

Job's friends are far more than just supporting characters; their words and approaches to suffering offer profound lessons about how (and how not) to comfort those in pain. Let's explore each of them, their teachings, and what the Torah and sages tell us about their roles.

1. **Eliphaz (זְפִילָא) the Temani (יִנְמִיָּת)** - The "Traditionalist"

As we mentioned earlier, he was connected to Esau's line and came from Teman, a region known for wisdom.

His Teachings:

- **Eliphaz** starts by acknowledging Job's righteousness ("If you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you" - Job 4:7) but quickly turns to the idea that suffering comes from sin.
- He claims to have had a vision in which a voice declared: "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?"

(Job 4:17) - suggesting Job must have hidden sins.

- He warns Job not to trust his own righteousness, saying "the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out" and that God punishes those who turn from Him (Job 5:4-5).

The Sage's Perspective:

Eliphaz spoke **some truth** - the Torah does teach that sin brings consequences. But his mistake was assuming he knew the reason for Job's suffering and judging him harshly. The Talmud says he meant well, but his approach was wrong: he came to teach rather than to listen.

2. **Bildad (בִּדְלַב) the Shuchi (יְחֹשֶׁה)** - The "Literalist"

Bildad was from a clan connected to Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 36:20). He is the most rigid of the three friends.

His Teachings:

- He insists that God's justice is absolute:

"Does God pervert justice?

Does the Almighty pervert what is right?" (Job 8:3).

- He claims Job's children must have sinned to be taken (Job 8:4) - extending Eliphaz's logic to blame even the innocent.

- He tells Job to "ask the former generation" and "inquire of the fathers" (Job 8:8) - arguing that wisdom from the past proves the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer.

- He promises that if Job repents, "you will then have your delight in the Almighty" (Job 8:21).

The Sage's Perspective:

Bildad's mistake was reducing God's ways to simple cause-and-effect. While Torah teaches

that our actions matter, it also acknowledges that suffering is not always tied to personal sin - sometimes it tests us, sometimes it purifies us, and sometimes it is part of a larger plan we cannot see.

3. Tzophar (רפּוֹצ) the Na'amati (יִתְמָעַנִּי) - The "Condemner"

Zophar was also from Esau's line (Genesis 36:13), and he is the most harsh of the three.

His Teachings:

- He accuses Job of pretending to be righteous while hiding sin: "If you would put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no wickedness to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without blemish" (Job 11:14-15).
- He claims Job's suffering is too light for his sins (Job 11:6) and that God holds back from full punishment out of mercy.

- He speaks of God's greatness as a reason Job must be wrong: "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7) - using God's transcendence to silence Job's questions.

The Sage's Perspective:

Zophar confused awe of God with judgment of others. While it is true that we cannot fully comprehend God's ways, this does not mean we should condemn those who struggle with doubt or pain.

What We Learn From Their Mistakes

The sages identify key failures in how the friends approached Job:

1. **They Spoke Too Soon:** The [Talmud \(Bava Batra 16a\)](#) teaches that "one who comforts should first speak words of peace, then be silent and listen." The friends spoke more than they listened.

2. They Assumed They Knew God's Will: They imposed their own understanding of justice on Job's situation rather than trusting that God's plan is deeper than human comprehension.

3. They Made It About Themselves: Their words were more about defending their own beliefs than about comforting Job - they were upset that Job's suffering challenged their understanding of the world.

The "Fourth Friend" - Elihu

While not one of the original three, the **young Elihu (אֱהִיּוּ בֶן-בַּרַחַע) Ben Barach'el (לְאֵיכָרְבֵי) the** ****Buzite, of the family of Ram** appears later (Job 32-37) to offer a different approach:

- He acknowledges that suffering can refine us ("He wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal" - Job 33:24).

- He validates Job's pain while still affirming God's justice.

***The name "Buz" is directly linked to Esau/Edom too! In Genesis 36:23, Buz is listed as a son of Nahor (Abraham's brother) - making him Abraham's nephew. The land of Buz was part of Edom (Jeremiah 25:23), so the Buzites were kin to Esau's descendants.*

- The sages teach that **Elihu represents the correct approach** - balancing truth with compassion, and humility with wisdom.

Spiritual Lessons for Us

The story of Job's friends teaches us how to support those in pain:

- **Listen First:** Let people share their suffering before offering advice or judgment.
- **Validate Their Feelings:** It is okay for people to be angry, confused, or hurt - we don't need to "fix" their emotions.
- **Avoid Assumptions:** We cannot know why someone is suffering, and assuming we do only causes more pain.
- **Offer Presence Over Answers:** Sometimes sitting with someone in silence is more helpful than any words.