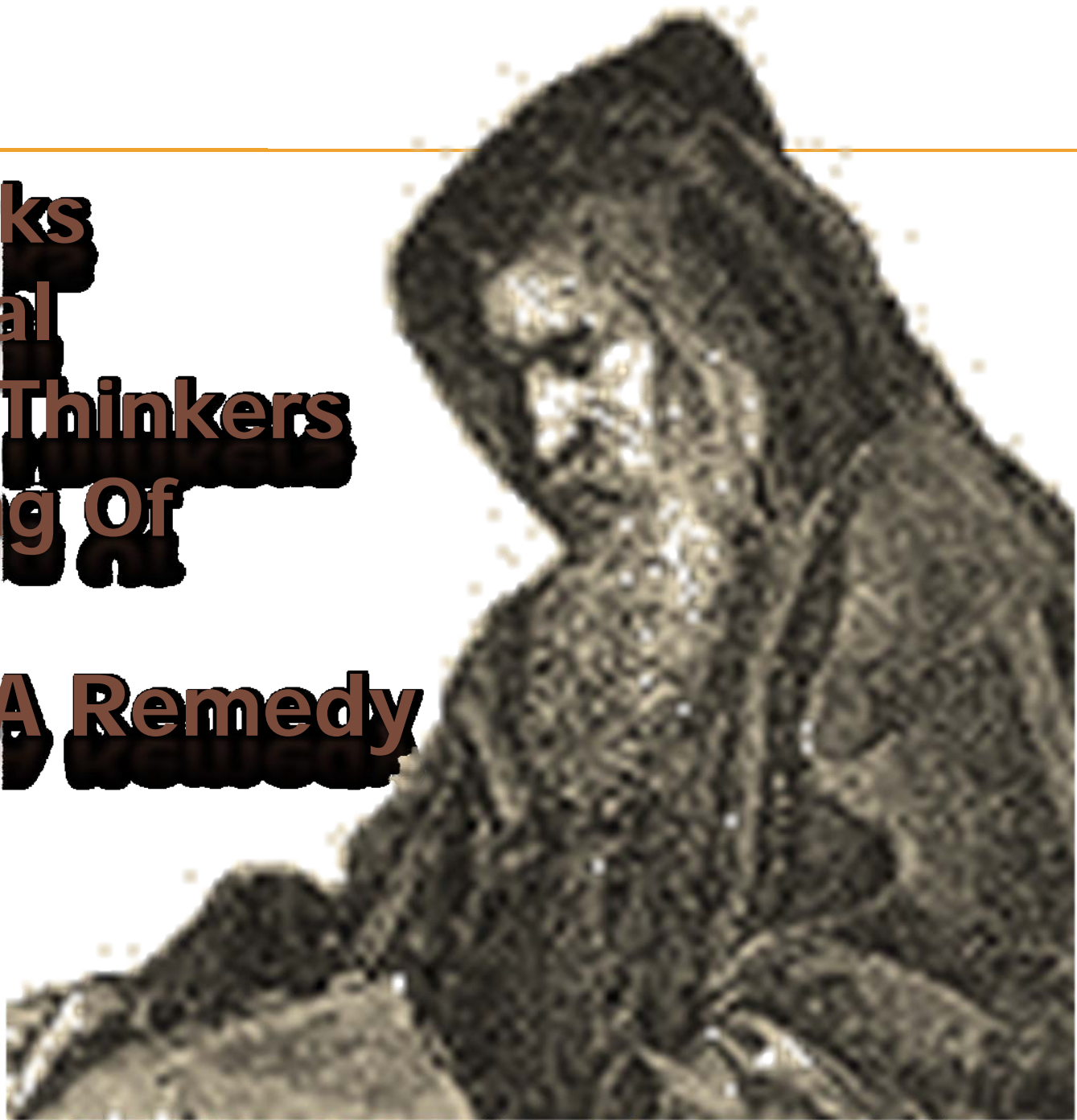

**Using Works
Of Medieval
Armenian Thinkers
In Teaching Of
Bioethics:
Narek As A Remedy**



Using Works Of Medieval Armenian Thinkers In Teaching Of Bioethics: Narek As A Remedy

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Health in Middle Ages

From ancient times medication was considered to be a miracle, something that only magicians and those with supernatural powers could do. Hence a special reverence was conferred to those who mastered this unique trade.



The present report is devoted to Gregor of Narek, a great thinker, philosopher and psychoanalyst of the Xth century.

The Book of Narek

The book known as Narek was written by Gregor of Narek a monastery in Eastern Armenia. Narek was written in 1001-1003 A.D.

While talking about medieval Armenian thinkers we first of all mean all thinkers, astrologists and lawyers who created works of art starting from the fifth century. In one word we understand philosophers, persons who love and appreciate wisdom and who have great contribution in Armenian and international heritage.

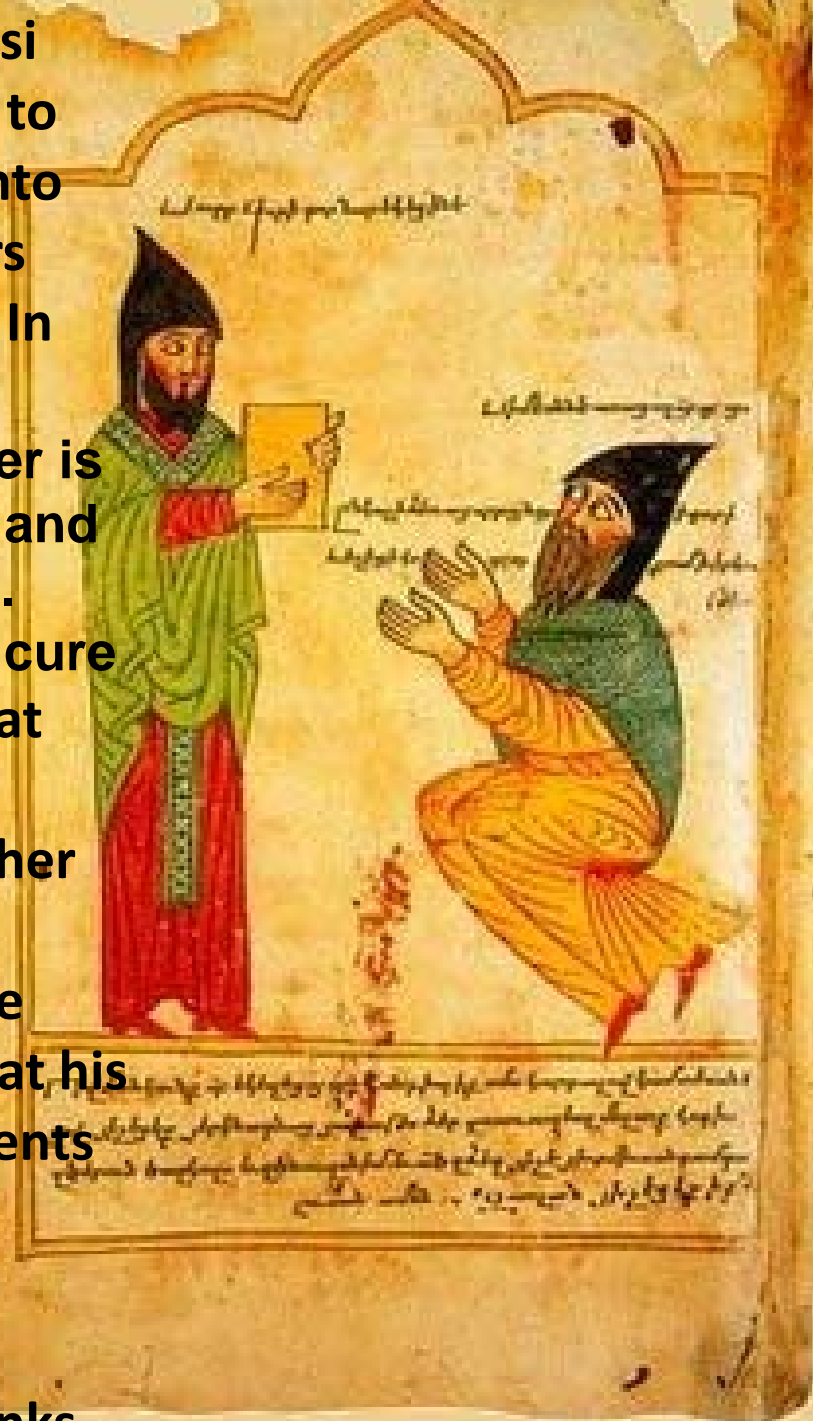
Among them we can mention the names of Movses Khorenatsi, Shirakasi, Lastivertsi, Tlkurnatsi, Gosh, Nerses Lambronatsi and many others. In the works of these thinkers we face the diversity of life and death, good and evil, consciousness and right, repentance and remorse, truth and false.



between the ideas, expressed by Narekatsi (XX century thinker). In order to answer to that question it could be better to take into consideration the idea of ancient thinkers from China, India until Greek, Hypocrate. In their opinion:

- a. There isn't legs, feets, fingers etc. Ther is only a man and who has body and soul and you will have a system approach to him.
- b. Don't cure the body untill you do not cure
 - The fact is that the physician should treat the patient not only with medicine or by means of operation but first of all by his/her smile, heart, behavior and by words. He should inspire faith and trustfulness in the patient and should make them believe that his only compensation and aim is to see patients recovered.

Narekatsi as well as many other thinkers of ancient and medieval ages thinks





- Now the second reason. Each physician should think that even after graduating a number of courses he still has a lot to learn. Let's remember here that only one point was added to the oath of Hypocrite in 1967 in World Congress of Deontologisat in Paris:

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

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



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

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

Each person has the right to make mistakes but try to find force to say about it, to confess your faults and not repeat them.

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

Moreover, we suffer from vanity and Narsisism, we try to justify ourselves by all means and blame others Yes, all are guilty but not me. It is proper here to quote Garegin Nzhdeh's words: try to find the reason for your misfortune, unsuccessfulness and failures in you and only out of you.

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



"Try to find the reason for your misfortune, unsuccessfulness and failures first of all in you and only out of you." G. Njdeh

Many scholars think, that if a book similar to Narek was written by any European writer, it would gain universal acceptance even in the Middle Ages. The only reason Narek is not as widely known and read as works of Confutsius, Descartes, Hume etc. is because he has written in Armenian, a language that only a handful of people can read.

The Narek is a nicely written book which makes everyone to analyze him/herself and to honestly evaluate his/her behavior and values. It leads the person to stand in front of God and in front of his horrible sins against his/her body, his/her spirit, other individuals, the humankind and the Almighty.

Narek is written in Grabar, the ancient Armenian and is a melodic prayer. It was believe that thanks to the fine style of its lines, it has gained even more power in leading people towards repentance, towards communion with God. Anyone who has read the Narek, will assure that it eventually brings peace, harmony and love onto the reader.

While Narekatsi speaks about
the sins in this way:

*If I were to fill the basin of the sea with ink,
and to measure out parchment the length and
breadth of a field of many leagues
and were to take all the reeds of the forests and
woods and turn them into pens,*

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

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

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

Each physician should understand the fact that he is a mortal with his shortcomings and mistakes , not a God, should not throw down the gauntlet to God and boast that he can create man and take lives of severely ill men. Today's technologies and scientific achievements can give such opportunities but as said A. Shveitser:" If I have the right to pick up all the fruits to which my hands can reach".

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

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

Starting from the fifth century Armenians have had translators holiday. Even in our Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Matenadaran you can find Armenian translations but not original texts.

A lot of researchers come to Matenadaran for restoring the original text by Armenian translations. At that time translations were done from Hebrew , Greek, etc.



Among the best translation we can mention Testimony, works of Shakespeare, Byron, Pushkin and so on.

To have and reach best translation translators should know first the language, national spirit, culture and traditions and only after start translating.



Unfortunately we do not have good translation of Narekatsi.

Maybe one of you can carry out this job: go to **AKHTAMAR ISLAND**, on the shores of **LAKE VAN** where Narekasi has created his masterpiece.

With bloody wrecks and horrid rumbles

Eastern slaves of car and gold

Escape with crowds from soul deserts

*To western blessing home of my
soul.*

H. Tumanyan



Akhtamar island, Lake Van



All 10000 lines are filled with love, the ultimate reverence towards the Almighty and with the consideration of human limitedness and sinfulness.

The Book starts with the following lines:

The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries,¹
I offer up to you, O Seer of Secrets,²
placing the fruits of my wavering mind³
as a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul⁴
to be delivered to you in the censer of my will.

Compassionate Lord, breathe in
this offering and look more favorably on it
than upon a more sumptuous sacrifice⁵
offered with rich smoke. Please find
this simple string of words acceptable.
Do not turn in disdain.

May this unsolicited gift reach you,
this sacrifice of words⁶
from the deep mystery-filled chamber
of my feelings, consumed in flames
fueled by whatever grace I may have within me.⁷

As I pray, do not let these
pleas annoy you, Almighty,
like the raised hands of Jacob,
whose irreverence was rebuked
by Isaiah,⁸ nor let them seem like the impudence
of Babylon criticized in the 72nd Psalm.

But let these words be acceptable
as were the fragrant offerings
in the tabernacle at Shiloh⁹
raised again by David on his return from captivity
as the resting place for the ark of the covenant,
a symbol for the restoration of my lost soul.

Contents/ideas of Narek

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

Its results are not comparable to the results achieved by any contemporary medical institution.

These methods are in two different spheres of culture and are used for two different types of diseases: one for spiritual diseases, the other for bodily ones.

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

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

Narek offers mainly spiritual remedy. Its powers, as believed from early Middle Ages, was based on the power of the Word and Will of God. In all cases, when Narek suggests using a physical item for remedy it is a symbolic item, e.g. the Right Hand.



Gregor of Narek relates sins and diseases.

According to Narek, Human Diseases are a result of Human Sins.

Sins force people to live with a life not naturally designed for human beings. For example, adultery, avarice etc. are forms of behavior that are not natural to human beings.

Thus when a person sins, he/she starts to behave in a way for which the human body is not designed for and thus the body gets ill.

Because both sins and diseases are caused by breaking the Divine law, they both can be overcome by repentance.

The will, the decision to repent brings relief on the human being. But it does not happen all at once, the relief from pains comes during time and it may take long.

In Narek first the sinful character of humans is depicted. Gregor of Narek undertakes the whole responsibility for all sins committed by all human beings at all times and thus demonstrates the need for curing the mankind. In order the mankind and individuals to be cured humans need to first conceive their sins. Once the sin is conceived the person needs to repent and later to suffer for sins as the Almighty decides.

Narekatsi moves forward, in addition to depicting the vast majority of human sins and thus discovering the true nature of human psyche (I think no other writer or thinker has ever so well pictured the true nature of human psyche), he reveals the way for salvation. Narek is first of all a way for salvation.

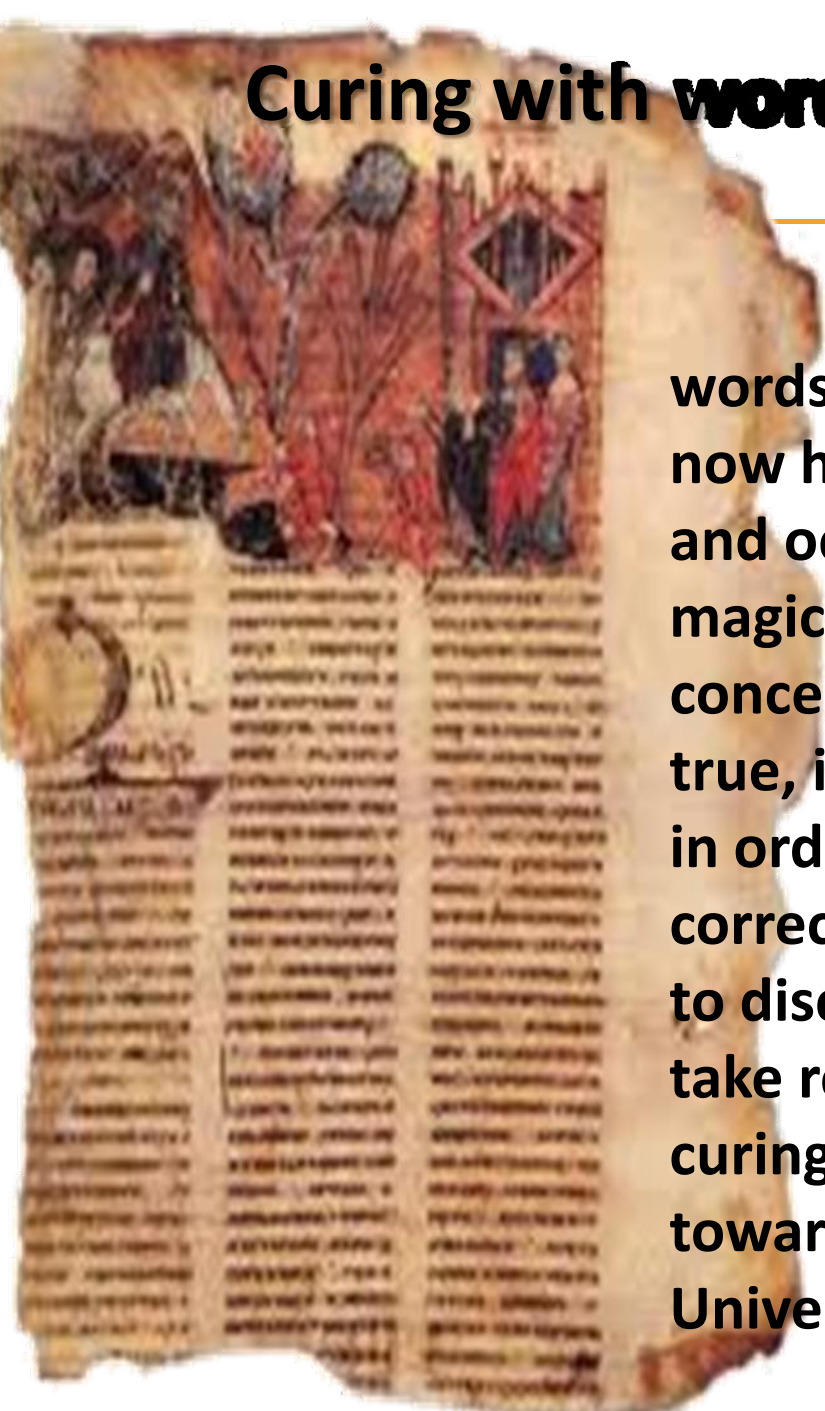
Narekatsi claims that the non-objective, the word and will of God can be objectified, that is to get body and heaviness. Throughout his prayers he makes the same claim over and over again. All that happens in this word is simply objectification of divine word and will.

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

Only the moral courage, the courage to repent and ask for forgiveness heals the person and cleans the person from sins.

Thus, according to Narekatsi, diseases are nothing else but objectification of the non-objective, the will of God, the word of God, and to cure a disease, one needs not only physical means, but also non-objective, non physical remedies such as repentance.

Curing with ~~words~~/melody



The attempts to cure someone with words that started thousands of years ago, now has changed into the practice of hypnosis and occultism, but Narek is neither a book of magic, nor a text where the luxurious words conceal the reality. In fact, the opposite is true, its words force the reader to believe that in order to live well one needs to live correctly, that in order to live well one needs to discover the true nature of humankind and take responsibility for making steps towards curing his/her spirit, towards God and towards a truly Holy reunion with the Universal Logos.

You are able, compassionate God,
to perform a miracle with your everlasting might saying,

*“”e healed of your soul’s torment,”¹ or
“May your sins be forgiven,”² or
“Go in peace. You are cleansed of sin.”³
And whatever I do not manage to say at
that hour receive from me today in your
love for mankind,
O long-suffering, generous God, who gives
life to all.*



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

The Word Remedy (Khoskabuzhutyun in Armenian) is the technique of curing the person with words.

It was believed from ancient times that words exist by themselves, that words existed even before the physical objects and hence, their existence is more real.

And because their existence is more real, than physical objects then they should be able to affect on human body

and thus if they can affect on human body, they can also cure the human being if used correctly.

In order the words to be powerful the contents must be well chosen and the person who uses the words must have great faith.

In word remedy nothing but the *Logos*, the holy word and faith in God are used.



The effectiveness of Narek is conditioned by the faith humans have.

The great Armenian composer Komitas has very interesting statements about music and about healing with music. He separates two types of music: divine and human. The divine music is played in churches, for bringing the sinful spirits to repentance, and for converting the sinful ideas into righteous ones. The human music is played in happy gatherings.

If, Komitas thinks, the music can bring sinful spirits to righteousness or make sad people happy, why cannot it also push the disease away.

Komitas was a bearer of the ancient view that all existence is composed of four elements: the soil, air, fire and water.

Thus he, for example, he believed that a four stringed musical instrument (k'nar- Harp) is preferable for medical purposes, because the human being also is composed of four elements.



