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THE BOOK OF JOB AND THE MODERN VIEW OF DEPRESSION

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The Biblical Book of Job is a wisdom book. Wisdom, in this context, refers to the intellectual discipline taught by the sages of ancient Israel to provide professionals with a realistic approach to the problems of life. Chapter 30 of the Book of Job is a key-index of ideas that, if followed through the book, discloses a modern scientifically accurate description of a depression that, at times, was life-threatening. There are practical clinical clues to distinguish between normal mourning and depression, as well as aids to the differential diagnosis of somatic symptoms that may arise from depression. A timeless model of the scope and limitations of the professional relation between patient and comforter is also presented. Part of the wisdom of the Book of Job is to use depression as an example of a life-threatening illness to provide an unexcelled standard of clinical observation and medical intervention.

THE PROPER DIAGNOSIS and management of depression may be instrumental in preventing suicide (1, 2). However, physicians may mismanage or overlook depressions in their patients for a variety of reasons. They may fail to recognize its cardinal features: (1) they may fail to distinguish between normal mourning and depression (2); they may fail to recognize that somatic symptoms can arise from depression (3); or a mutual alienation and hostility may arise between the patient and the physician that leads the physician to abandon the patient (4).

The Biblical Book of Job is a literary masterpiece and a wisdom book (5) that was composed between 500 and 300 B.C. (6). Wisdom refers to an intellectual discipline taught to professionals by the sages of ancient Israel in order to provide them with a realistic approach to the problems of life (7). The nature of the wisdom contained in the Book of Job is still the subject of intensive study (8).

In the Results section of this paper we show that Chapter 30 of the Book of Job is a key-index of ideas, which if followed through the book, discloses a modern, scientifically accurate description of depression that was sometimes suicidal. In the Discussion section, we will use the same key-index to provide illustrations and solutions from Job to all of the diagnostic and management problems of depression cited above.

We conclude that part of the wisdom of the Book of Job is to use depression as an example of a life-threatening illness to provide an unexcelled standard of clinical observation and medical intervention.

Materials and Methods

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

The research criteria of Feighner and associates (9) will be used for the diagnosis of depression. These criteria were chosen because of a published interobserver reliability of 92%, and validity of 93%, as determined by correctly predicting diagnosis at follow-up. The criteria may be divided into two parts; preconditions and content.

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The preconditions are: "A psychiatric illness lasting at least one month with no preexisting psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia, anxiety neurosis, phobic neurosis, obsessive compulsive neurosis, hysteria, alcoholism, drug dependency, anti-social personality, homosexuality and other sexual deviations, mental retardation, or organic brain syndrome. (Patients with life-threatening or incapacitating medical illness preceding and paralleling the depression do not receive the diagnosis of primary depression)." *That these preconditions were largely met in Job's life, is shown by the first two chapters, or prologue, of the Book of Job.*

The content includes "[A] Dysphoric mood characterized by symptoms such as the following: depressed, sad, blue, despondent, hopeless, 'down in the dumps', irritable, fearful, worried or discouraged. [B] At least five of the following criteria are required for 'definite' depression; four are required for 'probable' depression. [1] Poor appetite or weight loss (positive if 2 lb [0.907 kg] a week or 10 lb [4.536 kg] or more a year when not dieting). [2] Sleep difficulty (include insomnia or hypersomnia). [3] Loss of energy, for example, fatigability, tiredness. [4] Agitation or retardation. [5] Loss of interest in usual activities, or decrease in sexual drive. [6] Feelings of self-reproach or guilt (either may be delusional). [7] complaints of or actual diminished ability to think or concentrate, such as slow thinking or mixed-up thoughts. [8] Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, including thoughts of wishing "to be dead." *These requirements will be met by the material indexed in the thirtieth chapter of Job.*

TRANSLATION

our report is based on the modern authoritative literal translation by N.H. Tur-Sinai (H. Torczyner) (10). This translation is a linguistic study that provides detailed translator's notes for each verse of the Book of Job. Where significant differences exist between Tur-Sinai's translation and that found in the more familiar Revised Standard Version of the King James Bible (11), the latter will be indicated in the text by an asterisk (*), and presented in full in the Appendix (v).

The Tur-Sinai translation was chosen in preference to a number of others because, in our opinion, it gives the most accurate rendition of the Hebrew original. One key example will suffice: where Tur-Sinai translates "My bowels boil" (30:27), the RSVB has "My heart is in turmoil." The original Hebrew word for "bowels/heart" is *M'ei* which means bowels.

PRECAUTIONS

In order to avoid a forced interpretation, the content material for the diagnosis of depression and the illustrations and solutions of the modern problems of diagnosis and management of depression, will be derived exclusively from ideas indexed in the thirtieth chapter of Job. Chapter 30 of Job, in which Job himself speaks, is part of a poem enclosed between a short prose prologue and epilogue. In the poem, Job's misfortune is recounted and discussed by four comforters. There are frequent recapitulations and summaries of previous dialogue. Therefore, an idea indexed in Chapter 30 can be developed with appropriate dialogue from other chapters.

QUOTATIONS

The quotations used within the body of this essay will be brief. We provide more complete quotations in an *Appendix* when we think that they would permit a better appreciation of the context, meaning, and poetry.

Results

PRECONDITIONS FOR THE DIAGNOSIS OF DEPRESSION

The preconditions for the diagnosis of depression are largely found in the first two chapters of Job. The cited verses will be found in the *Appendix* (i).

Job is described as a well-integrated [1:1], prosperous man of high social position [1:3], who is concerned about the welfare of his children [1:5]. His wealth and children are destroyed [1:14-19]. He is stricken with a pruritic [2:8] nonleathal [2:6] generalized dermatitis †.

The length of his illness is presented as

So . . .

I was given moons of frustration
and nights of suffering were allotted to me [7:3].

This fulfills the preconditions for the diagnosis of depression: a well-balanced premorbid personality, absence of a life-threatening or disabling illness, and persistence of psychiatric symptoms for more than one month.

CONTENT OF DEPRESSION

A. Dysphoric mood.

(a) *Sadness.*

I go in darkness, without sun,
I stand up in the assemblage and cry [30:28].*

†Tur-Sinai refers to Job's dermatitis as scurf [2:7]. S.G. Browne points out that scurf in ancient medical writings refers to a dermatitis distinct from leprosy (12). The phrase "among the ashes" [2:8], which is included in the description of Job's dermatitis, refers to exclusion from society (13). In ancient Israel, leprosy was the only disease that made exclusion from society mandatory (14). Lepers lived in refuse or ash heaps outside of towns (15). Leprosy was believed to be divine retribution for slander (16). Job was, therefore, thought by his contemporaries to be a leper and so a sinner and an outcast.

Tur-Sinai (17) interprets the latter line as, "When I now stand up in the assembly of the people, I burst into tears". Job previously described his tears in

My face is scalded by weeping,
and on my eyelids is darkness [16:16].

Darkness in this context refers to gloom (18).

I am a brother to jackals,
and a companion to the birds of the desert [30:29]*.

Here, Job's voice is compared to the wailing of jackals, and the mournful sounds of desert birds (19).

(b) *Fear, hopelessness and despondency.*

It turneth upon me with terrors.
My nobility is blown away as by the wind,
and my salvation passeth as a cloud [30:15]*.

The first line of this verse describes fear. The last two lines are a recapitulation of the hopelessness that Job previously expressed in the depths of his despair.

My days are gone swifter than smoke,
and vanished without hope.
O remember that my life is wind,
mine eye shall no more see good [7:6-7].

(c) *Irritability.*

But now mock at me
those that are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to have set with the dogs of my flock [30:1].

This angry outburst is part of a sequence of verses depicting rumination and alienation presented in the *Appendix* (iii).

(d) *Helplessness and discouragement.*

Thou liftest me up to the wind,
and the height maketh me weak and dissolveth me [30:22]*.

Job feels that he is being toyed with by God, against whom he is helpless. This makes him discouraged and frightened (20).

The presence of sadness, fear, hopelessness, despondency, irritability, and discouragement characterize a dysphoric mood.

B. Other Criteria.

(a) *Digestive symptoms including poor appetite.*

My bowels boil, and rest not;
it came upon me in the days of my affliction [30:27]*.

Elihu, a comforter, during a recapitulation of Job's complaints extends digestive symptoms to include

so that his life abhorreth bread,
and his soul pleasant food [33:20].

Tur-Sinai (21) interprets this as, "His living soul makes his favorite food abhorrent to him like dirt."

(b) *Sleep difficulties, nocturnal pain and self-reproach.*

At night he scrapeth off my bones from me,
but my veins do not rest [30:17]*.

Because the veins, like the heart and arteries, were believed to contain the soul, "My veins do not rest" is interpreted as restlessness of the soul (22). This recapitulates

When I lie down, I say: when shall I rise?
—He meteth out at even—
and I am full of unrest until dawn [7:4]*.

In my cloth he disguiseth himself as an attorney,
as "my mouth" he clotheth himself in my coat.
He teacheth me: "(thou art like) the clay";
and I become like dust and ashes [30:18-19]*.

Tur-Sinai (23) interprets 30:18-19 to mean that in a dream, Job accuses himself of being worthless. This interpretation is favourably cited by Anderson (24) in his own interpreter's commentary on Job, based on the Revised Standard Version, and is recapitulated in a later speech by the comforter Elihu. The relevant lines are

In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falleth upon men, . . . [33:15]

Then he is chastened with reprimands upon his bed,
and the strife of his bones is continuous [33:19].

In other words, Job's sleep is disturbed by musculo-skeletal pain and dreams of self-reproach.

(c) *Decrease in sexual drive.*

I made a covenant with mine eyes;
how should I look upon a maid? [31:1].

Tur-Sinai (25) believes this verse to be a part of Chapter 30, and is interpreted as, "How should I look upon a maid: In my distress."

(d) *Recurrent thoughts of death.*

For I know (?) that thou wilt bring me to death,
and to the house where all living will meet [30:23].

This is a recapitulation of part of Job's opening soliloquy, a portion of which is presented in the *Appendix* (ii).

Poor appetite, sleep difficulties, self-reproach, decrease in sexual drive, and recurrent thoughts of death are five of the seven "other criteria." Five "other criteria," together with the previously described preconditions and dysphoric mood, meet the requisites for the diagnosis of a definite depression according to the research criteria of Feighner and associates (9).

As previously noted, the opening verses of Chapter 30 complete ruminations begun in Chapter 29 (see *Appendix* [iii]). Hopelessness was described under the section entitled dysphoric mood. Lehmann (26) observed that the combination of ruminations and dysphoric mood, including hopelessness, are certain indications of a suicidal depression.

Discussion

Chapter 30 of the Book of Job not only serves as a key-index of ideas leading to a scientifically accurate description of depression, but also leads to solutions of common problems in recognizing and managing depression. These problems are:

A. THE LACK OF RECOGNITION OF THE CARDINAL FEATURES OF DEPRESSION

Murphy (1) observed that two thirds of physicians caring for patients with depressions that terminated in suicide were unaware of the diagnosis. He attributed this to inadequate psychiatric training. Young (27) states that such clinical exposure is difficult to provide, because the intimate emotionally charged dialogue of depression cannot be demonstrated at will for clinical teaching purposes. Study of a dialogue written by a first-rank author and clinician, the Book of Job, could be one solution to this problem.

B. THE LACK OF DIAGNOSTIC DISTINCTION BETWEEN NORMAL MOURNING (OR GRIEF) AND DEPRESSION

Fawcett (2) observed that depression may be overlooked because the patient may have enough obvious reasons for normal grief or mourning. Grigorian (28) used the prologue and the soliloquy of the Book of Job to illustrate Freud's distinction between depression and mourning: namely, depression, unlike mourning, is characterized by a severe loss of self-esteem or serious self-accusation. This observation has been confirmed in a large study of widows and widowers (29).

After the prologue, which describes Job's loss of health, children, wealth, and social status, his first words are, "Oh that the day had perished wherein I was born, . . ." In this

soliloquy (see *Appendix* [ii]), Job attacks the very roots of his existence. This characterizes him as a depressive, and not a mourner.

C. THE LACK OF RECOGNITION OF SOMATIC SYMPTOMS AS ARISING FROM DEPRESSION

The fact that musculoskeletal pain and gastrointestinal symptoms are important presenting features of depression was introduced into modern medicine by the influential papers of Denison and Yaskin (30) in 1944, and Kennedy and Wiesel (31) in 1946. The relatively recent introduction of this concept may account for the fact that, according to one estimate, the somatic symptoms of depression are misdiagnosed 87% of the time (3). Yet, these symptoms were discussed by the author of Job more than two millennia ago.

The relationship between musculoskeletal pain and depression is dealt with in verses 30:17-19, which are presented in *Results* section B (b). The first line of this sequence of verses describes nocturnal pain and the next, insomnia. Because this sequence is surrounded by descriptions of sadness, it is possible that the nocturnal pain is causing the insomnia and sadness; or depression may be the cause of the nocturnal rheumatic pain (32; 33), as well as of the sadness and insomnia. The resolution of this diagnostic problem is presented in the remainder of this sequence in which Job accuses himself of being dirt. For a second time, self-accusation and loss of self-esteem are used to characterize depression, in this case as the cause of the nocturnal pain, sadness and insomnia.

The *Results* section B (a) presents gastrointestinal symptoms as part of the clinical description of depression "My bowels boil . . ." [30:27].

D. THE MUTUAL ALIENATION BETWEEN THE PHYSICIAN AND THE DEPRESSED PATIENT

Zee (4) emphasized that mutual alienation may arise between the physician and the depressed patient, which leads to abandonment of the patient. Chapter 30 of the Book of Job begins with the dialogue of an alienated man (see *Appendix* [iii]). The poet described the process leading to mutual alienation between Job and three of his comforters.

Job's first three comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to him out of great compassion and with the best of intentions (see *Appendix* [i]). Nevertheless, Job and these comforters become mutually alienated, and Job is abandoned by them

So these three men ceased to answer Job,
because he was righteous in his own eyes [32:1].

Some of the examples of the angry dialogue between Job and these comforters include

Bildad: How long will . . . the words of thy mouth be a lot of
wind? [8:2].

Job: . . . ye are all quack doctors [13:4].

The solution to the problem of mutual alienation is presented through a fourth comforter, Elihu. His first words addressed specifically to Job are

Howbeit, Job, I pray thee, . . . [33:1].

Elihu is the only comforter who addresses Job by name. Whereas the first three comforters confine their dialogue to intellectual or objective understanding (34, 35), Elihu tries to establish an interpersonal relationship. Further details of a correct comforter-client relation are spelled out as follows

(a) *Establish a bond of equality.*

Behold, I am God's, even as thou art,
I also am formed out of the clay [33:6].

(b) *Reassure the client that he has nothing to fear from you.*

Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid,
neither shall my pressure be heavy upon thee [33:7].

(c) *Listen to and completely understand all complaints.*

Surely, thou hast spoken in mine hearing,
and I have heard the voice of thy words [33:8].

This verse is followed by a complete recapitulation of Job's complaints. Some examples of this are presented in *Results* section B (a) and (b).

(d) *Assume responsibility on the client's behalf.*

If thou hast words, answer me.
Speak, for I desire that thou justify thee.
If not, hearken unto me;
keep silent, and I will teach thee wisdom [33:32-33].

(e) *Present a realistic prognosis.*

Lo, all these things doth God work,
twice, yea, thrice with a man,
to bring back his soul from the pit,
to be enlightened with the light of the living [33:29-30].

This is an accurate statement of the prognosis of depression (36). It is also clear that cure depends upon God's intervention.

(f) *Assure the client that help is available to obtain a cure.*

If there is with him a messenger, a spokesman,
one among a thousand,
to tell unto man what is right with him [33:23].
Then he is gracious unto him, an saith,
deliver him from going down in the pit. . . . [33:24].
His flesh shall be smoother than in childhood,
he shall return to the days of his youth [33:25].

These passages describe a comforter as one who works with a client in a positive way toward a cure, but accepts that the outcome depends upon the grace of God. Elihu's name is symbolic of this role, because it is another spelling of Elijah, the prophet who was the forerunner of the Lord (37). In fact, Elihu's soliloquy is followed in the Book by God's intervention, which results in Job's cure. *Because the outcome of intervention is dependent upon the grace of God, the comforter should be humbly aware of this limitation of his healing powers.*

(g) *The comforter should not overestimate his wisdom.*

Behold, God is exalted in his power;
who is ruling like Him?
Who imposeth upon Him his way?
Or who can say, thou hast wrought iniquity? [36:22-23].

Elihu, Bildad and Zophar accept the then conventional theology that all suffering was God's just punishment for sin (38). Here, Elihu states that God and His justice are beyond man's understanding and so Job's suffering is not proof of sin. The first three comforters are penalized by God for presuming that their wisdom equalled His [see Appendix (iv)].

Elihu's soliloquy provides an unexcelled example of a comforter-client relation that includes its positive attributes as well as its limitations.

Conclusion

The *Results* section of this paper shows that Chapter 30 of the Book of Job is a key-index of ideas which, if followed through the book, divulges a description of depression that meets current demanding diagnostic standards. Kahn (35) concluded that, from a psychodynamic point of view, the component of Job's illness was depression. We conclude from this that (a) the author of the Book of Job was, in addition to his many other talents, a master observer of disease; (b) the essential form of depression has remained essentially unchanged during the two millenia since the Book was written; (c) the Book of Job still is a fruitful source of insight into the nature of depression.

The *Discussion* section of this paper shows that the same key-index provides a modern practical approach to the diagnosis and management of depression.

A systematic presentation of a practical professional approach to a common problem fulfills the definition of wisdom. Therefore, part of the wisdom of the Book of Job is a timeless medical masterpiece that provides an unexcelled standard of clinical observation and medical intervention.

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