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MEDICAL SCIENCE AND BIOETHICS (NAREKATSI IN FRAMES OF BIOETHICS CURRICULUM)

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In this article we analyse the ideas of outstanding Armenian thinker of X century Gregory of Narek and their connection with ideas of V. Potter. The power of Narek as a remedy for diseases is explained also by the viewpoint of Word Remedy.

Key words: sins and diseases, the sense of pity and sense of shame, objectivation of the non-objective, self-criticism.

МЕДИЦИНСКАЯ НАУКА И БИОЭТИКА (НАРЕКАЦИ В РАМКАХ УЧЕБНОЙ ПРОГРАММЫ ПО БИОЭТИКЕ)

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В данной статье анализируются идеи гениального армянского мыслителя X века Григора Нарекаци и их связь с идеями В. Поттера. Сила «Нарека» анализируется также словесным лечением.

Ключевые слова: грех и болезнь, стыд и совесть, опредмечивание беспредметного, самокритика.

While talking about medieval Armenian thinkers we first of all mean philosophers, thinkers, who created works since the fifth century a.c., who appreciate wisdom

and who have had a great contribution in Armenian and international heritage. Among them we can mention the name of Narekatsi (Gregor of Narek).

In the works of this thinker we face the diversity of life and death, good and evil, repentance and remorse, truth and false and so on.

“The book of Lamentation” known as “Narek” was written by Gregor of Narek in Eastern Armenia in the X century.

There are no evidences in the world of simultaneous availability of three things in a whole:

“The Book of Prayers”

“The Book of Remedy” and

“The High Poetry”

It’s a unique work, that you cannot find such example in the world culture history [4].

Many scholars think, that if any book alike to “Narek” would written by any European or Western writer, it would gain universal acceptance.

And the first reason, that “Narek” is not as widely known and read as works of Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, Kant, Aristotle, Hegel etc. is because he has written in Armenian, a language that only a handful of people can read.

Foreign readers being acquainted with a small part of the translation of Narekatsi’s poetry wondered, that in Armenia, during more than 1000 years an incredible treasure is reposed named Grigor Narekatsi.

On the 12 of April 2015 in Vatican St. Peter Basilica HIS HOLINESS POP FRANCIS has proclaimed Gregor of Narek the Doctor of Churches of the Universe (Doctor Ecclesiae).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHkMeKLo_Mw&t=20s]

In fact, the Gregor of Narek is one of the greatest thinkers and mystics of world. He was an outstanding theologian, whose theology is not only an intellectual reflection on the God, but a dialog with the God.

Really, in the world of human culture we can find a lot of thinkers, who tried to explain, analyze, interpret, comment, understand and present the essence, sense of God, but Narekatsi just speaks with the God from the depth of heart.

With his “Book of Lamentations”, which is a human soul cry for mankind sins, Gregor of Narek remains as a plot of eternity.

The book known as Narek was written by Gregor of Narek a monastery in Eastern Armenia. Gregor of Narek was a high rank priest who was both a very influential cleric as well as social/political figure of his time [3].

“Narek” is composed of 95 chapters and over 10000 lines none of which repeats the other.

The work was highly valued in the middle ages and it was copied over and over numerous times. The “Book of Lamentation” otherwise known as “Narek”, is valued both for its artistic style and the important role it played among Armenians. Up to date thousands of Armenians maintain the belief that the book has a healing capacity and read it for be treated from diseases.

Narek was written for both glorifying the Almighty and for curing spiritual and physical diseases. Each of the 95 parts of the “Book of Lamentation” cures one disease.

During the history specific lists have been created which specifically names the diseases each chapter cures (In Armenian «Ban» which means «Logos», «Word» and «Idea»). These lists also indicate the number of times each part needs to be read for observing its curing effect. In the introduction of the academic publication of Narek (Yerevan, 1985, pp. 158–168) five similar lists of remedies are presented. A. Petrosyan, a scholar of Narek, adds another list from the manuscript # 8428 from the Matenadaran, the institute of Ancient manuscripts. This manuscript also indicates the number of times Narek needs to be read for attaining each of its curing effect [6].

“Narek” is a nicely written book which makes everyone analyze himself and honestly evaluate his/her behavior and values.

It leads the person to stand in front of God and in front of his sins against his/her body, his/her spirit, other individuals, the humankind and the Almighty.

Narek is written in Grabar, the ancient Armenian and is a melodic prayer [6].

It was believed that thanks to the fine style of its lines, it has gained even more power in leading people towards repentance, towards communion with God. Anyone who has read “Narek”, will assure that it eventually brings peace, harmony and love onto the reader.

As any talented, and moreover as any genius creator, he realized his eternity, so at the end of the book he wrote:

“Although me as any human being will die, but by the eternity of this “Book of Lamentation” I will live forever” [7].

This article is devoted to Gregor of Narek, a great thinker of the X century.

Why I have included this topic into the frames of Bioethics?

What connection, link can be found between Bioethics (born in XX century) and between the ideas, expressed by Narekatsi (X century).

In order to answer to that question, it would be better to take into consideration the ideas of ancient Eastern thinkers from China, India until Greek, Armenia [4].

In their opinion:

a. *There isn’t leg, a nose, feet, finger etc.* There is only a man who has body and soul and you should show a systemic approach to him.

b. Narekatsi as well as many other thinkers of ancient and medieval ages thinks that a real physician should not start curing the body until curing the soul.

It is not said in vain that don’t cure the body until you do not cure the soul (Plato).

- The fact is that the physician should treat the patient not only with medicine or by means of operation but first of all by his/her smile, behavior and by words, heart and soul. He should inspire faith and trustfulness in the patient and should make them believe that his only compensation and aim is to see patients recovered.

c. Do not think that you know everything, always study, study and study.

- Physician should think that even after graduating a number of courses he still has a lot to learn. Let's remember here that only one point was added to the Oath of Hypocrite in 1967 in World Congress of Deontologist in Paris [2]:

No physician should ever think that he already knows everything on medicine. But always bear in mind that still he knows nothing [6].

A piece of Omar Khayam's poetry confirms that idea:

*Myriad and much mysteries
I know clear and distinct
Life and what exists beyond it
More or less is known by me.
And now I
Standing on the top of wisdom
Have realized still
That know nothing*

d. Do not forget that you are a man, a mortal one and not GOD. So, You can constant a lot of scientific, technical and technological achievement. Each physician should understand the fact that he is a mortal with his shortcomings and mistakes, not a God, should not throw down the gauntlet to God to the mothers – nature and boast that he can create man and take lives of severely ill men. Today's technologies and scientific achievements can give such opportunities but as said A. Schweitzer: "If I have the right to pick up all the fruits to which my hands can reach" [1].

Narekatsi gives us an excellent example of a real man and a real physician. First of all a real physician should master his profession deeply and at the same time he should be very honest, balanced, clever and intelligent.

Narekatsi himself show the best example of modesty, of knowing his place and of not being arrogant, proud, just on the contrary always be self-critical.

The first thing to know is the self-recognition and self-understanding, the ability to analyze your deeds and behavior, and always treat yourself with self-criticism [5].

But how tell us about his wrong doings, about his iniquities Narekatsi:

*"If I were to fill the basin of the sea with ink,
And to measure out parchment the length and
breadth of a field of many leagues*

*And were to take all the reeds of the forests and
woods and turn them into pens,*

*I still would not be able to record even a fraction
of my accumulated wrong doings".*

Or

*If I were to set the Cedars of Lebanon as a scale
and to put Mount Ararat on one side
and my iniquities on the other,
it would not come close to balancing [3].*

Each person has the right to make mistakes but the most difficult thing is to find moral courage, force to say about it, to confess its faults and not repeat them.

Unfortunately, at present civilized persons not only confess with great difficulty but even do not confess at all their sins, even minor faults.

Moreover, we suffer from vanity and Narsicism, we try to justify ourselves by all means and blame others Yes, all are guilty but not me.

It is proper here to quote Garegin Nzhdeh's words: "try to find the reason for your misfortune, unsuccessfulness and failures first of all in **you** and only outside of you".

So, we face the distortion of spiritual consciousness which leads to many diseases and closes the way to freedom, abolishes ways of curing [6].

The power of Narek as a remedy for diseases is explained also by the viewpoint of Word Remedy [5].

The Word Remedy (Khoskabuzhutyun in Armenian) is the technique of curing the person with words. It was believed from ancient times that words exist by themselves, that words existed even before the physical objects and hence, their existence is more real. And because their existence is more real, than physical objects then they should be able to affect on human body and thus, if they can affect on human body, they can also cure the human being if used correctly.

In order the words to be powerful the contents must be well chosen and the person who uses the words must have great faith. In word remedy nothing but the *Logos*, the holy word and faith in God are used.

The attempts to cure someone with words that started thousands of years ago, now has changed into the practice of hypnosis and occultism, but "Narek" is neither a book of magic, nor a text were the luxurious words conceal the reality.

In fact, the opposite is true, its words force the reader to believe that in order to live well one needs to live correctly, that in order to live well one needs to discover the true nature of humankind and take responsibility for making steps towards curing his/her spirit, towards God and towards a truly Holy reunion with the Universal *Logos*.

Contents/ideas of "Narek"

“The idea of curing from diseases is mentioned in Narek numerous times. However, Narek and its curing methods are not comparable to today’s scientific curing methods”.

Its results are not comparable to the results achieved by any contemporary medical institution. These methods are in two different spheres of culture and are used for two different types of diseases: one for spiritual diseases, the other for bodily one.

Thus these curing methods are better to consider complementary rather than contradictory.

Narekatsi claims that he has written this text for curing the ills of **body** and **soul**: “*And may you make this book of mournful psalms begun in your name, Most High, into a life-giving salve for the sufferings of body and soul*” (Prayer 3, E) [7].

Narek offers mainly spiritual remedy. Its powers, as believed from early Middle Ages, was based on the power of the Word and Will of God [5].

Gregor of Narek relates sins and diseases. According to Narek, Human Diseases are a result of Human Sins.

Sins force people to live with a life not naturally designed for human beings. For example, avarice, arrogance, gluttony, betrayal, envy etc. are forms of behavior that are not natural to human beings. Thus when a person sins, he/she starts to behave in a way for which the human body is not designed for and thus the body gets ill. Because both sins and diseases are caused by breaking the Divine law, they both can be overcome by repentance.

Narekatsi claims that the non-objective, the word and will of God can be objectified, that is to get body and heaviness. Throughout his prayers he makes the same claim over and over again. All that happens in this word is simply objectification of divine word and will.

There can also be non-physical, non-objective pain, that of the sin. When someone sins, he/she is hurt already and it eventually causes physical harm. Curing the physical damage of the body does not heal the person as a whole [4].

Only the moral courage, the courage to repent and ask for forgiveness heals the person and cleans the person from sins. Thus, according to Narekatsi, diseases are nothing else but objectification of the non-objective, the will of God, the word of God, and to cure a disease, one needs not only physical means, but also non-objective, non-physical remedies such as repentance.

That is why it is necessary even obligatory to know and read Narekatsi, his ideas, to study his works and take example from him.

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