Biblical Psychotherapy: Reclaiming Scriptural Narratives For Positive Psychology and Suicide Prevention

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Biblical Psychotherapy

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KALMAN J. KAPLAN and PAUL CANTZ
What ancient civilization do you most associate as laying the groundwork for modern medicine?

What ancient civilization do you most associate as laying the groundwork for modern psychiatry?
This presentation is premised on the idea that employing biblical thinking in a psychologically-minded way can promote positive, more effective psychotherapeutic alternatives for alleviating feelings of despair.

This approach has been developed in response to the implicit and even explicit Greek bias in psychiatry/psychology that has led to a hopeless and fatalistic view of mental health/pathology and therapeutic efficacy.
Much of mental health and mental pathology can be traced to implicit and explicit influences originating in classical Greek attitudes and beliefs regarding the human condition.

As Erich Wellisch (1954) argued over 50 years ago. “The very word “psyche” is Greek. The central psychoanalytic concept of the formation of character and neurosis is shaped after the Greek Oedipus myth... But stirring as these problems are, they were not solved in the tragedy of Oedipus.... Ancient Greek philosophy has not the vision of salvation.” (p. 115)
The hopelessness of the Greek view is illustrated graphically in Hesiod’s account of the beautiful but amoral Pandora sent as a punishment in retaliation for Prometheus stealing fire for man. Pandora releases all the evils onto the world from the urn which Zeus has given her, leaving hope alone locked up in the box, and inaccessible to man. (Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll. 533-615, *Works and Days*, ll. 53-105).

“Pandora”
- John Williams Waterhouse (c 1896)
Wellisch suggests that Biblical narratives provide an antidote to this hopeless pattern.

The end of the Biblical account of the flood provides a place for hope not evident in the Greek account. God releases it into the world through placing a rainbow in the sky as a guarantee and a sign of hope that there will be no more floods. (Gen. 9: 8-17, Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 10a)
God of Bible placing rainbow in sky after the flood as a sign of hope

“Noah's Thank Offering”
By (Joseph Anton Koch (c. 1803)

Noah builds an altar to the Lord after being delivered from the Flood; God sends the rainbow as a sign of his covenant (Genesis 8–9).
This pattern plays out in Biblical narratives and Greek tragedies. Some 16 suicides/self-mutilations can be found in the 24 surviving tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides (see Table 1), while only 6 suicides can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, and 1 suicide in the Christian New Testament.
Suicide also occurred frequently in historical Greek figures.

Many famous people in Greece and Rome took their own lives: Pythagoras, Socrates, Zeno, Demosthenes, Marc Antony, Seneca and his wife, Paulina, and many more.

“Death of Seneca”
By
Peter Paul Rubens (1615)
The great sociologist and founder of suicidology, Emil Durkheim (1897/1951) distinguished three types of suicides: *egoistic* suicides resulting from an isolation of self from society, *altruistic* suicides resulting from a lack of differentiation between self and society, and *anomic* suicides, referring to a confusion in boundaries between self and society. Most of Sophocles’ suicides are *egoistic* in this sense, while most of the Euripides’ suicides are *altruistic*.

Let us first apply Durkheim’s typology to suicides in Greek tragedy.
### Table 1. Suicides in Greek Tragedy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajax</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ajax (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Self-blinding</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocasta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haemon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Antigone (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurydice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Antigone (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Knife</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deianeira</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Trachinae (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heracles</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>The Trachinae (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Burning</td>
<td>Anomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigone</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Antigone (Sophocles)</td>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>Anomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermione</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Andromache (Euripides)</td>
<td>Suicidal threats</td>
<td>Anomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaedra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hippolytus (Euripides)</td>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>Anomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evadne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Suppliants (Euripides)</td>
<td>Burning</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iphigenia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Iphigenia in Aulis (Euripides)</td>
<td>Axe</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoeceus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>The Phoenissae (Euripides)</td>
<td>Jumped</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macaria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Heracleidae (Euripides)</td>
<td>Knife</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyxena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hecuba (Euripides)</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcestis</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Alcestis (Euripides)</td>
<td>Poisoned</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M=Male, F=Female.
Suicides in the Hebrew Bible

Durkheim’s terminology can also be applied to suicidal behavior in the Hebrew Bible. There are only six suicides which are listed in Table 2, three (Ahitophel, Zimri and Abimelech) can be classified as egoistic, and three (Samson, Saul and Saul’s armor bearer) can be classified as altruistic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahitophel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2 Sam. 17:23</td>
<td>Strangling</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimri</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1 Kings 16:18</td>
<td>Burning</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abimelech</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Judg. 9:54</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samson</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Judg. 16:30</td>
<td>Crushing</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sam. 31:4</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Sam. 1:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Chron. 10:4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saul’s Armor bearer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1 Sam. 31:5</td>
<td>Sword</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Chron. 10:5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What may be of greater significance is the number of suicide prevention (and life-promoting) narratives in the Hebrew Bible, often involving characters in seemingly hopeless and desperate situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1 Kings 18–19</td>
<td>Protected withdrawal and nurturance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Numbers 11</td>
<td>Support and practical advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Psalms 22</td>
<td>Renewal of faith in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Renewal of relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Genesis 27–28</td>
<td>Appropriate matchmaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>Protected withdrawal and guidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven Empirical Risk Factors for Suicide

We now will concentrate on seven warning signals or risk factors for suicide emerging from the recent research literature concerning suicide prevention.

- 1) Social isolation can increase the risk of suicide.
- 2) A distorted search for meaning can increase the risk of suicide.
- 3) Being exiled (a refugee) can increase the risk of suicide.
- 4) Feeling unable to be oneself with others can increase the risk of suicide.
- 5) Feeling unsupported in one’s life mission can increase the risk of suicide.
- 6) Feeling abandoned by one’s child leaving the family nest can increase the risk of suicide.
- 7) A dysfunctional family of origin can increase the risk of suicide.

In each case, Biblical narratives suggest a treatment plan unavailable to the Greek characters.
Ajax

After the Greek warrior Ajax’s rage has passed, he falls into a deep depression. Though he does not disguise his suicidal intent, he is allowed to go off by himself, offered neither food nor emotional support. His brother, Teucer sends a messenger from the Greek chieftains ordering that Ajax not be left alone. The messenger too late-Ajax has fallen on his sword (Sophocles, Ajax, ll.748-755, 848-849, 865). The common-sense suicide preventive message is clear. Do not leave a suicidal person alone!!!
Elijah

The Biblical prophet Elijah represents a contrasting example of suicide prevention. At a certain point in his life, he is weary and hungry and expresses a wish to die. This statement is listened to and Elijah is given food and drink and allowed to rest (I Kings 19: 4-8). On the basis of these life-promoting actions, Elijah recovers his strength and goes on to Mt. Horeb.

Depiction of I Kings 19: 5-6: “Elijah Nourished by an Angel” By Gustave Dore (1870)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Ajax</th>
<th>Elijah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Precipitating Stressor</td>
<td>Ajax is humiliated by both Agamemnon and the goddess Athena</td>
<td>Elijah is overwhelmed and exhausted from his harassment by Queen Jezebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reaction</td>
<td>Ajax says he wants to die</td>
<td>Elijah says he wants to die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Response Of Others</td>
<td>Ajax is allowed to leave his tent alone.</td>
<td>Elijah is sent an angel who bring him food, drink and companionship and lets him rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effect</td>
<td>Ajax kills himself by falling on his sword</td>
<td>Elijah recovers his strength and goes on to Horeb to continue his mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison 2. Job versus Zeno: How overcome misfortune

According to the account of the ancient Greek chronicler Diogenes Laertius, Zeno, founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, wrenched his toe on the way home from lecturing at the Stoa (porch) He interprets this objectively minor mishap as a “sign from the gods that he should depart” and voluntarily holds his breath until he dies (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 7.28).
The Biblical figure of Job, in contrast, does not commit suicide despite being assailed by far more serious misfortunes – the loss of his wealth, his family, and his health. Though he is deeply grieved and indeed wrestles with suicide (Job 7:15), he reaffirms his relationship with his Creator. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” (Job 13:15).
## Table 5. Job against Zeno

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Precipitating Stressor</th>
<th>Zeno</th>
<th>Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zeno the Stoic trips and stubs a toe on the way back from giving a lecture at the Stoa</td>
<td>Job suddenly and unexpectedly loses his property, his children and his health</td>
<td>Though Job complains, he maintains his innocence faith in God despite his misfortunes. This despite the reaction of his friends that he must be guilty and that of his wife that “he should curse God and die.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zeno interprets this as a sign from the gods he should depart.</td>
<td>Job’s three friends tell him that he must be guilty, and his wife tells him to curse God and die.</td>
<td>Job steadfastly maintains his faith in God while proclaiming his innocence. God punishes Job’s friends for saying they understand His (God’s) ways and tells Job that he alone has spoken the truth, and restores him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Response of Others</td>
<td>No mention made of reaction of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effect</td>
<td>Zeno immediately holds his breath until he dies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rome was the greatest power of its time. Yet Rome ultimately fell. In 410 C.E., the Visigoths, led by Alaric, breached the walls of Rome and sacked the capital of the Roman Empire. In 476 C.E. Romulus, the last of the Roman emperors in the west, was overthrown by the Germanic leader Odoacer, who became the first Barbarian to rule in Rome. The order that the Roman Empire had brought to western Europe for 1000 years was no more.

Jewish history is filled with stories of loss and expulsion. This condition is exemplified by the famous and prophetic line of Exodus.. “And there rose a new Pharaoh in Egypt who knew not Joseph.” (Exodus 1: 8). Yet the Jews survived and even thrived in exile, and have returned to their ancient homeland after nearly 2000 years.
The Story of Coriolanus

- Plutarch describes Marcius (honored by the name Coriolanus) as a man of great energy and strength of purpose and neither greedy nor petty, but combined with so violent a temper and self-assertion that he could not cooperate with people. After his heroism and brilliance in defeating the Volsci, Marcius becomes embroiled in angry arguments between the upper and lower classes of Rome, and his outspoken insults to the plebeians leads to his banishment and almost his execution, despite his glorious military services. Infuriated and obsessed with wreaking revenge on Rome, Marcius (Coriolanus) goes to the Volsci and persuades them to attack Rome. As Marcius’s Volsci army sits camped before Rome. He refuses the request of two Roman delegations to desist but is ultimately persuaded not to attack by his mother (Volumnia), who tells him, “You cannot attack Rome unless you trample on the body of the mother that bore you.” Marcius breaks down and withdraws the Volsci army. Plutarch says that he was murdered by the Volsci shortly after this withdrawal. Though not a suicide story per se, there is no question that the rigidity of Coriolanus is a factor in his death.
Veturia at the Feet of Coriolanus
The Murder of Coriolanus by the Volskis
The Story of David

- David is described as playing the lyre for King Saul, and is loved by the people. He slays the Philistine giant Goliath not by brute strength but through agility and the use of a simple slingshot. Later, his life threatened because of the jealousy of King Saul, David flees his native Israel with a band of men to live under the Philistines, longtime foes of Israel. (I Samuel 27). David leaves not because he hates his countrymen but to save his life from King Saul’s anger against him. David is no perfectionist but remains deeply human. Even in exile, David does not turn from his love of his king, his people and of God, despite the king’s anger at him. He initially feigns madness to King Achish and wins his confidence. In the period that David and his troop live among the Philistines, he tries to avoid doing harm to Israel. Although he does lead his troops in war against common enemies of Israel and the Philistines, he is spared the conflict of having to fight against Israel in a decisive battle against Israel in which Saul and his son Johnathan are both killed (1 Samuel 29: 6-11). David ultimately becomes King of Israel after Saul’s death in battle at the hands of the Philistines. As king, David (2 Samuel 6: 12-23) does not show contempt towards common people as did Coriolanus to the plebeians in Rome. Rather, David dances with the people when the ark is brought into Jerusalem.
David Feigning Madness before King Achish
David Dancing with the People before the Ark

- Insert
Coriolanus a Roman military hero, antagonizes his countrymen and is exiled from Rome.

Coriolanus joins the Volksis, the enemy of Rome

Coriolanus will lead the Volksis in battle against Rome.

Coriolanus withdraws the Volksis from attacking Rome but remains condescending to the Volksis and is killed by them.

David is a military hero in Israel flees from Israel to escape Saul’s murderous jealousy and wrath

David joins with the Philistines, the enemy of Israel

David is able to avoid fighting against the Israelites, attacking instead common enemies of Israel and the Philistines.

David is spared fighting against the Israelites and is this able to be loyal both to King Achish of the Philistines and Israel David subsequently becomes King of Israel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Coriolanus</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Precipitating Stressor</td>
<td>Coriolanus a Roman military hero, antagonizes his countrymen and is exiled from Rome.</td>
<td>David is a military hero in Israel flees from Israel to escape Saul’s murderous jealousy and wrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reaction</td>
<td>Coriolanus joins the Volksis, the enemy of Rome</td>
<td>David joins with the Philistines, the enemy of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Response of Others</td>
<td>The Romans fear Coriolanus will lead the Volksis in battle against Rome.</td>
<td>David is able to avoid fighting against the Israelites, attacking instead common enemies of Israel and the Philistines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effect</td>
<td>Coriolanus withdraws the Volksis from attacking Rome but remains condescending to the Volksis and is killed by them.</td>
<td>David is spared fighting against the Israelites and is this able to be loyal both to King Achish of the Philistines and Israel David subsequently becomes King of Israel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison 4. Jonah versus Narcissus: How to balance self and other

- Greek thought sees self and other as fundamentally opposed. One wins at the expense of another losing.

- Biblical thought sees self and other in harmony. In the words of the Biblical sage, Hillel, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself only, what am I? If not now, when?” (Avot 1: 14).
A vain young man named Narcissus is so physically beautiful that many fall in love with him by simply looking at him. *(The Metamorphoses, 3: 359-378)*

One would-be lover who feels scorned prays to the god of fate, Nemesis, and asks that Narcissus fall in love and be unable to achieve his desire. *(The Metamorphoses, 3: 405-6)*
Soon, Narcissus becomes obsessed with a beautiful youth in a pond, not realizing it is his own reflection. *The Metamorphoses*, 3: 414-454).

Echo, the nymph who loves Narcissus in vain, is transformed, left merely repeating the words he says—as an echo. (*The Metamorphoses*, 3: 379-352).

Narcissus finally becomes aware of the unobtainability of the figure he sees in the pond— it is his own reflection He pines away until he dies. (*The Metamorphoses*, 3: 497-502).

“Echo and Narcissus” by John Williams Waterhouse (1900)
The Book of Jonah

- God calls on Jonah to go to warn the people of Nineveh of their wickedness. Jonah does not want to go, but he is too God-fearing to defy the command and too strong-willed to submit. He runs away in confusion to Tarshish and tells his shipmates to throw him overboard when a terrible storm threatens the ship (Jonah 1: 1-12).

- The story could thus end in Jonah’s suicide, but it doesn’t - God intervenes as a protective parent, swallowing Jonah in the protective stomach of a great fish until he overcomes his confusion. Jonah prays to God from the belly of the fish until he becomes stronger. Then the fish vomits him out on dry land (Jonah 2).
This same pattern repeats itself. God again asks Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time Jonah goes and gives the people God’s message. They repent and are saved (Jonah 3: 1-10).

Jonah becomes angry and again expresses the wish to die and leaves the city to sit on its outskirts (Jonah 4: 1-3).

Again, God intervenes, sheltering Jonah with a leafy bush from the burning sun (Jonah 4: 6).

After a worm destroys the protective bush, Jonah once again expresses suicidal thought (Jonah 4: 7-8). God once again intervenes, this time engaging Jonah in a mature dialogue to teach him the message of teshuvah, repentance or return and divine mercy and that he can reach out to another without losing himself (Jonah 4: 9-11).
Table 7. Jonah against Narcissus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Narcissus</th>
<th>Jonah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Precipitating Stressor</td>
<td>Narcissus is born of a rape of his mother. He is prophesied to have a long life as long as “he does not come to know himself.”</td>
<td>God asks Jonah to go and warn the wicked people of Nineveh to repent lest they avoid great punishment. Jonah does not want to go and runs away to Tarshish to avoid the conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reaction</td>
<td>The beautiful Narcissus heartlessly exhibits hubris by rejecting would be lovers of both genders.</td>
<td>God sends a great storm and Jonah becomes suicidal while on board a ship. When discovered, Jonah tells his shipmates that he is the reason for the storm and asks his shipmates to throw him overboard. However, rather than let him drown, God sends a big fish to swallow Jonah and protect him, and allowing him to recover his strength, and come to “know himself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Response of Others</td>
<td>Narcissus is brought down by Nemesis and becomes completely infatuated with a face he encounters in a brook.</td>
<td>After the fish vomits out the restored Jonah unto dry land, God again asks him to go to Nineveh to warm its inhabitants to repent and change their ways. This time Jonah goes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effect</td>
<td>Narcissus realizes the face in the brook is his, and thus unobtainable. He is without an identity that self-knowledge makes possible. He commits suicide, either in a passive (pining away) or active (stabbing himself) manner, depending on the source. Narcissus fruitfully looks to the outside world for his own missing identity. Yet, according to prophesy, if he finds it, he will die.</td>
<td>Jonah warns the people of Nineveh but becomes suicidal again and sits outside the city walls under a hot son. God again protects Jonah through shielding him from the sun with a large gourd. Ultimately God removes the gourd, and in addressing Jonah’s complaint, strengthens Jonah’s identity and teaches him the lesson of mercy and compassion -- and that reaching out to others does not mean that he must lose himself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison 5: Moses versus Oedipus: How to constructively accept help in one's life mission

- Greek thought posits one is doomed by a dysfunctional family. “For now. I am forsaken of the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to his bed who gave me my own wretched being. (Sophocles, Oedipus the King, ll. 1359-1361). “From what manner of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed, unwed, to share their home” (Sophocles, Antigone, l. 869).

- Biblical thought thinks the opposite. One can overcome the effects of a dysfunctional or even an abandoning family. “Cast me not off, neither forsake me, O god of my salvation. For though my father and mother have forsaken me, the Lord will take me up.” (Psalm 27: 9-10)
The Story of Oedipus

Oedipus, a kind and concerned ruler, is concerned about the plague infesting Thebes, and tries vigorously to find its cause, not realizing it was his own act of unknowingly murdering his father and subsequently marrying his mother Jocasta—he was abandoned at birth and raised by the King of Corinth. However, he pursues his quest alone, his questions answered by riddles from the Oracle of Delphi, convoluted responses from the prophet Teiresias, and some attempts of help from his brother-in-law Creon, whom he does not really trust Creon; so he is basically alone in his quest. Despite warnings from Jocasta to desist in his quest, Oedipus plunges blindly ahead. His quest ends in the most dreadful destruction for Oedipus and his family.
Oedipus Alone with the Sphinx
Francois Xavier, Fabre, 1808
The Story of Moses

Moses' is raised in the house of the Pharaoh to save his life. He seems guided by his conscience and circumstances and does not consciously attempt to seek clues about his destiny. Yet one can see his latent identification: he kills an Egyptian attacking a Hebrew (Exodus 2: 11-12). Moses subsequently chances upon the burning bush and encounters the Hebrew God, who informs him of his mission to save the Children of Israel from Pharaoh. Yet Moses has a speech impediment - he stutters - and is genuinely helped in his mission by his older brother Aaron who does the public speaking for him. (Exodus 7). Despite Moses’s misgivings as to his own abilities, he does ultimately agree to God’s call and leads the Children of Israel out of slavery. Yet he subsequently does feel overwhelmed by his task and unable to go on, crying to God in his despair for help: (Numbers 11: 12), God responds and provides him with the help of seventy people, a Sanhedrin, to share Moses’s burden: (Numbers XI: 16-7).
Moses Accepting Help

Moses holding up his arms during the battle, assisted by Aaron and Hur; painting by John Everett Millais
Table 8. Moses against Oedipus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Precipitating Stressor</th>
<th>Oedipus</th>
<th>Moses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Oedipus’s mother sends the infant Oedipus away to be exposed on mountain top and die.</td>
<td>Moses’s mother sends the infant Moses away to save him from being killed by Pharaoh.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Oedipus is rescued and raised by the king of a neighboring state, Corinth</td>
<td>Moses is rescued and raised by the daughter of Pharaoh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oedipus's identity is questioned, and he has no one to talk to. He attempts unsuccessfully to gain usable information from the Oracle of Delphi, who speaks in riddles and entraps Oedipus into patricide and incest.</td>
<td>Moses sees an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite and kills him with a rock. He flees Egypt, but God appears to Moses and chooses him to lead the Israelites against Egypt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oedipus attempts to save Thebes from a plague but is undone by misinformation and riddles from others. This results in Oedipus's self-blinding as well as many killings and suicides.</td>
<td>Moses seeks and receives necessary help at various times in his mission (Aaron, a Sanhedrin, etc.) and is able to carry out his mission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison 6: Rebecca versus Phaedra: How to cope with one's child living his own life.

- Greek thought fears a child coming to live his/her own life. The Greek father Laius fears being displaced or even killed by his own son (Apollodorus, 1.1.4; Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, ll. 707-721; Gayley, Myths, ll.261-264). The Greek mother Clytemnestra fears being abandoned by her daughters (Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis, ll. 653-566; Electra, l. 1102). She uses her sons against her husband (Euripides, Medea, ll. 1354-60).

- Biblical thought thinks the opposite. The Hebrew father is commanded to teach his son thoroughly (Deut 6: 7; Kiddushin, 30a). The Biblical mother Rebecca is invested in helping Jacob, whom she perceives as the most suitable, to receive the blessing from Isaac (Genesis 27). Hannah hands over her son Samuel to study with the prophet Eli. The effects of a dysfunctional or even an abandoning family and even makes him a special robe - a me’il (I Samuel 1,2).
In Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, Phaedra, the wife of King Theseus of Athens, is caught in a miserable family situation, and at the same time she has unrealistic expectations of herself. By the goddess Aphrodite’s design, she falls madly in love with her stepson, Hippolytus. Though she resists her passion, with great misery to herself, her servant betrays her secret to Hippolytus. Phaedra then hangs herself (ll. 776-779), leaving behind a note that falsely accuses Hippolytus of raping her (ll. 882-898). Theseus believes the note and pronounces a curse of death on his son. The curse is soon fulfilled, and the truth of Hippolytus’s innocence is revealed too late.
Phaedra (1880) by Alexandre Cabanel
After participating in the deception by which they have obtained Isaac’s blessing, Rebecca tells Jacob to go away to her brother Laban, so that he won’t be killed by his brother Esau who feels that Jacob has stolen his father’s blessing that rightly belongs to him (Gen. 27:42-45). Immediately afterward, Rebecca tells Isaac that her life has been made miserable by Esau’s Hittite wives, and she worries that Jacob may similarly marry a daughter of Heth, the Cannanite:

And Rebecca said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good shall my life be to me?” (Gen. 27:46)

Isaac commands Jacob to not marry one of the daughters of Canaan, who are so offensive to Rebecca and instead tells him to go to Laban and marry one of his daughters. Rebecca is relieved, and there is no more mention of her “suicidal” musings (Gen. 28:1-4)
The Jewish Bride, by Rembrandt
Stage Phaedra Rebecca

1 Precipitating Stressor Phaedra falls passionately in love with her stepson Hippolytus, wanting him for herself. Rebecca is concerned that her son Jacob will marry a totally unsuitable Hittite woman.

2 Reaction Phaedra attempts to resist her passion but becomes very depressed. Rebecca tells her husband Isaac that “her life will not be worth living” if Jacob marries a Hittite woman, like his brother Esau did.

3. Response of Others Phaedra’s servant betrays the secret of her infatuation to Hippolytus. Isaac sends Jacob away to marry a daughter of Rebecca’s brother Laban.

4. Effect Phaedra hangs herself and leaves a note to her husband Theseus falsely accusing Hippolytus of raping her. This leads to the death of Hippolytus. Rebecca is satisfied and does not speak of suicide again.

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<th>Rebecca</th>
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<td>Phaedra hangs herself and leaves a note to her husband Theseus falsely accusing Hippolytus of raping her. This leads to the death of Hippolytus</td>
<td>Rebecca is satisfied and does not speak of suicide again.</td>
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Comparison 7: Ruth versus Antigone: How to overcome the deleterious effects of a dysfunctional family of origin

- Greek thought posits one is doomed by a dysfunctional family. “For now. I am forsaken of the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to his bed who gave me my own wretched being. (Sophocles, Oedipus the King, ll. 1359-1361). “From what manner of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed, unwed, to share their home”(Sophocles, Antigone, l. 869).

- Biblical thought thinks the opposite. One can overcome the effects of a dysfunctional or even an abandoning family. “Cast me not off, neither forsake me, O god of my salvation. For though my father and mother have forsaken me, the Lord will take me up.” (Psalm 27: 9-10)
Antigone suicides (Sophocles, Antigone)

- King Laius of Thebes unsuccessfully attempts to kill Oedipus, because he fears being displaced and indeed murdered by him.
- Oedipus is adopted by King Polybus of Corinth family, To avoid his “fate”, he flees from Corinth and unknowingly kills his biological father Laius and marries his biological mother, Jocasta.
- When Oedipus discovers his incest, a tragic sequence of events evolve: his mother kills herself, he blinds himself, after which he curses his two sons to kill each other.
- Antigone, his daughter, hangs herself after being buried alive for trying to bury her dead brother, Polyneices.
The Incest of Lot and his Daughters

- When the sinful people of Sodom are destroyed, Lot and his two daughters escape. Thinking their father is the last living man, they get him drunk and have sexual relations with him, so that the human race will not perish. (Genesis 19: 31).
- Out of the union of Lot and his older daughter come the people from Moab (literally, “from the father” in Biblical Hebrew).
- Ruth the Moabitess is a descendant of this incestuous union. Rather than suicide, she thrives and becomes a very symbol of womanly love, as a daughter, a wife, and a mother.
- From Ruth comes David, etc.

“The Story of Ruth” by Thomas Matthews Rooke (1876)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
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<th>Ruth</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Precipitating Stressor</td>
<td>Antigone is the direct product of an unintentional incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother Jocasta.</td>
<td>Ruth is a descendant of an intentional incestuous relationship on the part of Lot’s eldest daughter with her father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reaction</td>
<td>Though raised in a seemingly secure home, Antigone does not seem to be able to separate from her family of origin</td>
<td>Though Ruth is widowed at an early age and away from her native land, she does not seem to be enmeshed and indeed is able to bond to her also widowed mother-in-law Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Response of Others</td>
<td>Antigone is over-identified with her family of origin and winds up being buried alive because she will not leave her brother fighting against Thebes to remain unburied.</td>
<td>Naomi accepts Ruth as her daughter and brings Ruth back with her to Judah and facilitates Ruth’s marriage to Boaz, the kinsman of Naomi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effect</td>
<td>Antigone hangs herself, rejecting her wood be lover. Antigone means in Greek against generativity (semen).</td>
<td>Ruth thrives and becomes a mother of Obed, and ancestress of King David and the Davidic line. Integrates Naomi into her family in a beautiful way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the Greek oracles transmit predictions of the future which cannot be altered, the biblical prophets allow for the possibility that people can grow, develop, and even change. The Greek Pandora locks hope in her urn after releasing all evils unto the world. The biblical Noah, in contrast, is shown a bow in the sky as a sign of hope and a promise of no more floods. The time is long overdue for a Biblical Psychotherapy, especially applied to an in-depth positive psychology and suicide prevention.
Lesson 1: Elijah against Ajax

We must pay attention to suicidal cues and statements. Interventions do not have to be grand. Oftentimes a simple, life-promoting gesture can be very important in promoting life and preventing suicide.
Lesson 2: Job against. Zeno

We must offer a positive message of hope and meaning to suicidal people. Otherwise, a person may engage in destructive and lethal actions, both to oneself and to others, in an attempt to find this life-meaning.
Lesson 3: David against. Coriolanus

We must offer a way of assimilating successfully to a refugee without losing his own identity. Otherwise, a person may engage in destructive and lethal actions, in an attempt to be loyal to conflicting identities.
Lesson 4: Jonah againsts Narcissus.

We must offer suicidal people a means and method of integrating self and other.

In other words, we must show them how to connect to and love others in a self-expressive way.
Lesson 5: Moses against Oedipus.

We must offer people with insecure backgrounds a means of support in their life mission.

In other words, we must demonstrate to them that they are not alone in their journey.
Lesson 6: Rebecca against Phaedra

We must offer parents alternative ways of establishing meaning when their offspring go their own way and build their own lives.
Lesson 7: Ruth against Antigone.

We must offer people from a dysfunctional, abusive and abandoning family a therapeutic sense of secure parenting to allow them to overcome the negative effects of their family of origin and lead productive, full and meaningful lives.
Questions

1. Was Ajax delusional? How would you treat him from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Elijah story)?

2. Was Zeno grandiose? How would you treat him from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Job story)?

3. How could Coriolanus have better handled his exile from Rome? How would you treat him from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the David story)?

4. Was Narcissus narcissistic? How would you treat him from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Jonah story)?
Questions

5. Was Oedipus an “unwanted child”? How would you have tried to help Oedipus in his quest? How would you treat him from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Moses story)?

6. How would you have helped Phaedra deal with her feelings of obsessive possessive attachment toward her stepson? How would you treat her from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Rebecca story)?

7. How would you have helped Antigone deal with her enmeshed family of origin. How would you treat her from a Psycho-Biblical perspective (using the Ruth story)?
STOP, LOOK AND LIVE: A Guide for Therapists
Kalman J. Kaplan

- Slow down
- Talk to me
- One day at a time
- Pace yourself

- List your thoughts
- Organize your feelings
- Overcome your impulses
- Know whom to contact

and

- Love the world around you
- Impact people you meet
- Voice your inner self
- Embrace each day
Next Offering of the course begins September, 2016

36 CEUs for psychologists, physicians (CME type 2), social workers, pastoral counselors, chaplains, LPCs and nurses.

Program in Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health
(http://www.spertus.edu/biblical-health)

Kalman J. Kaplan, PhD, Director
(312-246-2932, KalKap@aol.com)

Paul Cantz, PsyD, ABPP Coordinator
(847-877-9578, pcantz@gmail.com)
Why suicide prevention in faith communities?

Faith communities—by *nature*—foster “protective factors”—conditions that suicide risk
Why suicide prevention in faith communities?

Promote understanding that mental illnesses are real—and treatable

Stimulate safe dialogue about suicide

Cultivate narratives of hope
Why suicide prevention in faith communities?

- Support people facing mental health challenges
- Promote effective treatments for mental health problems

Promote Mental Health
Why suicide prevention in faith communities?
- Respond to suicide crisis

Suicidal thoughts and acts
• What resources are available?

• Communications aids: flyers, bulletin inserts, PowerPoint slides

• Worship and spiritual resources
  -- Prayers, meditations, liturgies
  -- Sermons and homilies
  -- Hymns and songs
  -- Scriptural resources

• Other resources for mental health promotion and suicide prevention
One Sabbath:
Celebrating life, hope, and reasons to live

There is a reason for each of us to be here—alive—the young and old, the weak and strong, the sick and the healthy. This week, we celebrate reasons to live—today and every day, regardless of how you feel at the moment. Let’s be honest: life can sometimes feel overwhelming. The loss of a job or a relationship, trouble in school, a serious mental or physical illness, a divorce, or the death of a loved one can happen to anyone. Life events like these can leave us feeling worthless, abandoned, or isolated.

[Insert the name of your faith community] seeks to be a caring community focusing on the hope that in God’s time, the travails of this life will subside. Through connections within our own community, we find strength for each day. Each of us is here for a reason and has a God-given role in life, regardless of the circumstances. Moment by moment, it is important to remember there is help and hope.

Every life matters—to others, to the world you live in, and most importantly, to God. God loves you. God knows your struggles and failures, as well as your joys and triumphs. Even when you walk through the valley of the shadows, God is with you. In the times when it feels like God is far away or doesn’t hear our prayers, God gives us people who can help—friends, loved ones, co-workers, others in your faith community, your [insert the term you use for faith leaders: rabbis, pastors, imams, priests], and clinical professionals such as counselors, therapists, and doctors. They can be God’s heart and God’s listening ear when we feel most troubled or alone.

If you know someone (including yourself) who has lost hope, is feeling completely alone, or feels life doesn’t matter, reach out for help. Let others help. This is especially important if there are thoughts of suicide or wanting to die.

Resources for Help
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24 hours): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Pathways2Promise: Ministry and Mental Illness. pathways@mimh.edu

*Faith.Hope.Life* is an initiative of
Download campaign overview.

What is the Faith.Hope.Life. campaign?

Faith.Hope.Life. is an opportunity for every faith community in the United States, regardless of creed, to focus one Sabbath each year on the characteristics common to most faiths that also help prevent suicides. These characteristics are at the very core of what most faith communities are and do, in that they:

- Promote hope
- Build healthy social connections
- Provide answers to life's challenging questions
- Recognize and celebrate the myriad reasons for living and the God-given value of each member in the community, no matter how young or old, weak or strong, healthy or infirmed, and
- Support those who face mental health challenges and/or problems with misuse of alcohol and other drugs, as they seek effective treatment. Support their families and loves ones, as well.

Faith.Hope.Life. is an initiative of the Faith Communities Task Force of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. All the information and resources necessary to launch Faith.Hope.Life. in your faith community are available on this website.

+ Why should my faith community promote the Faith.Hope.Life. campaign?
+ When is the Faith.Hope.Life. campaign?
+ How does the Faith.Hope.Life. campaign help prevent suicides?
+ What resources are available to help faith communities celebrate Faith.Hope.Life. Sabbath?
+ What are some ways faith communities can help prevent suicide, in addition to the Faith.Hope.Life. campaign?
+ About our logo
Responding to a member who may be at risk for suicide

- Stay calm
- Take threatening comments seriously
- Know how to ask directly: “Are you thinking of killing yourself?”
- Know (in advance) the community referral resources available for mental health crisis intervention and firmly connect the member with appropriate resources
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-8255 (TALK), a free, confidential service available 24/7 that connects callers to local, certified crisis lines.
- Accompany the individual to the hospital or other clinical professional
- Provide support and care to family and friends affected by the crisis
Other resources for mental health promotion and suicide prevention in faith communities

The following resources can help faith communities promote mental health and wellness, as well as reduce the risk of suicide among their members and in their greater communities. The Faith Communities Task Force encourages you to become familiar with these resources and use them in any way possible.

Understanding and Defining Roles for Faith Leaders and Faith Organizations

The Role of Faith Community Leaders in Preventing Suicide. A web-based resource describing roles for faith communities in reducing risk of suicide among community members. (Suicide Prevention Resource Center.)

Webinar: The Role of Faith Leaders in Suicide Prevention. Rev. (Dr.) Robert Certain, a former military chaplain, and Rev. Talitha Arnold lay out the rationale for faith leaders being attentive to preventing suicides and provides information to prepare faith leaders for assuming their role. They also outline how faith communities can promote important protective factors through worship, education, pastoral care and other ministries. (National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.)

Equipping and Training Leaders; Engaging Faith Members

Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging. It is important for faith leaders to understand the types of public messaging about suicide that can increase risk among vulnerable individuals. Conversely, leaders should be aware of the types of public messages that promote resiliency, encourage help-seeking, publicize prevention successes, and encourage actions that help prevent suicide. This resource helps people messaging about suicide to develop messages that are strategic, safe, positive, and make use of relevant guidelines and best practices. (National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention)

After a Suicide: Recommendations for Religious Services and Other Public Memorial Observances. A brief guide for faith community leaders and other community leaders that provides background, information, suggestions, ways to care for and
Two other items of interest (also on the website):

**Understanding Theological Perspectives**

The Role of Faith Communities in Preventing Suicide: A Report of an Interfaith Suicide Prevention Dialogue  A report from the Interfaith Suicide Prevention Dialogue convened by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center in 2008. It contains ideas for engaging faith communities in suicide prevention and developing interfaith suicide prevention initiatives, as well as the perspectives on suicide of five major religions practiced in the United States (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) and the common themes among them. (Suicide Prevention Resource Center)

Webinar: Overcoming the Tragic: A Positive Approach to Mental Health Drawing from Biblical Narratives. Dr. Kalman Kaplan, University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine and Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, focuses on pastoral/rabbinical approaches to supporting those struggling with depression and suicide. (National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention)
Thank you!

- Questions – Comments – Discussion
  - (www.Faith-Hope-Life.org)