

NURSING INTERVENTIONS IN MOSAIC LAW

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ABSTRACT

The holy texts of the religions (Old Testament-Talmud) are a valuable source of knowledge and information not only on matters of faith but also on matters of morals, values and behaviors that govern believers' lives. Furthermore, they raise concerns on sociological issues, such as gender relations. A lot of information is obtained by them on matters of everyday life of the believers, on a variety of medical and nursing problems as well as the way to resolve them. Specific reference is made to pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, menstruation, postpartum period, and circumcision. Particular importance is also given to adulthood and hygiene, illness and patients (leprosy), the use of therapeutic agents as well as to death and burial. The aim of this study is to present issues of interest to nurses and doctors, since the knowledge of the past is the basis for scientific research in the present and the future.

KEYWORDS: nursing interventions/ rules, illness and health issues, Mosaic Law.

INTRODUCTION

Religions play a very significant role in organizing societies all over the world. The faith and worship issues posed by the modern everyday life raise concern and are still under investigation.

Although modern states try to limit the influence of religion, this still remains important and affects directly the believers, socially and spiritually. Today, there are still countries where people's lifestyle and the way the state itself operates as an institution, is based on the religions of the region.^[1]

The holy texts of religions are not only sources related to matters of faith, but also bases of morals, values and behaviors of the believers. It is also possible to obtain by them information on everyday issues, medical-nursing issues that were previously valid and still affect society.

Based on the Old Testament and Talmud that reflect the cultural settings of the ancient Judaeans,^[2] this study tries to review and present medical-nursing issues mentioned in these texts.

The Old Testament, a common reference point for both Christianity and Judaism, is the agreement between God and people of Israel, in order to release them from the slavery that had existed by the Egyptians for four centuries. Then, God led them to the land of "Promise".

God first called Moses to Mount Sinai from where he received his divine commandments, namely the decalogue. These ten reasons constitute the core of the law of ancient Israel, known as the Mosaic, which is contained in the Old Testament Pentateuch and the entire Bible, and regulates all aspects of Israeli life.^[3]

The hygienic rules, set by Moses, focus on laws regarding purity, cleanliness and food.^[4] The Jewish law is also highly relevant to prevention⁵, responsibility for personal hygiene as well as ethical practice of medicine⁶. Judean medicine ethics puts less emphasis on autonomy and focuses more on the value of human life and the community as a whole.^[7]

The classic sources of information on Jewish therapeutics are the Bible and the Talmud.^[2]

A further source of information for the people of Israel about the medical-nursing issues is the Talmud, which was primarily a legal book.^[2,4] Medical issues are also discussed in it, mainly in terms of hygiene and health surveillance. This collective work provides people an overview of the Jewish medicine.^[4] After the mosaic law, Talmud was the study that has influenced as much as ever the life and thought of Judaism.^[8]

The approach to healing that the Talmud sanctified in Jewish life was folk healing. The Talmud has pages of

advice and information on matters of health and illness, almost all magical and folkloric. One long section (Gittin 67a-70b) is a virtual manual of home remedies on ailments from head to foot. Scattered throughout the Talmud have comments on disease prevention, the causes of illness, and speculations on the metaphysical significance of disease.^[9]

Pregnancy, Childbirth, Breastfeeding

About the physiology of pregnancy, scattered several observations are mainly found in Talmud. Someone can be informed by it that with the onset of pregnancy, menstruation stops, blood is amended and milk is produced. The Talmud also teaches that at the moment of conception, not only the sex of the child, but also his physical and mental condition is determined. The pregnancy is recognized externally after three months.

The suffering and pains of childbirth are the punishment for Eve's sin: "And God said to the woman" I will greatly raise the grief and your pregnancy aches and with pains you will give birth to your children.... ". (Genesis. 3:16) A punishment linked both with the birth of her children and also the relationship with her husband. Childbirth becomes painful, sometimes dangerous and even life-threatening for both mother and infant. Woman suffered a weakening of her nature, because of the entrance of sin into her, which distorted the natural relationship and harmony of her body and soul.^[3]

Having a lot of children was considered as happiness and luck, it was a gift from God, while infertility was considered as Lord's punishment. Infertile women were plagued with negative consequences (teasing, feelings of pity).^[4] As childlessness was perceived as divine punishment, in case of legal wife's sterility, the husband had the right to receive, with the consent of her, a second wife in order to have a child: "..... Sarah said to Abraham," "..... The Lord has prevented me from conceiving and giving birth to a child. Well, go and have a baby with my servant, even via her, I can have one ... "(Genesis 16: 1-3). During childbirth, woman was kneeling down. This position was considered normal for the start of childbirth and there was most of the times an auxiliary seat. Modern studies indicate that the specific position (knee-jerk) relieves particularly the lumbar region, helps embedding the fetus and taking the correct position for the extrusion. It also relieves the pain coming from the painful contractions and allows pelvic and torso movement. Sedentary position is a relaxing position, gravity assists, and there is greater relaxation of the perineum.^[10-12]

During childbirth, relatives and neighbors were mostly next to the women, and later midwives.^[4] Midwives are mentioned several times in the Bible. In talmudic times, the midwife was called *haya* or *hakhamah*. The latter term actually means "the wise woman". This shows the high standard of the midwife at that time. In fact, two are mentioned, Shifrah and Puah, whom Pharaoh ordered to

kill the children of the Jewish women immediately after the birth "(Exodus.1, 15-19).^[2]

Placenta was normally maintained "so that the child could warm by it". Only after a certain length of time, it was being buried on the earth.^[4]

It was great joy when the newborn was a baby boy. The joy was not the same if the baby was a girl. The care that causes the birth of a girl to the father has been described in the darker colors: "The daughter is a big secret care for her father, and her care doesn't leave him to sleep ..." (Sirach 42, 9-11).

At that time, mother normally breastfeeds her children for twenty-four months. A woman who had to breastfeed, was not allowed to become pregnant during this period (24 months), because in this way could starve the baby who was feeding. For the prevention of a new pregnancy during breastfeeding period, a Talmudist recommended taking contraceptive measures during sexual intercourse. A widow, who was still breastfeeding her baby, was allowed to be remarried, only after twenty-four months.^[4]

Breastfeeding was mother's obligation. In the case of twins the mother had to breastfeed only one child, for the other the father had to hire a wet nurse. The wet nurse was an important person. Indeed, Bible refers to the death of Deborah, the wet nurse of Rebecca (Genesis 35, 8). The wet nurse, during breastfeeding, had to take no further work and in addition not to breastfeed her own children. She was not allowed to eat something that could damage the quality of milk (for example, hops, pumpkins and small fish).^[4]

Postpartum Confinement

The period of confinement was particularly important for Jews as it contributed to mothers' purification. If the newborn was a boy, the mother was considered unclean for 7 days and on 8th day she had to perform the circumcision of the infant and would remain unclean after that for another 40 days. If the newborn was a girl, mother would be unclean for 14 days plus another 60 days due to her impure blood. After this period, mother should offer to the priest an one-year-old lamb for holocaust and a pigeon or a turtle dove for a sacrifice of sin. Thus, after this sacrifice, she would be cleansed and purified from the dirt of the flowing blood.^[13]

Finally, woman's death during childbirth or postpartum was considered as punishment when she had not fulfilled her religious obligations.^[4]

Circumcision

Jewish microsurgery is mostly known from circumcision. This intervention is mainly due to religious reasons but also for the maintaining of personal hygiene.^[14] In the beginning they used sharp stones, but later bronze or

other metallic tools.^[15] The use of a sharp knife was later used for this intervention.^[5]

Modern studies confirm the importance of circumcision on hygiene issues as well as on the reduction of transmission of major diseases, such as AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in areas such as Africa. It is also reported that in some countries the practice of this process has not been changed enough compared to previous times. Their intervention is primarily religious and a sample of respect to the tradition, and in some areas it means the passage of boys into adulthood.^[16-20]

In Holy Bible, God gave orders to Abraham about the circumcision. The flesh of the foreskin of all the boys should be circumcised eight days after their birth, as a sign of the covenant between God and the Jews. (Genesis 17: 10-14)

The circumcision was usually performed by the father of the family, occasionally by the mother, later by the doctor or the circumcision specialist. The circumcision was performed on Saturday in the four following phases:

1. Cutting of foreskin with a knife.
2. The revelation of the glans, possibly after the removal of the inner part of the foreskin.
3. Wound cleaning by a specialist in circumcision.
4. Wound dressing.

Before and after surgery the child was washed. Sick children should not be circumcised. When two children of the same mother died due to circumcision, circumcision of the third child could not be performed. In this case, one may think of blood disease (haemophilia), which only responds to males.^[4]

Menstruation

Woman during the menstrual period was considered as unclean and she had to stay away from her husband for 7 days. She was not also able to perform her religious duties and she had the obligation to sacrifice two turtledoves. Anyone who was touching an "unclean" woman had to be washed and had to wash his clothes. Furthermore, the male himself was considered as "unclean" until the afternoon of that day. Sexual intercourse during the menstrual period was being punished with the death of both spouses.^[4]

B. Adulthood - Hygiene Rules

Hygiene rules set by Moses were focused on the laws of purity, cleanliness and food. By his purity's laws, Moses forbade any sexual intercourse before or outside marriage.^[4,9]

The believers had to take part in rituals only if they were pure. The impurity could be caused by eating impure animals, such as camel, rabbit, hare and pig. It is, therefore, well understood how important the issue of nutrition was for Jews. Biblical rules concerning food belonged to the laws of purity. There was also a

combination of religious/devotional, customary and healthy incentives

1. Meat should come from a pure animal (ox, sheep, big game, goose, duck, hen, pigeon and turkey).
2. The animals had to be slaughtered according to the regulations: cutting along the throat under the larynx with a toothless knife, thus the death comes from bleeding.
3. Animals are not forbidden to have any internal or external injury.
4. Eating blood is not allowed in any case.

Moses allows people to eat food mixed with meat and vegetables. It is also known Jewish nostalgia for the meat dishes that they were enjoying during their stay in Egypt. Peas, legumes and onions were Jews food items. Their favorite food was milk and honey of wild bees. They rarely had meat and fish. For drinking, they preferred water, grape wine and wine from dates.

Additionally, impurity could be caused by Leprosy, morbid hemorrhage, postpartum confinement, and pyorrhea of penis. Washing as well as expiatory sacrifices served to purity. Some of these rules alongside their religious significance had a hygienic parallel side, the prevention of contagious diseases. But somebody should not fall into the mistake to equate the biblical "unclean" with "infected". By the use of the incense, vapors that were acting antiseptically could be created. However, it was still not possible to talk about disinfection.

Jews had to wash their hands every morning after getting up from the bed and before each meal. As they were eating with their hands, they had to wash their hands after meals. While pre-meal cleanliness was considered a religious duty, post-meal washing was hygienically justified. For this purpose, cold water or oil was used.^[4]

Disease - Patients

The Bible unambiguously declares that God has the ultimate power over life and death, health and illness.^[9] Ancient Jews believed that the diseases were not due to a demon or evil spirit or a curse of their envious fellow human beings but they represented God's wrath for the sins of people (original sin). There is always health as long as the Ten Commands are not violated. Certifying faith in a God, who gives health and disease, Mosaic Law had the power to prevail over superstition and magic, even though they still existed to some extent. Faith was considered to be the only one that is giving health to the body and salvation to the soul. As being unclean was considered the worst of sins, hygiene rules have been expressed in the scriptures to make people be clean in God's eyes. Therefore, the cleanliness of the body and the purity of the soul are equally important.^[21]

Most of the sick people feel better in the morning, and as the day progresses, their condition is worsening. This explains why one should not visit the patients during the

first three or the last hours of the day. During that time, their illness is considered lighter or heavier than it is in practice. In biblical nosology is well documented that illness and treatment are God's job.^[4]

The following causes of illness are found by simple observation of nature: colds, sunburn, unhealthy drinking water, ugly lifestyle and change of the normal lifestyle, blood redundancy, heredity and the transmission of diseases through persons and objects.^[4]

In Judaism, the Biblical command "If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to its owner." (Deuteronomy, 22: 1) is the source of the physician's obligation to heal the patients. If a physician is able to bring back to the patient what he lost, in this case, his health, he has to do it. Moreover, the physician's obligation to provide treatment to patient includes the return of patient's quality of life and patient's return to the previous situation, in which he was enjoying life.^[22] In the Talmud, the therapist refers to the term *assia*, who was taking care of wounds, injuries and even dental problems. However it can be argued that in the Bible there is so much interest in medical practice, because God is considered to be the sole and absolute therapist.^[2]

Furthermore, except of the term therapist (physician) in the book of Iov, the term *toflim* is also found, and it refers to a male nurse.^[23]

It is certainly true that in the provisions of all the religious books of the East eg. Bible, Koran, body care and disease prevention occupy a lot of space. This is undoubtedly dependent on the climatic conditions of the Near East.^[4]

Leprosy

In the Bible, the disease that is often mentioned is leprosy, showing that it had a high prevalence among the Jews. It is the "zaraath" disease that is usually translated as "leprosy".^[2,4] The skin, according to the traditions, is an organ, in which almost every pathological and regenerative process is reflected.^[24]

In Leviticus 13.1-46 there is no exact description of the disease, but an attempt to prove who is clean and who not. Instructions are also given to the priest to assist him in his work, the diagnosis of the disease.

Three stages of "leprosy" are distinguished: The incipient, the old and the untreated leprosy. The main symptoms are a white spot, deeper than the surface of the surrounding skin, and a white discoloration of the head hair. Sometimes, it can be presented in the lemon stigma "raw meat". It is possible to infect the entire body, including the scalp. There is no risk of transmission. There is only exclusion, because lepers are considered to be culturally unclean. Due to the fact that the disease was frequently present in several family members, someone

could think of heredity among its causes. Nowhere is mentioned as a disease that is seriously harmful to life. Leprosy can be treated without treatment. The patient had to appear to the priest and offer sacrifice.^[4]

In case that someone presents wounds, white or infrared sores, and change hair color to white at the affected site, then the diseases of leprosy has been induced and the patient is considered "impure".

Finally, every leper who has symptoms of leprosy will wear torn garment, he will have his head uncovered, his hair loose and his mouth covered in order to be recognized. He is also characterized as impure. All this time, he will remain isolated and will live outside the camp.

Leprosy can be treated without treatment. The healed had to appear to the priest and offer sacrifice.⁴ Patient, who has now been treated, after being washed and having removed all the hairs from his body, has to stay outside his home for 7 days. On the 7th day, after being washed and shaved and after having his clothes washed, he will have the right to freedom of communication. On the 8th day, the healed will make a sacrifice and the priest will declare him clean.^[25]

Therapeutic Means

Biblical medicines mainly come from the plant world. Among others, the following plants having medicinal use are identified: aloe, canola, gourd, dill, fig, poppy, laurel, peppermint, lemon, hyssop. Drugs (= drug raw materials) originated from the entire plant or its parts (leaf, root, bark, oil). Many medicinal materials were often being boiled together. The raw materials of the medicines were taken by patients in dry form or dissolved in wine.^[4]

The animal kingdom was represented in the pharmaceutical arsenal with the following materials: honey, bile of fish, dog liver, goat milk.^[4]

For external use, ointments, patches, balms, oils and wine were available. Bread soaked with wine was added for ophthalmic use and green leaves were placed in case of eye inflammation. Water and drinking of water, were also used. Especially popular were all kinds of incense.^[4]

Foods having beneficial role to patient's treatment, such as cabbage, chickpeas and chamomile, are also mentioned in Talmud.^[4] Eating unleavened bread has, also, until today therapeutic use.^[26] On the contrary, beef, meat, roasted meat, poultry, cooked eggs, cardamom, milk, cheese, walnuts and cucumbers seem to have negative role in the course of the diseases.^[4] Even in dying patients, food and fluids must be given unless the patient does not want them. In this case, patient's desire should be respected. This view is based on the fact that the foods are beneficial to patient and do not cause harm to him.^[27]

Death- Burial

In Deuteronomy and in particular at 34.5-8 point, there is a referral to the death of Moses, his burial and the mourning of relatives, which was being initially maintained for 30 days.^[28] In order to exclude a case of near death situation, one had to wait, before the burial, "the body cracking" of the dead, and even its swelling from the gas of rot. The eyes of the dead were shut, the jaws tied together, and the body holes (nose and anus) were capped. Then, the dead was washed, poured with various substances and wrapped in a large sheet (shroud).

Family tombs were in caves, under trees or hills. Only the kings and prophets were permitted to be buried in the cities. The corpses were being transported with lamentations onto a carriage. Moses had determined that every dead man had to be buried before the seventh day. The thought that someone could remain unburied, was intolerable to Jews, because the abandoned corpses were eaten by stray dogs or predators birds.^[4]

CONCLUSIONS

The Old Testament and the Talmud are important sources of information-gathering for medical-nursing interventions, affecting not only the Jewish people, but also through Christianity and Muslims (religions with Jewish origins and affinities) a large part of the world's population.

The disease was seen as a state of weakness, exhaustion, and punishment by God, but it was an integral part of the person's existence and a warning of a change of direction.

The therapeutic remedies derived mainly from the plant kingdom. The concept of purity was particularly important. It is also apparent that the care of the ancient Jews was the prevention of diseases and that, through a modern perspective, the position of the woman in this society was particularly difficult.

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