempered man. In the Book of Job, speech and silence are contrasted regularly. Silence is seen as a sign of wisdom and the fool must be silenced. The sage shows his wisdom by keeping silent. In contrast, the fool must keep quiet because of his foolishness. He must listen to become wise.

The Book of Job is not an instruction but instead a discourse on suffering. It relies on traditional concepts of wisdom regarding silence from the Ancient Near East and Egypt. It focuses on the function of silence and the silencing of the interlocutor in the development of the argument.

This paper analyses power struggles between different figures of the text, whereby one figure takes on a position of a wise person and places the other as a student. It claims that silence is decisive in these power struggles. It affects all figures of the text. Also, the editor takes part in it by removing Zofar from the third speech cycle and silencing Elihu, who disappears completely from the book. God, when appearing as Yhwh in the final chapters, takes on an active role in silencing men. Finally, Job falls silent (40:4; 42:3) when he acknowledges the superior wisdom of Yhwh. He not only gains a deeper understanding of God but this transformation also represents a new stage in the development of personal piety, as is known from Egypt.

**Keywords:** Job, silence, theology, wisdom, Ancient Near East

Silence has been studied extensively in Egyptian Instructional Literature and in texts of personal piety. Emma Brunner-Traut in her ground-breaking study on Egyptian Instructions and Coptic Apophthegmata distinguishes ten different aspects of silence (1979: 186). The silent person appears as a key figure in normative behaviour in the Egyptian instructions (cf. Brunner-Traut 1979: 176). Van Oorschot (2012) applies her study in his work on the Book of Job. While he discusses bodily experiences and eloquent silence as compliant actions of social behaviour and physical experience, this study elaborates on silence and silencing as key responses to dealing with suffering. To this end, the different concepts of silence in the Ancient Near Eastern and biblical wisdom literature are presented, the vocabulary used for it in the Book of Job is compiled and the theme of silence is analysed throughout the book.

## CONCEPTS OF SILENCE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WISDOM TRADITION

Two concepts shape the understanding of silence of the Ancient Near East and are also present in the biblical Book of Proverbs. The first concept is the silence of the student and the second is the silence of the wise. The aim for the student is to become a wise and knowledgeable person. He reaches this goal by accepting the superiority of the teacher and being attentive. Both are present in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.

### **1. The silence of the student**

The first collection of individual instructions in Proverbs 1–9 authorizes claims to knowledge by framing it as a father who directly addresses his son (Vayntrub 2016: 104). The learning success of acquired wisdom is not based on one's own experiences but rather on observation and silent listening<sup>1</sup>, that is, internalizing the teachings that form a person's character to fear God (Fischer 2008: 89). The father who teaches his son represents the old and wise man who teaches the unlearned (Prov 1:8; 5:12, 13; 6:20).

This frame is put in a royal setting and is commonly found in Ancient

<sup>1</sup> "You will make calculations quietly ...; let no sound from your mouth be heard" Anas-tasi V 23,4 (Shupak 1993: 168).

Near Eastern and Egyptian wisdom<sup>2</sup> literature since the third millennium BCE, as several examples show.

According to the instruction of Ptahhotep “No one is born wise.” He is “instructing the ignorant in knowledge and in the standard of excellent discourse, as profit for him who will hear, as woe to him who would neglect them. He spoke to his son.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Middle Egyptian Instruction for Merikare, the king Khety<sup>4</sup> instructs his son, Merikare:

Copy your fathers, your ancestors,  
See, their words endure in books,  
Open, read them, copy their knowledge,  
He who is taught becomes skilled. [...]  
Do not neglect my speech,  
Which lays down all the laws of kingship,  
Which instructs you that you may rule the land [...]  
Lo, I have told you the best of my thoughts,  
Act, by what is set before you.<sup>5</sup>

Also, the Sumerian Instructions of Šuruppak refer to a wisdom that is transmitted from the father to the son:

[Šurupp]ak, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land.  
[Šuruppa]k offered instructions to his son;  
[Šuruppa]k, the son of Ubartutu  
Offered instructions to his son Ziusudra,  
‘O my [son], instruction I offer thee, take my instruction,  
O Ziusudra, a word I would speak to thee, give ear to my word,  
My instruction, do not neglect.  
My spoken word, do not transgress.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out that the term ‘wisdom’ has been borrowed from Old Testament Studies and that it is more appropriate to speak of Egyptian Didactic or Instructional literature when dealing with the question ‘How should one live?’ (Lichtheim 1996: 261).

<sup>3</sup> Lines 42–51, translation by Lichtheim (1975: 63).

<sup>4</sup> The name of the father is lost in the incomplete papyrus copies, but it must be his throne name. Lichtheim 1996: 247.

<sup>5</sup> Lines 35–36, 138–139, 144. Translation in Lichtheim (1975: 99, 107).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from the Akkadian translation in Lambert (1996: 93). The Sumerian version is translated in <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section5/tr561.htm>.

Nevertheless, besides listening to the instruction, wisdom is acquired by consulting and observing “the ignorant and the wise.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The silence of the wise

The second concept, ‘the silence of the wise’, is based on binary thinking and stands for the applied wisdom in finding the balance between silence and speech at the right place and time. The silence of the wise does not mean to fall absolutely silent. Instead, it is a virtue of a person who knows how to control his affects. Silence prevents difficult and tricky situations, as one speaks responsibly and only when needed. In Egypt this was the case in the Instructional Literature throughout the millennia. The Egyptian Instruction to Kagemni already teaches the advantage of silence:

The respectful man prospers / Praised is the modest one, / The tent is open to the silent / The seat of the quiet is spacious. / Do not chatter (I,1–2).<sup>8</sup>

A wise person is able to judge a situation and react appropriately by speaking words of wisdom or keeping silent. The instruction of Ptahhotep gives advice on how to answer in the context of different relationships, namely to a person who is superior, equal or not equal. The advice for the equal is: “If you meet a disputant in action / Who is your equal, on your level, You will make your worth exceed his by silence” (lines 68–69; Lichtheim 1975: 64). Another piece of advice is: “Concentrate on excellence, Your silence is better than chatter. Speak when you know you have a solution” (lines 365–366; Lichtheim 1975: 70, cf. Crenshaw 1969: 133, n. 24.).

In the Middle Egyptian Instruction to Merikare, the king Khety instructs his son Merikare by contrasting the unwise speech of a hot-head with the skilled speech of a king<sup>9</sup> who stands in the tradition of his ancestors:

<sup>7</sup> Ptahhotep.

<sup>8</sup> Ascribed to a vizier of the Old Kingdom but written more likely between the late part of the Old Kingdom and the early Middle Kingdom (Lichtheim 1996: 244).

<sup>9</sup> Assmann (1991: 201) calls this part of the instruction “Reden und Wissen: eine königliche Rhetorik.”

The hothead is an inciter of citizens ... the talker is a trouble maker of the city. Curb the multitude, suppress its heat... If you are skilled in speech, you will win, The tongue is [a king's] sword; Speaking is stronger than all fighting... The wise is a [school]<sup>10</sup> to the nobles... Shaped in the saying of the ancestors. Copy your fathers, your ancestors. He who is taught is skilled.<sup>11</sup>

The instruction of Any from the New Kingdom teaches:

In a quarrel do not speak,  
Your silence will serve you well.  
Do not raise your voice in the house of god,  
He abhors shouting.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious above all that stillness is not silence, but avoiding damaging speech. One should not talk in the heat of the moment (Brunner-Traut 1984: 759).

Gradually, silence assumes a religious undertone and comes to mean the repression of one's own desires and harmony with God (Assmann 1984: 196), e.g. a hymn praises the god: "You are Amon, lord of the silent, who comes to the voice of the poor" (ÄHG 148 B15); Amun is "the protector of the silent man, the rescuer of the poor" (ÄHG 169,2).<sup>13</sup> A prayer on a block statue of Ramose states that a scribe of the king who has a patient heart and a character of true silence can be praised (Assmann 1994: 41). In the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope from the Ramesside Period, which has a common source with a section of Proverbs (22:17–24:22)<sup>14</sup>, the "silent man" and the "heated man" become the two central human types (Lichtheim 1983: 45), which are brought into contrast.<sup>15</sup>

As for the heated man in the temple,  
He is like a tree growing indoors.

<sup>10</sup> Another restoration is storehouse. See Lichtheim (1975: 107, n. 2).

<sup>11</sup> Instruction for Merikare 25–36, quoted from Lichtheim (1975: 99).

<sup>12</sup> Lichtheim (1976: 137), ch. 4,1. Reprinted in Hallo, Younger (1997: 111).

<sup>13</sup> Translated in Shupak (1993: 387, n. 62).

<sup>14</sup> For an extensive discussion of the relationship, see Schipper (2005).

<sup>15</sup> According to Shupak (1993: 160), this is the only passage in Egyptian instruction literature where both appear in direct contrast.

A moment lasts its growth of shoots,  
 Its end comes about in the woodshed;  
 It is floated far from its place,  
 The flame is its burial shroud.  
 The truly silent, who keeps apart,  
 He is like a tree<sup>16</sup> grown in a meadow.  
 It greens, it doubles its yield,  
 It stands in front of its lord.  
 Its fruit is sweet, its shade delightful,  
 Its end comes in the garden.<sup>17</sup>

Here the ‘heated man’ is contrasted with the ‘silent man’, but the logical contrast with the ‘calm-tempered’ is also held up as an ideal:

Considerate hearer, able doer.  
 thoughtful and eloquent,  
 calm-tempered, free of anger  
 a righteous one who does not plot evil.<sup>18</sup>

The motif of silence is common in the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Book of Proverbs (Shupak 1993: 167–175). In the Book of Proverbs, the hot-tempered man is a person full of wrath (Prov 19:19).<sup>19</sup> Every now and then the silent man as an expression of wisdom appears in the second collection of the Book of Proverbs (10–22): the silent man (Prov 20:5) restrains his lips (Prov 10:19; 17:27) and has a cool spirit (Prov 17:27). He is a prudent man (Prov 10:19) who speaks words of knowledge (Prov 17:27). He is a man of understanding (Prov 17:27) and self-control (Prov 20:5). Even a fool can be considered wise and intelligent if he keeps

<sup>16</sup> They are compared to a tree that grows in the wrong place (indoors, temple) and withers quickly, and a tree that grows in the right place (outdoors, meadow). The truly silent is like the second tree bearing double fruit. The tree-metaphor is also common in the Old Testament wisdom-literature standing for the wise and righteous man (Ps 1; 57:8; 92:12), but it is not linked to silence. Also, the negative image of a tree that does not last long is also known, namely a wicked and ruthless man flourishes like a green tree which is only a temporary phenomenon (Ps 37:35–36).

<sup>17</sup> Amenemope, ch. 4; quoted from Lichtheim (1976: 150–151). Reprinted in Hallo, Younger (1996: 117).

<sup>18</sup> Louvre C 167, stela of Intef, son of Sitamun, presents an ideal character and “culminated in the figure of the royal administrator who combined physical, intellectual and moral qualities in typified perfection” (Lichtheim 1996: 257).

<sup>19</sup> The LXX sees him as a malicious person *κακόφρων ἀνήρ*.

silent (Prov 17:28; cf. Sir 20:5). Contrary to this, the one who gives an answer before he listens brings folly and shame upon himself (Prov 18:13). This is also known from the Demotic Egyptian Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy, who fictitiously writes one-line maxims to his son: “Silence conceals foolishness” (Ankh. 23,4).<sup>20</sup>

The call for appropriate speech appears often in Ankhsheshonqy: “Do not hasten when you speak, lest you give offense. Do not say right away what comes out of your heart” (Ankh. 7,23–24). “The wealth of a wise man is his speech” (8,23). You may trip over your foot in the house of a great man; you should not trip over your tongue” (10,7). “Do not make many words” (14,12). “Better is muteness than a hasty tongue” (15,16). “Do not hasten when speaking before your master” (17,10). “Do not make many speeches before your master” (17,25). “A slip of the tongue in the royal palace is a slip of the helm at sea” (23,10). Also, the Demotic Papyrus Insinger (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE) prioritises the silent man in some maxims: “Better the portion of him who is silent than the portion of him who says ‘Give me’” (Ins. 23,5) (Lichtheim 1983: 167) and teaches: “He who is silent under slander is one who escapes from crime” (Ins. 27,6). Nevertheless, he also knows that silence is not always appropriate: “Do not let yourself be called ‘idiot’ because of silence when it is time to speak” (Ins. 2,7). It is a well-structured work with chapters and titles indicating the content. The chapters are closed with a set of paradoxical statements (Lichtheim 1983: 109). The binary opposition of the wise and the fool is enlarged by the pairing of the pious and the impious (Lichtheim 1983: 48), expressing basically the same idea and adding a religious note that should also be considered for the Book of Job<sup>21</sup>, which might only be slightly older in its final composition.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Lichtheim (1983: 66–92). The papyrus EA 10508/6 is dated from the Ptolemaic Period 1st cent. BCE but is probably older. She further assumes that Ankhsheshonqy quotes an uncommon saying, sharing a source with Prov 17:28 and Pseudo-Menander: “Silence is good at all times; even a fool, if silent, is deemed wise (Pseudo-Menander no. 55)” (p. 47).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. the motif of weighing the heart, reflected in the ‘oath of clearing’ (31:6), and already known from the Book of the Dead, appears in Papyrus Insinger in a religious context: “The god lays the heart on the scales opposite the weight. He knows the impious man and the pious man by his heart” (Ins. 5,7–8).

<sup>22</sup> The etymology of the Egyptian term *gr* for the wise follows the same line. In the instructional literature it signifies silence as a modest restraint in the interpersonal sphere, but in the later texts of personal piety it signifies a humble attitude towards the deity. Cf. Assmann (1979: 23, n. 33).

## EXPRESSIONS OF SILENCE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The examples in the preceding section were taken from didactic literature. Even if the Book of Job quotes proverbs and other wisdom sayings regularly and abundantly, it serves another purpose. It belongs to speculative wisdom, delving into the problem of suffering and divine justice, presented—besides the frame narrative—as poetry in a dialogical form. The Book of Job is not an instruction on silence, but rather an application of it. Therefore, the subject of silence has to be addressed as a topic. Various aspects of silence are analysed on the basis of vocabulary and verbal or gestural expressions.

### 1. Vocabulary

Terms for silence used in the Book of Job are:

#### חרש II

In the Book of Job, the root חרש II is always used in the Hifil as “be silent, cease speaking, make silent” (DCH 3 2011: 323). Here, silence is not only contrasted with speaking, but also requires listening. In this respect, Yhwh in his answer to Job boasts about his creature, Behemoth, and states vehemently that he will not stay silent (41:4). Job addresses his friends to be silent, as that would be their wisdom (13:5). He commands them to remain silent and let him speak (13:13). In contrast, Elihu demands silence and attention from Job (33:1) and Zofar rebukes him: “Should your idle talk silence men?” (11:3).

When Job says to Eliphaz: “Teach me, and I will be silent” (6:24), he seems to be ready in his distress to be taught by his friends<sup>23</sup> about how he has gone astray. It is only at first glance that he gives Eliphaz an opportunity to reply<sup>24</sup> because he goes on to challenge Eliphaz, showing him his errors and defending his innocence verbosely. In another instance, he argues in juridical terms that he would be silent and die if somebody were to bring a case against him (13:19), making it very clear that there is nobody.

The self-confident Elihu sees himself as Job’s spokesman before God (32:6–10). He is convinced that he has an answer for Job and therefore

<sup>23</sup> Note the Hifil imperative masculine plural הורוני of the root דרה.

<sup>24</sup> This is how Tur-Sinai understands this verse (1957: 127).

urges him twice to be silent and listen to him (33:31–33). His statement is in accordance with the Egyptian concept of a silent student, as presented above.

דמם

This root is commonly used and expresses ‘to remain silent’ (29:21). More generally, it expresses ‘to rest, to be still’ (30:27). In the context of his oath of clearing, Job confesses that he would be guilty if he had hidden himself and remained silent, but he did not. Instead he calls out to be heard and complains about God’s silence (31:30–35).<sup>25</sup>

שקט

Job seeks relief for his pain. His inner state is not silent, not quiet. He is not at ease and does not find rest (3:26). God hears the cry of the afflicted. When God gives quietness, who then can condemn him? (34:28b–29a.)<sup>26</sup>

צמח

Some modern translations introduce the western idiom of silence in Job 23:17: “I am not silenced” (ESV; NIV) but צמח makes perfect sense in its literal translation: ‘put to an end’ means in the Nifal ‘to disappear, vanish’ (DCH 7 2011: 133).

נשה

When God boasts about his creation, he mentions the female ostrich to whom God had forgotten to give wisdom (39:17). In the LXX, it is stated that God had caused wisdom to be silent to her (κατεσιώπησεν), having read הסה instead of השה. The brood behaviour and physiognomy, giving the female ostrich a small head means that she is not capable of grasping wisdom and therefore make her appear a fool.

## 2. Verbal or gestural expressions

Silence is expressed by phrases and gestures and can be motivated by compassion, loss of authority, disturbance, fear and other reasons.

<sup>25</sup> In Ps 62:6 it is used in correlation with waiting (יחל) for God.

<sup>26</sup> Observe the Hifil “to quiet someone.” Most of the translations translate as Qal and miss the causative. If God himself keeps quiet, the opposite is achieved. The cries of the poor and afflicted die away.

- 2.1. Silence is achieved when “no one speaks a word” אִי־דֹבֵר [...] דָּבַר. This was the case when Job’s three friends came and sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights and expressed silence by ‘tacit persistence’<sup>27</sup> (2:13).
- 2.2. Answering has to do with authority. The one who has authority can demand an answer. Job experiences the loss of his authority as social isolation and silence. Job’s family, friends and servants keep their distance (19:13–22). Job called his servant in vain: “I called and he did not answer” (קָרָאתִי וְלֹא יַעֲנֵנִי) (19:16). In contending with God, Job experiences that God does not answer (30:20). Elihu admonishes Job not to contend with God, who does not give account of his words (33:13). Furthermore, Job recognizes God’s superiority and therefore cannot answer, even if he is right (9:3, 15).
- 2.3. A symbolic gesture for keeping silent is ‘to put his/her hand upon the mouth’ (cf. Judg 18:19; Mic 7:16.). This can be a gesture of respect, as when the nobles paid respect to Job in his former state of well-being (29:9). In the conflict with the three friends, Job calls for respect and urges his friends to listen to him: “Put your hand upon your mouths” (21:5). Later, when Job has listened to God’s speech, he shows the same deference and puts his hand on his mouth (40:4). In the presence, and acknowledgement, of God’s superiority, he makes this “gesture of deference” (Clines 2011: 1139) (40:4, 5).<sup>28</sup> When Job looks back to his former position, he recalls situations of people paying homage to him (29:7–10). The people refrained from talking and their tongue was stuck to their palate. They listened to Job expectantly and waited in silence for Job’s counsel because he was in a respected position, a man who sat at the city gate, a man of noble deeds and wisdom (29:11–21)<sup>29</sup>. Their behaviour can be understood as “a sign of submission to authority, but also a symbolic recognition of superior wisdom and piety” (Hawley 2018: 68).

<sup>27</sup> “Schweigendes Verharren” (Heckl 2010: 40).

<sup>28</sup> In the context of wisdom, it appears in Prov 30:32 and Wis 8:12. The latter presenting the whole conception of a person who has been taught by wisdom and has achieved an authority over the others who are waiting until she speaks.

<sup>29</sup> Typical metaphors of wisdom are strength—here expressed in the uncommon comparison to a bow renewed—long life—expressed in the image of the multitude of sand, in LXX understood as Phoenix—and nourishment—expressed in a tree with roots spreading out to the waters, cf. Ps 1:3.

- 2.4. To cease speaking is the simplest experience of silence. It signifies the disturbance or the end of a relationship. If words do not succeed, words may cease. In the Book of Job, it goes along with the non-understanding of Job's friends. Job addresses this non-functioning communication with his friends: whether he speaks or ceases to speak he does not find relief (16:6).<sup>30</sup> Finally, Job's friends have made up their mind. They stop talking to Job because of his self-righteousness (32:1). Yet, in the eyes of Elihu the three friends failed to answer Job. He gets angry because there is no answer in "the mouth of these men" (32:5). They have spoken with many words like the foolish. They ceased speaking because they have used all their arguments and do not have a word left to say (32:15). Therefore, Elihu overcame his fear to speak and break his silence: "I was afraid to tell what I know" (32:6).
- 2.5. Bildad expresses his frustration about the preceding talks with the polemical question: "How long will you hunt for words?" (18:2), accusing Job and probably also his friends (the 2nd pers. masc. plur. is used), or people in general (Heckl 2010: 111), of vain talk. The idiom 'to hunt for words', lit. 'set word snares', reminds of the seductive and persuasive woman (Prov 7:22). Silence would be the better option. Bildad takes over the position of a wisdom teacher who teaches his students using the term בִּינָה "understanding, discernment," often used in wisdom literature for the silent, attentive student (Prov 2:5, 9, etc.). In the following verse, the LXX differs from the Hebrew text and reads: "Why have we been silent (σεσιωπήκαμεν) before you like four-footed animals?" (18:3), again demanding a reversal of the relationship. It is Job who should be silent and listen.

## SILENCE IN THE DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The prologue and the epilogue form the frame-narrative. Therefore, they are analysed before the dialogues of the poetic part.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Weiser (1968: 122), who points out that several exegetes see this verse as a complaint about Job's suffering, which cannot be alleviated by speech or silence.

## 1. Silence in the prologue

Even if the prose narrative (1:1–2:13; 42:7–17) is intertextually linked to the poetic part (3:1–42:6), it is a unity in itself. Certain figures appear only there (Satan, Job's wife, sons and daughters). The three friends—Elihu is not yet in view—are transitional figures, appearing at the end of the prologue and the opening of the epilogue. There is silence in the heavenly court: nobody objects to the deal between Satan and God. God and Job are the main figures in both parts. Within the heavenly court there is a lot of communication, especially between Satan and Yhwh, but the people are not aware of it. Even if Job interprets his life in the realm of God's acting and blessing (1:21; 2:10) he is ignorant of the bet between Satan and God. There is silence between the heavenly and the earthly spheres. The possibility of a bet is out of view in the poetic part. The friends in all their wisdom cannot imagine such a reason. That is ironic.

### 1.1. Job

Job is seen as an integer person in every regard (תמים 1:1, 8; 2:3)—taciturn and pious person before God. As all the sad news is delivered to him, one messenger interrupts the other to deliver his message and Job is a silent recipient. Job reacts only when they have finished. He accepts the loss of his children and praises Yhwh<sup>31</sup> (1:21) in an eulogy<sup>32</sup> (cf. Ps 113:2). When the plagues hit him personally, he does not cry out. There is no lament or arguing with Yhwh, only acceptance. He rebukes his wife, directing her that one must accept whatever God sends, be it good or evil (2:10). His approach might appear simple-minded when compared to the complex discussion in the poetic part, but he reduces life to its essence, namely accepting good and evil. There might even be an intertextual reference to the Garden of Eden story, which also belongs to the realm of wisdom, where mankind is enabled to distinguish between good and evil (Gen

<sup>31</sup> Job is the only figure who uses the name of Yhwh. Besides Job, it is only used by the narrator who tells the story of what happened between Yhwh and Satan in the heavenly court scene (1:7–12; 2:1–7) and in the closing part of the book after Yhwh had revealed himself (38:1; 40:1, 6; 42:1, 6–10). The usage of Yhwh for God in the introduction to the speeches out of the whirlwind links them to the epilogue. That Job also mentions Yhwh in 12:9 is an exception.

<sup>32</sup> "The use of the name Yhwh by Job in 1:21 represents the formula *Sit nomen Domini benedictum*, which was an ordinary part of eulogies" (Cranford 1981: 127–128).

3:22). In his statement, Job takes up the *vanitas* motif and combines two ideas in a mixed metaphor, namely his birth from his mother's womb (cf. Eccl 5:14) and his creation out of dust (cf. Eccl 12:7). Nobody returns to his mother's womb, but the dust that man is created from returns to the ground (Tur-Sinai 1957: 20). The narrator confirms Job's integrity (2:10). He had "spoken about God constructively or in a constructive manner" (Nam 2003: 23).

### 1.2. Job's wife

Yhwh (2:3) and Job's wife (2:9) refer to Job's *תְּמִימָה* (wholeness). This is his upright attitude of righteousness and integrity. Wholeness is not limited to his moral behaviour, but may include completeness in all domains, including his physical integrity (de Joode 2018: 83). While Yhwh praises him, she denies that his wholeness has any reward. She blasphemes God by calling upon Job to curse God and commit suicide (2:9). When Job rebukes her to talk like the fools (*הַנְּבָלִים*) who deny God,<sup>33</sup> he sticks to his integrity. Her claim to curse God is a nihilistic approach that rejects the retributive concept (Fischer 2000: 35).

The LXX expands the scene as Job's wife reproaches him for waiting in vain for a change in his miserable situation. Then, a long time passes without any change in Job's situation. Both are silent and then his wife talks to him impatiently and pours a torrent of complaints over him, urging him to break his silence by cursing God and dying. Her many words characterize her as a fool. She is the personification of the talkative woman, as the wisdom saying goes:

"As the climbing up a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man" (Sirach 25:20).

### 1.3. Job's friends

In his distress, Job is visited by his three friends. They come to condole (*נָדַח*) and comfort (*נָחַם*) him (2:11). The root *נָדַח* means lit. "to shake the head, or to rock the body" (Hartley 1988: 85) and is a silent, bodily expression of sympathy. The friends are appalled by his miserable situation and sit silently for seven days (2:13). They do what good friends do. They come

<sup>33</sup> Witte (2018: 138) calls her a "Gottesleugnerin" (denier of God).

and remain. They stick together. They are passionate. By throwing ashes heavenward and sitting on the ground for seven days they show ritual condolence. They remain silent. They manifest their grief and compassion. This is the best his friends could do for him.

As with Job's wife in the LXX they let some time pass silently, but in contrast to her they remain silent until Job starts speaking

## **2. Silence in the epilogue**

In the epilogue one could have expected a resumption of the heavenly court, but this is not the case. Satan has not only been silenced but has also disappeared from the scene. Job instead is qualified by God as having spoken "what is right" (נכונה), while his three friends—Elihu was not part of the prologue—did not do so. This stands in tension with Yhwh's speech when he accuses Job in a rhetorical question of darkening his counsel with words without knowledge (38:2), as is stated: "The dilemma of the contradiction between sharp criticism (38:2 and 40:8) and high praise of Job by Yahweh (42:7) is noted ..." (Oeming, Schmid 2015: 85).

Finally, Yhwh addresses Job's friends as well, bringing them into a relationship with Yhwh, the God of Israel (42:7–9). They are silenced because they did not speak correctly about Job. Nevertheless, Yhwh speaks to them and orders them to bring a burnt offering. In this way, they give a cultic answer. Job is asked to pray for his friends (42:8). In doing so, he acts as an intercessor, something which his friends did not do for him. In this way, the conception of wisdom is transformed from the wisdom of the knowledgeable, who instructs, to the wisdom of the pious, who prays for others. This might reflect a new stage in the development of personal piety, as already mentioned above. From the Ramesside period onward in the Instruction of Amenemope and in hymns and prayers, personal contact with god is emphasized (Shupak 1993: 166). Piety is expressed as submission to the will of God, who demands a personal decision and obedience (Assmann 1994: 40).

The epilogue ends with the restoration of Job's old life, which has been blessed with more riches than before. His relatives and other friends—strangely absent in the prologue—came and "comforted and consoled him over all the trouble" (42:11). The time of silence has moved to a time of comforting and consoling words.

### 3. The theme of silence in the dialogues of the poetic part

#### 3.1. Silence and wisdom in Job 3–31: the three friends and Job

Since the prologue ends with seven days of silence, one would expect wise words in the following section. Yet, the opposite is the case. Job's words reveal, that his integrity (תָּמַם) does not sustain. His religious conviction, that accepts everything from YHWH, does not last. Job has changed into a desperate person who curses the day of his birth (3:1) as his wife provoked him (2:9). In this regard the change of mood, which does not match the prologue (Zuckerman 1991: 25), may be seen as the "culmination of the Prologue as well as the immediate introduction to the Dialogue" (Gray 2010: 137).

Job and his friends give extended speeches and fail to address the situation appropriately. The conception of the silent man, who is restrained and self-controlled (Shupak 1993: 167), is taken to absurdity. The silence of Job and his friends, followed by Job's subsequent speech, could have had a cathartic effect because of the mere act of talking itself. When Job speaks, he turns himself inside out, revealing his thoughts and emotions but also showing deep despair instead of humbly accepting his fate.

If this is contrasted with his accepting answer in the prologue (1:21), it appears as if it had come to his lips too quickly without any mental digestion (Kaiser, Mathys 2010: 164). Kierkegaard had already criticised this quick and superficial answer as showing no compassion to the suffering, stating with a cynical undertone that this phrase is no more than saying 'Bless you' to somebody who sneezes (1955: 68).

Zuckerman (1991: 97) summarizes the transformation of "Job the Silent" into "Job the Verbose":

This Job the Silent was therefore a natural target for the author of the Poem to turn inside out. Hence, when he decided to convert Job into Anti-Job, he looked for a literary form that would allow him to transform a figure previously known for his taciturn piety into an articulate speechmaker who could opine over his woeful situation at length.

The same is the case for the three friends and later Elihu as well. They differ only in perspective. The friends justify God in his deeds, while Job addresses God to get an answer (Jepsen 1963: 15).

The three friends are representatives of traditional wisdom, which is insufficient. Their arguments fail. Traditional concepts of wisdom are based on a Deuteronomistic deed-consequence relationship, representing a worldview of connective justice. Since the friends appear as figures with different personalities, perspectives and convictions (Nõmmik 2010; Fischer 2014), they are dealt with separately.

#### Eliphaz (4–5; 15; 22)

He is the oldest and has a lot of life and religious experience. In his opening speech he anticipates Job's reaction. Eliphaz' words will make him weary (4:2) and dismay him (4:5). His arguments are based on his own experience: ("I have seen!", 4:8; "This we have searched out", 5:27) and God's personal revelation, whose voice he heard in a whisper of silence (4:12–16; cf. 1 Kings 19:12). In his dogmatic view, he sees no other reason than that Job has sinned. He gets worked up in his argumentation and accuses Job of sinning, reproaching him with a traditional catalogue of sins (22:6–9). Job will receive no answer (5:1) and should turn to God (5:8). Eliphaz accuses Job of speaking many words a wise person would not and in this way doing away with the fear of God (15:4). Job, who does not accept the meaningfulness of his suffering, inevitably questions wisdom and the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). His lips testify against him (15:6) (van Oorschot 2012: 245) and he is arrogant as if he were the first Adam, a listener to God's council. However, the old wisdom is in fact with Eliphaz and his forefathers, and not with Job and his father (15:10). Job is quietened by the argument of old age as a sign of wisdom, extended into the genealogy of the past.

#### Bildad (8; 18; 25)

Bildad reproaches Job's talkativeness as a blustering wind (8:2) and argues that God has acted in accordance with his law. The death of his sons<sup>34</sup> must be in accordance with God's casuistic law. They have sinned and God has given them over to the penalty of their transgression (8:4). They were rightly punished by God. Bildad shows no compassion and represents a heartless justice and an individualized understanding of

<sup>34</sup> Bildad omits Job's daughters. They have no value for his argument.

punishment. Therefore, Job should seek God and implore favour from the Almighty, and he will restore him. Bildad's speech is full of irony: Like Elijah at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:27), he sketches a sleeping God (8:6). He relies on the tradition of the ancestors, not only of those who are still alive but also of those who have passed away (8:8). Job tries to silence him with his reply that God has done "great things beyond searching out, and marvellous things beyond number" (9:10). He rebukes the argument that God has acted in accordance with his law, with his experience that "it is all the same" and that God "destroys both the blameless and the wicked" (9:22).

### Zophar (11; 20)

Zophar is an expert in poetic wisdom. His answers are given in regular strophes.<sup>35</sup> He is aggressive in his words and blames Job for his long speeches. He is a 'man of lips,' a talker who attempts to keep others silent (11:2–3). Since Job proclaims his innocence, Zophar can only wish that God would not keep silent and would speak to him (11:5). It is anticipated that all verbose replies are ineffective (van Oorschot 2012: 245). Theoretically, he sticks to the concept of wisdom as making few words, but then he himself gives an extensive answer with reference to God's wisdom in creation (11:7–8) and the allegation of Job's personal guilt (11:14).

### Job (6–7; 9–10; 12–14; 16–17; 19; 21; 23–24; 26–27; 29–31)

In the poetic part, Job speaks more than his friends. He gets into a struggle for superiority so as to make them listen to his words. The silence demanded is not the silence of the wise but the silence of the student who needs to be taught by a superior. This power struggle shows the absurdity of the whole situation. It is not the task of the teacher to demand silence, but silence is the prerequisite of the one who wants to be taught. It is evident that the dialogues will fail. The controversial speeches of Job's poetry document the limits of speech in wisdom, cult and law. The rootedness of Job's argumentation in wisdom is evident, but elements of lament have been incorporated (Bauks 2004). Wisdom texts and cultic speech are used in a complimentary way, but Job's lament also fails and his complaints

<sup>35</sup> This is four bicola per strophe with substrophes of two bicola. Cf. Nömmik (2010: 278, n. 11).

remain without resonance (van Oorschot 2016: 246). His call for justice turns into the call for a court-case (13:18). Job speaks provocatively. Gradually he changes into a plaintiff. He calls for justice and since it fails to appear he blames God for being unjust. That he will fail is already evident from the *Irrealis*, in which this demand is put forward (9:15–18, 32–35). A legal speech from the perspective of Job's poetry is an impossible possibility. There is no tribunal (31:35) God his adversary could be summoned to (van Oorschot 2016: 247).

This is a new dimension in his argumentation and atypical for a sufferer when compared to the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom of the Dialogue/Appeal genre. There

the innocent victim must always keep his complaints within the bounds of propriety. He can wail about his desperate condition at length and in detail, but he must do so humbly while always maintaining a respect for his patron god for first to listen and then to act in the Sufferer's favour. ... he dares not speak too sharply lest he provoke the deity to anger ... he is ready to substitute praise for despair (Zuckerman 1991: 98).

Job is not only annoyed by his friends, who in their words have revealed themselves as miserable comforters (16:2), but is also worn out by a silent God who shows no reaction to Job's words, whether he speaks or is silent (16:6, 7). Job's final answer (29–31) closes the dialogical part and opens three monologues, namely those of Job, Elihu and Yhwh. In his final speech, Job proves his innocence (Oeming, Schmid 2015: 42). Job sees God as an enemy because he refuses to answer him and keeps silent (30:20–21). When Job's words come to an end (31:40)<sup>36</sup> the three friends cease answering Job, "because he was righteous in his own eyes" (32:1).

Job, his friends and God keep silent. This is a frustrating silence with no solution in view. Suddenly, a new figure is introduced—Elihu—who opens a new cycle of thought and who is then followed by God revealed as Yhwh, not keeping silence anymore.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase "the words of Job are ended" is most often seen as a redactional supplement indicating the end of the words of Job (see also Ps 72:20; Jer 51:64; cf. Jepsen 1963: 6). The phrase may, however, also refer to Job's integrity that was described repeatedly as תָּמַם (1:1, 8; 2:3, 9; 9:2; 27:5; 31:6). We may thus translate "Job's words are without blemish!" But this remains a mere suggestion (Oeming, Schmid 2015: 61).

### Summing Up: Silence and Wisdom in Job 3–31

Job and his friends agree on the concepts of speech and silence (cf. Hawley 2018: 106). The wise restrains his speech but teaches at the appropriate time, and he rebukes others who accept his superiority by keeping silent. The difference lies in the appraisal of the situation. That is why they all talk a lot. Job's ironic comment after the first round of speeches already says it all: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (12:2). He points to the proximity of their speech and the hubris of their wisdom. Once his friends have died this kind of wisdom will be silenced. And no one will miss it! Still, the speeches of the three friends continue until chapter 27. In these three rounds of dialogue, one dissatisfying speech follows another (Hawley 2018: 69). The whole conversation comes to a frustrating end. The friends claim that Job is disrespectful and lacks the wisdom of the knowledgeable, and Job claims the same about them. The three friends stand for established, conventional conceptions of God and wisdom, providing no solution to Job's situation. "God is shaped as the object of lifeless systematization, without being formed into a constructive portrait" (Nam 2003: 59).

Their approach lacks the personal insight and compassion, as Oeming and Schmid (2015: 98–99) state:

The friends' error lies in their objectified speech; they never speak to God! Instead of prayerfully speaking *to* God and wrestling *with* God, they practice theology as speech *about* God. Instead of praying *for* Job or *with* Job, they theorize *about* God. In this manner, they completely miss God, even if they do make theologically correct statements.

Traditional wisdom comes to an end. The friends' speeches fade out. Bildad's third speech only has six verses and Zophar's speech is omitted. The editor silences the third friend, Zofar, by cutting out the third speech cycle and replacing it with a speech of wisdom instead (28), anticipating the solution. Bildad's short speech is the transition to the great silence of his friends, who admit their failure (Kaiser, Mathys 2010: 109).

### 3.2. Elihu (32–37)

Elihu burns with anger because Job's three friends found no answer. His anger is repeated three times in the opening section, as if he would distribute his anger to all three friends (32:2–5). That cannot go well. According

to the concept of silence and heat, a person burning in anger will not be able to give a lasting answer. Nevertheless, since his anger turns against the three friends it has a devastating purpose. He is the youngest. It is the right of the young not be well-tempered yet. When Elihu presents his arguments his anger fades and he proves himself a learned theologian with carefully composed arguments (Fohrer 1983: 94). Elihu defends God's superiority (33:12) and refuses Job's accusation that God would not respond to him by stating that God would speak in dreams (33:15), diseases (33:19–22), angels (33:23), and acceptance of prayer (33:26). Elihu quotes Job (34:5) as part of his argument. He represents an active intervention of God in a deed-consequence relationship.

Even if Elihu had stated that he challenges Job to dispute with him (33:5), Job never replies and his presence can only be imagined. Job keeps silent. Even if Elihu brings a fresh perspective he does not have a satisfying solution. He defends God's justice and closes with a call to fear God. As the speech of wisdom closed with the fear of God (28:28), so too do Elihu's (37:24). Elihu's four speeches are only an intermezzo. He disappears from the scene and God appears on the scene.

### 3.3. God (38–42)

God did not utter a word during the whole conversation. He was perceived as "*deus absconditus*." Suddenly and surprisingly, Yhwh answers Job out of the whirlwind (38:1). This theophany and the sudden use of the name of God, Yhwh, suggest that the solution of the problem will be given now (Witte 2018: 76).

Job's friends, as non-Israelites, had used different terms for God but never Yhwh. From now on the conversation is between Yhwh and Job (40:1, 3, 6; 42:1), the one, who in the prologue had been sketched as a follower of Yhwh. When he speaks, he is revealed as Yhwh, the God of Israel. Why does Yhwh not keep silent? Whatever the intentions are, God disputes Job and accuses him of speaking "words without knowledge" (38:2). Yhwh does not provide a response to the speeches of the three friends. They had already been silenced by the speech of wisdom (28) and Elihu disappears as suddenly as he had appeared. Yhwh answers only Job. Yet, his speech might also be a self-defence, expressing that Job has challenged him. Yhwh's speech is an answer to Job's words. It refers to Job's demand:

“Let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing” (31:35). Now it is Yhwh who challenges Job to compete with him (38:3).

He opposes him with praise of his marvellous creation. This is done in the form of two kinds of rhetorical questions. The answer is evident: Job could have only answered each question with ‘No’ or ‘You’, that is Yhwh (Köhlmoos 1999: 328). Yhwh silences Job. He rebukes Job’s questioning and sketches the world he has created. Yhwh cares for his creatures and they communicate with him (38–39). E.g. he provides food for the young ravens who are not silent but cry to God (38:41). Yhwh is not defining and defending his view on retribution in a court case but has a superior relationship to his creation (Bauks 2004: 71).

For Job, Yhwh’s creational acts and his dominion are incomprehensible. This leaves Job speechless (van Oorschot 2016: 249). He shows his superiority and power in creation. Yhwh does not answer the question of Job’s suffering. He reminds him that he is an inferior person who would have to gird himself to answer God. Repeatedly, he addresses Job directly, partly with irony (Engljähringer 2003: 164), and presents himself as the creator of the universe. Thereby, he refers especially to the animals (Clines 2013) but not to the creation of humankind. The human being is not at the centre of his attention. Yhwh has other things to look after.

#### **3.4. Job—once more (40:1–5; 42:1–6)**

Job’s prior talk has obviously been presumptuous. Does Job see and accept God’s sovereignty? Was he wrong in demanding justice? God has no answer for Job’s suffering and Job’s questions. There is no meaning to be found in the suffering. The purpose of Job’s suffering is not to know God better,<sup>37</sup> even if it has an effect on Job’s perspective and relationship with God. No sense is suggested to be found in the suffering. Yhwh does not speak of rights and justice but brings Job to acknowledge Yhwh as creator (Köhlmoos 1999: 326) by focussing on Job’s hyperbole. Job gets the message. Job does not win his case, but he expands his understanding (Nam 2003: 163) and states that he is insignificant (ללל) and renounces the legal dispute. This he expresses by laying his hand on his mouth (van

<sup>37</sup> This stands in contrast to Witte (2018: 78), who suggests that Job discovers the meaning of suffering, which probably consists of getting to know God better.

Oorschot 2012: 250). He will fall silent and not proceed to answer (40:4–5). Job has moved from resistance to acceptance.

And as if this is not enough, Yhwh challenges him a second time to gird up his loins like a man and answer him (40:7). This time Yhwh speaks about his power in other realms of creation. Again, Job, as a person taught by God, gives only a short reply and admits that he had uttered what he did not understand (42:1–6), thus coming to a new level in his relationship with God: he has seen Yhwh's eye (42:5).<sup>38</sup> Job sits in dust and ashes as he did in the prologue. There it was his bodily expression of grief. Here, it might be understood as the bodily expressions of repentance. Therefore, knowledge of God is the beginning of wisdom. Job acknowledges the superiority of God's wisdom.

In this way, the conception of wisdom is transformed from the wisdom of the silent, knowledgeable man to the wisdom of the pious, who repents by sitting in dust and ashes, as he says: "I repent in dust and ashes." (42:6). Once more Job "has learned that he is not at the centre of God's activities, and this insight leads him to true wisdom" (Oeming, Schmid 2015: 83) or piety (Fischer 2000: 39–40). The silent Job is a sage who has found his proper place before Yhwh (Crenshaw 1969: 133). His silence means consent.

David Clines presents an alternative interpretation of Job's silence as resignation. Job had demanded a court case, but he did not get it. He understands Yhwh's speech as a rejection. He has no hope of having his case heard. Yhwh does not give him justice. Job "merely focuses on the process of the lawsuit ... He will make no further statement to his case" (Clines 2011: 1224). Žižek<sup>39</sup> suggests that Job remained silent because he felt God's powerlessness. It is an act of silent solidarity. God is neither just nor unjust: He is powerless. Even if such an interpretation is tempting in a modern world after Auschwitz, it is anachronistic.

As stated above, Yhwh's speech provides an answer to Job's demand of a case (31:35). Job is silenced because he recognizes and accepts his hubris

<sup>38</sup> The seeing of Yhwh refers to the natural signs of the weather-storm and is in line with how Yhwh is sketched elsewhere; e.g. he who reveals himself at mount Sinai by earthquake and fire, and the people hear this as God's voice (Exod 19:16–19).

<sup>39</sup> "Hiob schwieg, weil er in einer Art stiller Solidarität Gottes Ohnmacht spürte. Gott ist weder gerecht noch ungerecht: Er ist ohnmächtig. Und Hiob verstand plötzlich, dass bei seinem Unglück nicht er, sondern Gott selber vor dem Gericht stand – und dass er kläglich versagt hatte" (Žižek 2018).

of having demanded a court case. No reason for his suffering is revealed to him. The bet between Yhwh and Satan in the prologue (1:6–12; 2:1–6) would have been a rather cynical answer for the suffering.

## THE FUNCTION OF SILENCE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The topic of the Book of Job is not theodicy, but instead it challenges retributive concepts and promotes the topic of how to deal with suffering. In this discourse on suffering the subject of silence has several facets. It relies on traditional notions of wisdom, as already known in Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian texts. Partly, it uses similar expressions and metaphors for the silent and the talkative, for the wise and the fool.

It comes as no surprise that Job's fate made him speechless in the face of his own suffering. His silence is part of the scene of lament and ritual mourning (2:13). Silence as a natural expression of grief is not the main function of silence in the Book of Job. As in Egyptian Instructional Literature, it is an expression of wisdom. The Book of Job utilizes the conception of silence as an expression of wisdom in a power struggle between the different figures of the text who aim to silence one another, that is, to place the other in the position of the student and to assume the position of a wise man. Job talks the most. He silences his three friends. The shortening of their speeches and the lengthening of Job's speeches support the case. Elihu shows his acquired wisdom by keeping silent for a long time. He tries to silence (32:1–5) Job as well as his friends. Even if he advances the discourse, he does not leave a lasting impression. Human wisdom can add new aspects but cannot solve the problem. Elihu's statements are ignored without any reaction.

Finally, Job is silenced by Yhwh's overwhelming wisdom as revealed in creation. He recognizes Yhwh's superiority and assumes the position of a student. He appears as a wise person who has been taught by God and restrains his own words, a sign of a prudent, knowledgeable person (Prov 10:19; 17:27). Since Job has accepted his position, Yhwh continues to teach him out of the whirlwind (40:6–41:34). Thereby, his wholeness (תמים) might have moved to a higher stage of knowing Yhwh. His eye has seen him (42:5), as Moses saw Yhwh (Exod 34:33–25), and left

Job speechless before God. Therefore, he is obliged to pray for his three friends. This conception of the pious, who submits to the will of God and thereby represents a new stage in the development of personal piety, is also known from Egypt.

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