

A THEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF HUMAN WHOLENESS IN DEUTERONOMY 6

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This paper revisits OT theology as a source for describing human wholeness.¹ While the focus is on Deuteronomy, it is not intended as a historical description of the deuteronomist's anthropology. Rather, it is a theological construct of the whole person based on theological patterns and linguistic correlations of the Hebrew biblical text.²

This symposium raises the issue of the relationship between faith and health, which is fundamentally a theological question. What does it mean to be human and whole? Ludwig Feuerbach's infamous indictment, that the world has no interest for Christians since the Christian thinks only of the salvation of his soul, serves also to push the question upon us.³ Are Christians simply candidates for heaven who do not want to be left behind?

We live in a world of competing nomenclatures for describing aspects of human *being*. A Western world perspective, offered in 1948 by the World Health Organization constitution, describes a healthy person in terms of "physical, mental, and social well-being." In 1984 the thirty-seventh assembly added that "a spiritual dimension" should be included in the definition. This four-part division, concerned with theological and philosophical anthropology, is grounded in the thought of Francis Bacon.⁴ By contrast, in Eskimo (Inupiaq) anthropology, a person's physical being is capable of being transported long distances in a relatively short time, even to the moon.⁵ Again, by comparison, American culture is replete with old Platonic notions of the independence of the soul from the body. In the popular film *Ghost*, a benevolent, dead husband attempts to communicate love to the one who was left behind in unbearable sorrow. The person's spirit is invisible but finds ways to communicate love from beyond the pale.

That odd romantic comedy shares its basic definition of the human "soul" with *Webster's New International Dictionary*: "[The soul is] the vehicle of individual existence, separate in nature from the body, and usually held to be separate from the body in existence."⁶ Here we see a fundamental break between

the common English language definition of the human soul and Christian doctrine. Many theological students are surprised to hear that Scripture and the tradition do not teach a doctrine of an inherently immortal soul or the persistence of a disembodied spirit beyond the grave.⁷ Many are fascinated with accounts of out-of-body experiences at death's door. I would argue that this tendency in popular Christianity to believe in an unconditional spiritual eternity has negative implications for human (and environmental) health.⁸ If I am even partly correct, it is a failure of the teaching function of the church. We must be better able to articulate the nature of the human creation. What is a soul? What is a person?

Where in Scripture may we find a simple yet comprehensive description of the whole and healthy person?⁹ If we search the law, prophets, and wisdom of the OT, can we find such a description? The Jewish community has looked to the Torah as a guide to a wholesome, integrated life. Its 613 diverse laws and rich narratives address the details of healthy living, e.g., hand-washing, the use of latrines, low-fat food consumption, methods for slaughtering animals, marriage, and raising children. The descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have carried many of these practices into the present through both *halakic* (legal) and *haggadic* (story) traditions. This detailed approach to health and wholeness requires an invested lifetime. The law and narratives of the Pentateuch are *comprehensive*, yet they cannot be described *simply*.

The prophetic literature offers us a simple summary of what it means to be healthy and whole in relation to God. Speaking over several centuries to a society that had become corrupt in its worship and justice practices, they called the people to “do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8). This requirement, however, did not describe God’s expectations in detail. Rather, the prophets’ oracles of doom and salvation called the people to turn and seek again the source of whole lives: the true worship of God through the practice of justice (cf. Amos 5:21–27; Isa 58:1–14). The extreme sociological problems of Israel and Judah resulted in this singular beam of light, narrowly focused on the corporate life of the people of God. The prophets do provide a *simple* but not a *comprehensive* description of health and wholeness.

The Wisdom literature gives us a mosaic of the complexities of life through books such as Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. The preacher in Ecclesiastes attempts a summary at the end of his search for meaning. He suggests that the reader should enjoy family and friends, work hard, fear God, and keep his commandments (Eccl 9:7, 10; 12:13). He concludes in frustration (since all is “vanity”) after searching for a description of what one should do to be whole. He tries to be *comprehensive* in his search for health and wholeness, but his conclusion is not simple. It is *simply* frustrating.

SHALOM

John Wilkinson is one of the few recent biblical scholars to describe an OT perspective on a whole and healthy person.¹⁰ Working from his expertise as a medical doctor and a biblical scholar, Wilkinson concludes that the Hebrew word *šālôm* (“well-being”) is the best umbrella term for human health and wholeness. Under this rubric he includes five subcategories: *justice* and *obedience* are conditions of attaining *šālôm*; *strength*, *fertility*, and *longevity* are blessings of *šālôm*. He offers these as general observations from the OT narrative.¹¹

Wilkinson is not alone in using *šālôm* as a useful summarizing concept for wholeness and health. The word is now widely used in health ministries including retirement home names (e.g., “Shalom Home”), shelters, homes for the mentally disabled, and social service organizations.¹²

It is commonly observed that *šālôm* means more than the English word “peace.” It is certainly more than the “absence of conflict.” It may generally be translated and used to mean “well-being” or “health.” In the OT the first cluster of lexicographical meanings is “to be complete” or “to lack nothing” (material prosperity). The second meaning cluster includes to be “whole,” “sound” (as in the medical phrase, “a sound bone”), or to be “O.K. .” The third set of meanings refers to the safety and security of the weakest in a community (“Be not afraid”). Finally, it also refers to fellowship and contentment. This meaning is rooted in the sacrificial system’s *šālôm* offering (sometimes translated “peace” or “fellowship” offering). These offerings may be of three kinds: thanksgiving for God’s deliverance; fulfillment of a vow (made under difficult circumstances, to thank God publicly later); and a free-will offering (for no particular reason).¹³

So we conclude that *šālôm* generally means “well-being” or “health.” The difficulty with the English use of this word is that its referent, content, and context are often unspecified. Peace or health for whom? “Well-being” is like the term “leadership.” Everyone is for it, but for whose good? Do we mean “well-being” and “leadership” like that given by Gandhi, by Hitler, by Chamberlain, by Churchill, or something completely different? The onus of definition of the content of the word *šālôm* is still upon us. Even within the OT narrative, the well-being of the people of God is a *contested concept*. What does it mean to be *whole*? In the narratives of Genesis to Deuteronomy, the children of Israel are often at odds with God on exactly this point (e.g., worship of the calf at Sinai; the cry for quail in the desert; and participation in the ritual at Baal-Peor). Today the meanings of the terms “health” and “well-being” are also being contested and discussed.

THE SHEMA

My proposal is that a *simple yet comprehensive* description of the *whole and healthy* person in Scripture is present in the Shema (lit. “listen”).¹⁴ After wandering for forty years in the wilderness Moses stood before the people on the plains of Moab. As they prepared finally to enter the land of promise, Moses reminded them of all that had transpired, from the crossing of the Sea to the Sinai incident, to that very day. He challenged them to choose a particular kind of healthy life, given to them by God, so that it would go well with them.

Hear (*šema*), O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart (*lēbāb*) and with all your soul (*nepeš*) and with all your might (*mēōd*). (Deut 6:4–5)

When Moses wanted to impress upon them that their love for God should proceed from absolutely *every part of their being*, he chose the words that are translated “heart, soul, and might.” Centuries later this effort to describe the totality of a person was not lost on Jesus. When he recited the Shema for the Pharisees (Mark 12:30), he added the word that was necessary in the Hellenistic world to describe an entire person: *dianoia* (“mind”). The Greek *kardia* (“heart”) was not sufficient for the Hebrew *lēbāb* (“heart-mind”).

The effort to describe the totality of a person in the Shema is evidenced further in Jesus’ conversation with the lawyer who asked him about the greatest commandment. The lawyer’s expression of the Shema most accurately used the Greek words “heart and mind” to describe the Hebrew concept of *lēbāb* (heart-mind). In each case, the linguistic effort was appropriate to each socio-philosophical context. Each was attempting to describe a complete representation of a whole person.¹⁵

Deut 6:4–5 (MT)	LXX	Mark 12:30 (Jesus)	Luke 10:27 (lawyer to Jesus)
<i>lēbāb</i> heart-mind	heart (<i>kardias</i>)	heart (<i>kardias</i>)	heart (<i>kardias</i>)
<i>nepeš</i> soul	soul (<i>psychēs</i>)	soul (<i>psychēs</i>)	soul (<i>psychē</i>)
		mind (<i>dianoias</i>)	strength (<i>ischiyi</i>)
<i>mēōd</i> strength	strength (<i>dunameōs</i>)	strength (<i>ischyos</i>)	mind (<i>dianoia</i>)

The Shema encapsulated the whole-life relationship of Israel before the Creator, and this whole-life was echoed by Jesus, as a description of *all that we are*. This commandment provides us with a *simple* as well as a *comprehensive* description of a whole and healthy person in Scripture. These Hebrew terms, translated in the Gospels, provide us with an interior geography of human life in all of its complex relationships.

The Context of the Shema. The clear theological context of the Shema is the call to love God: “The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God *with all . . .*” The context precludes treating health itself as the ultimate good (*summum bonum*). It concludes with a strong warning against idolatry, particularly the gods of health and success.

[When you have] houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. The LORD your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the LORD your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth. (Deut 6:11–15)

Health is not God. Even the health of the community is not God, nor is it the highest good in Scripture. The highest good is loving God.¹⁶ It may even mean relinquishing one’s life or physical well-being for the love of God.¹⁷ The Shema sets human health and flourishing within the narrative of human dependence: “The LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. The LORD your God you shall fear; him you shall serve.” This kind of limitation and even *disability* stands as the necessary context of my proposal that categories of human health and wholeness are represented in the Shema.¹⁸ One’s limitation before God, as described in this essay, is found in the very substance of one’s healthy “heart” (*lēbāb*), “soul” (*nepeš*), and “might” (*mē’ōd*). Neither the substance of limitation, nor the Shema’s context of dependency, displace the positive substance of human health presented in the word-concepts of the Shema. The health of limitation is not even a corrective to the deuteronomic view. It is a substantive part of the positive concern for healthy living.¹⁹

The Content of the Shema. The Shema provides a view into an OT description of a thriving human being. The Hebrew words (*lēbāb*, *nepeš*, *mē’ōd*) behind the English translations (“heart,” “soul,” “might”) are multi-dimensional concepts. They are windows into the vital and thriving life that God intended for humanity from the beginning. Their meanings do not divide along the lines of our typical “body, mind, soul” distinctions nor the World Health Organization’s “physical, mental, social, and spiritual” categories. Rather, they address the realm of the human will (*lēbāb*), the realm of human relationships (*nepeš*), and the realm of human vitality (*mē’ōd*) as gifts of God. We will investigate each of these concepts in turn.

THE HEALTH OF THE HEART-MIND

The term *lēbāb* is translated “heart” in the Shema.²⁰ A better translation of the word could be “heart-mind.” In English “heart” is often considered the seat of the emotions, yet in Hebrew *lēbāb* is not the seat of the emotions; the kidneys and bowels are. *Lēbāb* is the seat of decision-making, the will, and understanding. It is the seat of mental-emotional well-being. It can be conceived as the *integration* of a person’s intelligence and passion.²¹ It speaks to the realm of the human will.²²

A survey of the contextual meaning of the word reveals a fairly even spread between aspects of thought and decision (*intelligence*, twenty-five percent; *acts of the will*, twenty-five percent; *consciousness*, twenty percent; *character* or *reputation*, thirty percent).²³ When one is resisting God, the person is described as being *hard-hearted*, i.e., stubborn in *decision*, or *fat-hearted*, i.e., rebellious in *action* (e.g., Exod 7:13; Ps 95:8).

A healthy heart-mind is not divided. Sickness is described as a “double heart” (Ps 12:13; Job 11:12, “A hollow man is two-hearted”). This is my *first diagnostic key* for understanding the Hebrew concept of the whole person in the Shema. If one’s intellect and passions are divided (what we might call a battle between head and heart), one has a weak or confused *lēbāb*. The person is considered sick. This is generally measured in the OT by what one decides and does, not by what one intends.²⁴ The health of the whole person in the OT, therefore, has something to do with the *lēbāb*: the heart-mind and its decisions and actions in life. The integration of one’s intelligence and passions may be used, of course, for evil or selfish purposes, but its integration is the first element of health from this etymological perspective. The second element of health involves the purpose of that integration.

Scripture does not leave us guessing about the purpose of this integration of the heart-mind (intelligence-passions). The Shema and its broader Sinaitic context offer three concepts that are related to a healthy *lēbāb*. The first word is *instruction* in God’s law. It is represented in the OT by the word *šāmar* which means “preserve,” “keep,” “treasure,” or “guard.” This word is used repeatedly and specifically of the Sinaitic commands, especially by the deuteronomist.²⁵ The second word is *investment* in a life of commitment to God. This quality of health is represented in the OT by the word *bāḥar* which means “choose” or “decide.” The third word in this cluster of concepts is *tāmīm* which means “integrity,” “completeness,” or “wholeness.” We will consider each of these three concepts in turn.

Keeping God’s Instruction (šāmar). How shall Israel love the LORD God with the heart-mind? How shall the whole person and whole community be *kept* healthy? The first aspect of a healthy heart-mind is found in *keeping* God’s instruction. One cannot overestimate the centrality of the memory of the Exodus

and the consolidation and formation of a new sociality created in Israel through the giving of the *Torah* (instruction). *Šāmar* is like a code-word in the OT for keeping the instruction and commandments given at Sinai. Keep and be kept. “Keep in mind, watch, guard, preserve, take care of, treasure up, retain, observe, protect as property in trust.”²⁶

The means of “diligently keeping” the commands is very specific in the Shema.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your *heart* and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, that I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall *teach* them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you *sit* in your house and when you *walk* by the way and when you *lie down* and when you *rise up*. And you shall *bind* them as a sign on your *hand* and they shall be as frontlets on your *forehead*. And you shall *write* them on the *doorposts* of your house and on your *gates*. . . . You should *diligently keep* (*šāmôr tišmērûn*) the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes that He has commanded you. (Deut 6:4–9, 17–18a)

Keeping the commandments is considered preventative care in Deuteronomy. This is not to claim a one-to-one correspondence between keeping God’s commands and health. Israel’s 613 commands, however, provided the healthiest diet, hygiene, and social practices in the ancient Near East. Approximately one-third of them are related directly to personal and public health issues. This ancient code contains the safest and healthiest diet of the ancient Near East: no shellfish, no pork, no animal fat, no blood sausage, and no leftover food after three days. Something as simple as avoiding bacterial infection and viruses is commanded in specific ways in these laws. Leviticus 11:1–47 declared that no meat from diseased animals could be eaten. Numbers 19:11–19 gave instructions for safe contact with corpses (not recognized as necessary in Europe until the nineteenth century). Deuteronomy 23:12–14 provided for the world’s first public sanitation-latrine law. God declared that they would be free of the diseases of Egypt if they kept these commands (Deut 7:15; 28:60). Other “medical” concerns included quarantine for contagious diseases; circumcision with a sterile flint knife and on the eighth day (when highest levels of the vitamin K/prothrombin clotting agent are at one hundred and ten percent). Promiscuity of every kind with its resultant transmitted diseases was expressly forbidden.²⁷

The themes of health and healing in the Sinai Law (Exod 19—Num 10:10) and its concern for public health reach beyond what we would call “medical issues.” Community order in a general sense is a broad public health issue. Apodictic law (unconditional commands) against crime addressed safety issues. For example, the commands, “You shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not

bear false witness, and you shall not covet” served to limit violent crime. The extensive casuistic law and established legal procedures provided Israel with extensive instruction on how to keep a just court and set the precedent of rule by law rather than by despotic rule of force. As a final example, the Sabbath laws were simple but unique and effective for bringing health into the Israelite community. The commands to rest on the seventh day, to allow fields to lie fallow, to redeem debt slaves every seventh year, and to return land to those who had lost it every forty-ninth year were all given for the sake of the health and wholeness of God’s people. In these ways, the call to “keep the commandments” points to a definition of health that is body-based and measured in the health of the community.

Investing a Life with Choices (bāḥar). A second aspect of a whole and healthy heart-mind (*lēbāb*) is found in *choosing* a path of response to God’s mighty deeds. *Bāḥar* (“choose” or “decide”) is the primary action of the heart-mind. The OT tradition addresses this aspect of health in key narrative (rather than legal) traditions that require a person and a community to remember Israel’s choices, thus forming a habit that shapes one’s own life decisions.²⁸ It calls one to *invest one’s heart-mind* in the tradition of good choice by remembering God’s acts of deliverance and rehearsing the choices of the past.

Deuteronomy is famous for its thirtieth chapter, especially for Moses’ admonition to the people to “choose” on the plains of Moab before they cross the Jordan to enter into the land promised to Abraham.

See, I have *set before you* today life and prosperity, death and adversity. . . . I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. *Choose life*, so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, holding fast to him; for that *means life* to you and length of days. (Deut 30:15, 19)

The choice seems simple: choose between life and death; choose between life-preserving behaviors and life-destroying behaviors. Our experience is not substantively different from Israel’s. Analogously, many of the most acute health-care issues today seem simple yet are not: tobacco and alcohol abuse, STDs, cardiovascular disease, and physical fitness exercise. Nonetheless, the health of the heart-mind is related directly in the OT to choice. The choice for life is made possible in part through *hearing* and *remembering* the choices of the past. The psalmist demonstrates this kind of investment in long-term choice in the midst of a call to worship.

O that today you would *hearken* to his voice! Harden not your *hearts*, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who *err in*

heart, and they do not regard my ways. Therefore I swore in my anger that they should not enter my rest. (Ps 95:7b–11)

Moses' call to the people to "choose" was echoed by Joshua when all Israel gathered at Shechem (Josh 24:14–27). While calling for choice based on the recitation of God's mighty acts (Josh 24:2–13), Joshua also declared to them the difficulty of *simply* choosing the LORD and a life of health. When the people declared their allegiance to the LORD, Joshua confronted them with their inability to make such a hasty decision (Josh 24:19–20). When they insisted on their choice and recited their memory of deliverance, Joshua insisted on an additional witness, a cleansing of idols, an "inclination of the heart," and a "great stone" as a physical reminder of the choice. It is possible that early Israel's tribes gathered yearly at Shechem to renew the covenant and confirm their choice.²⁹

Integrity before God and in the Community (tāmîm). A third aspect of a healthy heart-mind (*lēbāb*) is found in the integration of the heart-mind before God and in one's community. The English meanings generated from the Hebrew root *tāmam* include the following: complete, integrated, sound (of bones), whole, healthful, undivided, morally innocent, impeccable, honest, blameless, free of blemish, unscathed (of sheep for sacrifice).³⁰

"Integrity" means having an *undivided* heart-mind in relation to God. "Noah was a righteous man, blameless (*tāmîm*) among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen 6:9). Noah was undivided in his heart-mind, i.e., he was a person whose intelligence and passions were integrated in relation to God. The psalmist prays for this kind of *undivided loyalty* in the midst of his lament. "May my heart be *blameless* toward your decrees, that I may not be put to shame" (Ps 119:80).

"Integrity" also means undivided motivation in relationship to others. King Abimelech of Gerar was dying because Sarah was in his tent as a result of Abraham and Sarah's deceit about their relationship. God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him why he was about to die. Abimelech's response, accepted by God, was, "I am innocent. I acted in integrity."

"Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister?' And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the *integrity of my heart (tām lēbābī)* and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the *integrity of your heart*, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her." (Gen 20:5–6)

This relational integrity meant that Abimelech acted in good conscience in accordance with the facts that he knew. God recognized this as integrity, even though those facts were in error.

The concept of integrity is rooted in the realm of sacrificial law. Here it means the coordination of one's intention and one's action. It means not cheating. The instruction for a *šālôm* offering is to burn up the *whole* (*tēmimāh*) rump (the entire fat of the tail) of the sheep (Lev 3:9). The intention of the one bringing this kind of offering was to give thanks to the LORD. To have this intention, and yet not to cut close to the lean meat and leave fat on the meat would have been disingenuous. It would lack integrity.

THE HEALTH OF THE SO-CALLED "SOUL"

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your *nepeš* ('soul')." A more accurate translation of this word-concept would be "person in relation to" or "bodily life in relation with." The common meaning of the English word "soul" is quite problematic since it misses the necessary relational and physical aspects of *nepeš*.³¹ (Cf. Webster's definition above, p. 1: "The vehicle of individual existence, separate in nature from the body, and usually held to be separate from the body in existence.")

In a contrast that is close to being antithetical to Webster's definition, *nepeš* is physically based and considered sick when it is separated from the life of the community. The basic physical lexicographical meaning of *nepeš* is "throat," "neck," or "trachea." It is also used to describe the animals created by God and is translated "creature" in the English text.

So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them and whatever Adam called every *living creature* (*nepeš hayyāh*), that was its name. (Gen 2:19)

If we translated *nepeš* as "soul" here, we would say that the beasts and birds were *living souls*. That is not intended in this text. They are, however, *living beings in relation to God and Adam*. They breathe. They are alive. They exchange glances. *Nepeš* means *to be alive* and *to be in relation*. "Living creature" is the identical term used of the creation of the first human being.³²

And the LORD breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a *living being* (*nepeš hayyāh*). (Gen 2:7)

The human did not become a *being* (or *creature*) abstractly, in differentiation from its body, or independently. Rather, its life was precisely *physical* and *in relation to* the One who breathed the first breath into the person. Adam became a *nepeš*; he was not supplied with one.³³ This aspect of *šālôm*, *šālôm nepeš*, describes the health of relationship or "relational well-being."³⁴

The term *nepeš* also has significant usage in levitical texts and in case law. In levitical texts *nepeš* is associated with the pulse of blood (probably registered in the neck, since this is the location of sacrificial slaughter). Blood is “life” (*nepeš*) and “belongs to the LORD.” Here “life” (the so-called soul) is body-based and has its locus in relation to God.³⁵ In case law *nepeš* is translated “life” and is an *ipso jure* reference to human relationships within a community. For example the law of retaliation (talion law) uses *nepeš* to refer to the person in relation, “Life for Life” (*nepeš taḥat nāpeš*; Exod 21:23; Lev 24:18; cf. Deut 19:21).

In these primary levitical and case law contexts the concern is always the relationship between the life taken, the life of the taker, and the lives of others in the community. Every OT context of *nepeš* is essentially relational and social. We could better translate the Shema, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart-mind and with all your personal *and social life*.” This, then, is my *second diagnostic key* for understanding the Hebrew concept of the whole person in the Shema. *Nepeš* does not mean what common parlance means by the word “soul.” Rather it means *a living physical being in relation to others*.

O My Soul. The psalmist often uses the expression, “O my soul” (*napšî*).³⁶ Fred Gaiser has shown that the context of this cry of lament provides detailed descriptions of the *nepeš* that has become *sick*. This loss of well-being (*šālôm*) is expressly relational.³⁷ His thesis is that the *napšî* (“my soul,” “my self,” or “my personhood”) “is primarily a term of lament that emerges in anguish.” It refers to a “self” in isolation and turmoil. Since *the self* is defined over against the community, the expression “O my soul” expresses “the traumatic isolation of the soul” that longs to be in healthy relationship again. The use of the term in the laments expresses a self’s isolation from God (approximately twenty percent of the time), isolation from one’s own self (approximately twenty percent), and isolation from the community (approximately sixty percent).³⁸ For better or for worse, the individual “soul” exists in physical relationship.

It is not likely that we will stop translating *nepeš* as “soul” in our Bibles or discussions. The problem with “my soul” as a differentiated, independent, and isolated self is that this is often considered to be the culturally normal, natural, good, and ordinary situation. According to an OT perspective this is a sickness and the source of alienation and anxiety. The health and wholeness of the person (*nepeš*) in relation to others is not left undefined in the OT. Two concepts (discussed in the next two sections) are helpful for describing the primary relationships of the “person” in OT theology. One’s relationship *to God* may be elucidated by the concept of *servicing-worship* (*ābad*). One’s relation *to others* is generally represented by the concept of *justice-righteousness* (*šedāqāh*).

Justice and Righteousness and the Health of the Nepeš. The first dimension of the life in relation in OT theology concerns one’s reputation in the community as a person who is “righteous,” meaning “just and compassionate.”

Generally, *justice-righteousness* (*ṣĕdāqāh*) refers not to one's motives or intentions but to actions that are external and observable in the community. A *ṣādīq* ("righteous person") is simply a person whose good reputation is known in the community. The content of the reputation especially includes acts of compassion and mercy to the poor.³⁹

In the Wisdom literature (esp. Job and Proverbs) a *ṣādīq* has specific characteristics. This person (1) cares for the poor, the fatherless, and widows; (2) defends their causes in court; (3) is a good steward of land and the nonhuman creation; (4) lives at peace with neighbors and is a joy to the family.⁴⁰

The OT concept of justice-righteousness is based in God's commitment to compassion toward those who recognize their need, in contrast to modern notions of "what is fair." Justice and righteousness are turned toward the person in anguish, the person who cries out for help. Israel's early tradition provides us with these unequivocal words of God to Moses at Sinai.

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. . . . If your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate. (Exod 22:21–24, 27)

Isaiah and Jeremiah broadened Israel's concept of justice and *šālôm* by insisting that the innocent who suffer must be given a voice in society, for this is redemptive for the society.⁴¹ In contrast to common notions of justice as individual rights, Abraham Heschel offers the following definition of justice-righteousness from the OT perspective. He argues that a shift in understanding justice-righteousness comes from the "grammar of the experience of knowing God."

Justice is an interpersonal relationship implying both a claim and a responsibility. Justice bespeaks a situation that transcends the individual, demanding of everyone a certain abnegation of self, defiance of self-interest, disregard of self-respect. The necessity of submitting to a law is derived from the necessity of identifying oneself with what concerns other individuals or the whole community.⁴²

When the "person in relation" identifies with the concerns of others, health and wholeness result. Moreover, that person shares in the LORD's delight.

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories, glory in this; that he understands and knows Me: that I am the LORD *who does kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth*; for in these things I delight," says the LORD. (Jer 9:23–24)

Justice-righteousness also has a creational dimension.⁴³ According to the prophets, when justice is not practiced, the fish, animals, water, and trees are adversely affected. An unjust people destroys the nonhuman creation. Animals, birds, and fish died because of unrighteousness (Hos 4:1–3). God makes a covenant with the animals because the people had failed (Hos 2:18). God spoke to the earth because the people were not listening (Jer 22:29). They were warned that if they did not keep the covenant (including Sabbath rest for the land) the land would vomit them out (Deut 20:19). God comforted the soil and animals concerning the invasion of the land because of the people’s unrighteousness, saying, “Do not fear O soil; Do not fear, animals of the earth” (Joel 2:21–22). When Jeremiah and Ezekiel say, “You say peace, peace [health, health] but there is no peace [health],” it is because there is no justice-righteousness. These biblical witnesses declare the necessary connection made for us by God between the health of the environment and human health.

Working for and Worshiping the LORD. A second dimension of the health and wholeness of a so-called “soul” (*nepes* or “person in relation to”) concerns one’s daily work (*‘abad*). The concept of *‘abad* relies heavily on its biblical context for its translation. Its first meaning is to “till” the ground or more generally to “work” or “labor.” In relation to daily employment it is translated “to serve in order to acquire” or “to do business.” In relation to a master it means “to serve as a slave.” In a cultic setting it is translated “to worship” or “to honor” God. In spite of contextual distinctions, these various meanings need not be artificially separated. While worship and Sabbath keeping are central to the OT witness, “serving” the LORD in one’s daily employment is also essential for a healthy individual and community. When the ethics of daily action and worship became separated in Israel, the prophets expressed God’s outrage. “I hate, I despise your religious feasts, and I cannot stand your solemn assemblies” (Amos 5:21). Expression of God’s “hate” is reserved for this kind of “sick” separation as well as for worship (*‘abad*) and service (*‘ebed*) of other gods (Jer 44:3–5).

The common and shared assumption in the ancient Near East is that a *person in relation* has a relationship to a God or gods. A primary OT narrative for understanding the relationships between a people, work, and God is Gen 2:15–22.⁴⁴ Here the idealized relationships are presented. God plants a garden and places the human in it to “till” (*‘abad*) and “keep” (*šamar*) it. God formed the animals and brought them to the human to see what he would name them. “And whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name” (Gen 2:19b).

Adam “works” (*‘abad*) with God. Within the boundaries of God’s creative action Adam had complete freedom to participate in the ordering of the world and in the work of God. God also had placed a forbidden tree in the garden to provide the ideal possibility that each day the human would choose to trust God’s word

that it would be better not to eat from it. In this way the human's restraint was an act of acknowledgement and worship (*‘abad*) of God. Recognizing this boundary daily was also Adam's act of service (*‘abad*). All the other trees of creation were within his freedom to experience and control.⁴⁵

This implied proposal at Eden is made more explicitly at Sinai. There the people are instructed to tell the truth about who God is through acts of worship. They repeatedly tell the story of deliverance, praising God for creating, rescuing, and sustaining life. A healthy person (*nepeš*) in the OT serves (*‘abad*) God in daily work (*‘abad*) and worship (*‘abad*).

THE HEALTH OF "MIGHT": VITALITY AND THRIVING

My *third diagnostic key* for the Hebrew concept of the whole person in the Shema is the presence of "might" or "strength" (*mē'ōd*). "You shall love the LORD your God with all your might." If this were simply meant as a category of physical strength several other Hebrew words could have been used. These include *‘ōz*, ("powerful," "mighty"), *ḥāzāq* ("strong," "forceful," "stout") or *kōaḥ* ("strong," "powerful in battle").⁴⁶

Usually the word *mē'ōd* is used as an adverb and commonly translated "very" or "exceedingly." This is seemingly an odd choice of a word to communicate strength. One lexicon translates the nominal use of *mē'ōd* as "muchness, life-force, abundance, increase."⁴⁷ Rather than indicating physical, personal, or political power, it indicates a quality of strength such as *energy* or *vitality*. This is corroborated by the LXX translation of *mē'ōd* with the Greek *dunamis* (capacity or capability to produce a strong effect). In NT texts the increase in *capacity for power* comes from the LORD.

I pray that according to the riches of his glory he may grant that you may be strengthened (*krataiōthēnai*) in your inner being with power (*dunamei*) through his spirit." (Eph 3:16)

May you be made strong (*dunamoumenoi*) with all the strength (*dunamei*) that comes from his glorious power (*kratos*). (Col 1:11)

Whether we use the word *vitality* to nuance our understanding of "might" (*mē'ōd*) or another word, we will recognize that the Shema is calling for the use of one's entire *capacity* and sources of *energy* in the love of God. The Hebrew word-concept that is most closely associated with this kind of strength, might, and vitality is *ḥāyāh*. It helps to fill out the concept of *mē'ōd* especially by means of its narrative contextual uses.

Thriving Life (*ḥāyāh*). The root *ḥāyāh* ("live") is used in the OT for describing vitality and a quality of "thriving." A medical condition persists in some

children called a “failure to thrive.” This odd designation denotes the absence of normal human growth known as “thriving.” In relation to a child “thriving” means incredible energy, curiosity, and increasing capacities for life. In modern Hebrew the term is translated “healthy,” “vital,” or “vigorous.”

The use of this root denotes several important steps in the formation (health) and restoration (healing) of a whole person. It is used of the beginning of physical life and being. When God breathed into the human, he became a “living being” (*nepeš ḥayyāh*, Gen 2:7). The term is used in the context of struggling for justice and survival under oppression. When the Hebrew women in Egypt resisted Pharaoh’s genocide, they succeeded because they were *ḥāyeh* (“vigorous”) in childbirth (Exod 1:19). It also means “to heal” or “revive.” When Israel camped at Gibeath-haaraloth (“Foreskin Hill”; Josh 5:3), they waited for the men who submitted to circumcision until they were healed (*ḥāyōtām*, 5:8).

Finally, the term is used of the unexpected flowing of life-giving water. When Isaac redug his father Abraham’s wells (filled in during his absence), he found *mayim ḥayyīm* (“living water”), i.e., an artesian spring that flowed without human labor (Gen 26:19). This is the source of the metaphor Jesus employs in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water*” (John 4:10; cf. Jer 17:13). Later Jesus compares himself to the artesian’s surprising source of water as a source of thriving. “He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of *living water*.’” (John 7:38 has *hydotos zōntos* as in the LXX at Gen 26:19; cf. Isa 12:3.)

CONCLUSION

In the past medical science has dealt primarily with diagnosing physical symptoms, seeking physical causes of illness, and administering physiological treatments. Increasingly, however, ministries of health are taking the whole person into account. They are seeking to understand the patient’s heart-mind decisions (*lēbāb*), relational dimensions of illness and health (*nepeš*), and a broad range of resources for restoring or supplementing a patient’s vitality (*mē’ōd*). These efforts will remain rather confused and split, however, as long as the terminology of the World Health Organization continues to divide a person into physical, mental, and social parts, with any kind of spirituality added on. If the OT is taken as a guide for defining the well-being of the heart-mind, the person in social relationship, and all its sources for vitality, then the so-called *spiritual* dimension cannot simply be pasted on like a poultice to a person’s health. By definition and in every dimension of living, the God of Scripture is witnessed as the source and goal of our individual and communal health. God’s acts of deliverance are ever the context given in Scripture for living with and loving God.

ENDNOTES

1. Much of the material that follows will also be published in essay form under the title “The Whole and Healthy Person in the Biblical Tradition: Where is it Written?” in *In Spirit and Truth: Essays in Theology, Spirituality and Embodiment in Honor of C. John Weborg* (ed. P. Anderson and M. Clifton Soderstrom; Chicago: Covenant, 2006).

2. A Danish study with a similar linguistic interest was published in an earlier generation as a historical description. See J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). Also see A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949). I am indebted to Fredrick Holmgren for drawing my attention to these resources.

3. L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (The Library of Religion and Culture Series; trans. G. Eliot; New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 287.

4. The “Baconian Myth” is a theme developed by Allen Verhey in the Lund Lectures of North Park Theological Seminary, September, 2005.

5. Author’s interview with the chief of Stebbins Island, Alaska, in June 1976.

6. W. A. Nielson, ed., *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language* (2d ed.; Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, 1947).

7. See Stendahl’s elucidation of the NT teaching regarding the *mortality* and conditional immortality of the soul. Krister Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection: Ingersoll Lectures* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); and P. Benoit and R. Murphy, eds., *Immortality and Resurrection* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970).

8. It is also an old edenesque tendency. See Gen 3:4.

9. On the danger of having a “broad theological definition” of health, see Allen Verhey, “Health and Healing in Memory of Jesus,” in this volume. I agree that a danger resides in human heart-minds to misuse definitions of health, especially through abstraction from the biblical text. Even the ideas of suffering and salvation have been misused in the history of the church. Nonetheless, the merit of these ideas may endure the machinations of misuse. The way forward is not through an avoidance of definition but by interpreting biblical concepts within their biblical and theocentric contexts.

10. J. R. Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

11. Wilkinson, 11.

12. *Šālôm* is also used in the famous Kaddish prayer, prayed in the Jewish community after the death of loved ones: “He who establishes *šālôm* in his heights, may he establish *šālôm* over us and over all Israel.”

13. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 1022. Cf. P. Yoder, *Shalom* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), 10–19. For an overview of the history of the conversation in OT studies on the meaning of the concept of *šālôm*, see P. Yoder and W. Sawatsky, eds., *The Meaning of Peace: Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).

14. It is fascinating to me that my colleague Scot McKnight comes to a parallel conclusion in his recent book *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete, 2004). I have been lecturing on this subject since summer semester, 2000, in a course called “Biblical Perspectives on Health and Healing” and had not had any conversation with Scot on this subject until his book recently appeared.

15. See also Matt 22:37, which omits “strength.”

16. Cf. Allen Verhey, "Health and Healing in Memory of Jesus" in this volume. This may mean laying down one's privilege for the love of God in the world. See the section below on "Justice and Righteousness."

17. Consider Jeremiah's ministry and the suffering servant in Isa 53.

18. See Gen 2:17 and also J. K. Bruckner, "Boundary and Freedom: Blessings in the Garden of Eden," *The Covenant Quarterly* 57 (Feb. 1999): 15–35. The enduring love of God is also contrasted with the limitation and finitude of human life in Ps 103:14–18. On disability see Alystre McIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Paul Carus Lectures Series 20; Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

19. My proposal reflects the positive view of the deuteronomic material, that life is a precious gift from God and requires our attention and stewardship. To that end it is helpful to know what human health entails. This proposal does not seek to make health (even health as it is portrayed in the Scripture with human limitation and dependence as a good thing) a utopia, a god, or even an icon that leads us to God. At some point it is useful to take a step beyond caveats, qualifications, and religious reactions to our present culture's preoccupation with health in order to ask what positive view of health might be offered in Scripture. The deuteronomic material does that for us. I am convinced that, in the end, this positive view offers a necessary corrective for our culture and a useful point of comparison, particularly for our Christian culture's idolatrous preoccupation with the so-called "soul" and "spirituality."

20. The words *lēb* and *lēbāb* are found 827 times in Scripture. They are used interchangeably.

21. In his magisterial survey J. Preuss said that in the Hebrew Bible the heart is the seat of the psyche. Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (trans. Fred Rosner; New York: Sanhedrin, 1978), 104. The book first appeared as *Biblisches-Talmudische Medizin* (Berlin: S. Karger, 1911).

22. "You have not set your heart to honor me" (Mal 2:2). Rabbinic Judaism later followed Platonic categories in assigning emotion to the heart and the logical control of emotion to the "soul." See *Midrash Rabbah* Eccl. 1:16 and Fred Rosner, *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud: Selections from Classical Jewish Sources* in *The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics*, vol. V (ed. N. Lamm; New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977), 77–80.

23. These percentages are arguable approximations of the data. See M. Brown's discussion of J. Barr's concern regarding "root fallacy" and semantic ranges. Michael Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 25–26.

24. Hebrew does distinguish various processes of thinking using the word *da'at* (from *yādah*), but these too are a function of the *lēbāb*. The *lēbāb* is the center of consciousness. Modern Hebrew uses several words for "mind," including participles that mean literally, "the *that* that thinks" and "the *that* that remembers."

25. Exod 19:5; 20:6; Lev 18:5, 26; 19:19, 37; 20:8, 22; 22:31; Num 15:22; Deut 4:2, 40; 5:10, 29; 6:17; 7:9; 8:2; 11:1; 13:4; 26:17, 18; 27:1; 28:9; 30:10, 16.

26. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 1036.

27. This is a modern medical perspective on the text. The original historical context has been elucidated as "taboo" by Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

28. E.g., Deut 8:1–20; 30:15–19; Josh 24:2–14.

29. A. Alt, M. Noth, G. E. Mendenhall, and others suggested that Israel gathered yearly (or alternately, every seven years), perhaps for the Feast of Booths, at Shechem for a covenant renewal ceremony. See G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

30. L. Kohler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study Edition in 2 volumes (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1748–1750.

31. “In Israelite thought man is conceived not so much in dual fashion as ‘body’ and ‘soul’ but synthetically as a unit of vital power.” A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual*, 88.

32. Augustine also recognized that all bodily living beings (including plants) have a “soul” (*anima*) that gives life, animates the body, and provides abilities of perception and memory. According to Augustine human beings are distinguished not by the “soul” but by reason (*ratio*) and the mind (*mens*). See *De Trinitate* 12.1.1–12.3.3; 12.15.24; *Confessiones* 10.7.11. See Sheri Katz, “Person,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 648; and Roland J. Teske, “Soul,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 807. The term *nepesh* is necessary background for understanding this kind of Christian doctrine.

33. [It] “became a *nepesh*, a soul. It is not said that man was supplied with a *nepesh* and so the relation between body and soul is quite different from what it is to us.” J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 1.99.

34. The alternate, common translation would be “peace of the soul.” That translation, however, has no specific content. It could just as well mean “dead.”

35. Augustine provides an interesting comparison here. He holds a middle ground between the Manichean corporeal divinity of the soul and the Platonic ascendancy of the inherently immortal soul. The mature Augustine modified his view of the soul in relation to the body and in relation to God. Rather than the Manichean position that the soul was a corporeal particle of the divine, he asserted the soul’s createdness (*In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 39.8). Rather than the Neo-Platonist view that a divine soul was imprisoned in the body, he asserted the necessary good mixture of body and soul as God had created it (*De Trinitate* 15.7.11). Although he believed that the rational soul was superior to the body, he was not dualistic. The body has radical significance in his anthropology. Because of the doctrines of incarnation and the resurrection of the body, his “ideal is not escape from the body and the world, but reestablishment of the inner equilibrium by unification of all one’s levels of being.” He anticipated in his resurrection “to be healed as whole, for I am one whole; not that my flesh be forever removed, as if it were alien to me, but that it be healed, one whole with me” (*Sermones* 30.3.4). Stephen J. Duffy, “Anthropology,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 26; Roland J. Teske, “Soul,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 808.

36. See Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5; 103:1, 2, 22; 104:1, 35; 116:7; 146:1.

37. Gaiser, F. “The Emergence of the Self in the Old Testament: A Study in Biblical Wellness,” *HBT* 14 (1992): 1–29. The most frequent occurrence of *nepesh* (which Gaiser sometimes translates “self”) is in the lament psalms, a total of 102 times. Other frequent uses are in Lamentations, Job, and Jeremiah.

38. Gaiser, “The Emergence of the Self,” 8–9.

39. See Bent Mogensen, “*Sedaqa* in the Scandinavian and German Research Traditions,” in *The Productions of Time: Tradition History and Old Testament Scholarship* (ed. Knud Jeppesen and Benedikt Otzen; University of Aarhus: The Almond Press, 1984), 67–80, 71. Mogensen is discussing J. Pedersen’s contribution concerning *justitia salutifera*.

40. J. R. Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives on Justice,” in *The Faith that Does Justice* (ed. J. Haughey; New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 70.

41. H. C. White, *Shalom in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: United Church, 1973), 25.

42. A. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 1.209.

43. On the use of the term “creational” in place of the political and clinical term “environmental” see U. Duchrow and Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice, and Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 1987), 48–49.

44. By contrast in the Babylonian epic, the *Enuma Elish*, people are created solely to serve the needs of the gods, neither to participate in their life nor to exercise creative freedom in their labor.

45. J. K. Bruckner, “Boundary and Freedom.”

46. Cf. Wilkinson, 15. He discusses the Hebrew *‘ōz* which means “powerful” or “mighty” in relation to *šālôm*.

47. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 547.



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