

JOB'S DISPLACED KIDNEYS: JOB 19:27

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אשר אני אחזה לי ועיני ראו ולא זר כלו כליתי בחיקי

One of the most famous passages in the Book of Job is 19:25-27, beginning, in the old Jewish Publication Society translation: *'But as for me, I know that my Redeemer liveth.'*¹ There are many problems with this passage, but a minor one can be solved simply.

Job expresses his longing to behold God with the words *kalu kilyotai becheqi*, in the old JPS translation: *'My reins are consumed within me.'*² and in the new JPS translation: *'My heart pines within me.'*² *Kilyotai* means "my kidneys"; *becheqi* means "in my breast." The problem, of course, is that the kidneys are not found in the breast. The old JPS translation accepts "kidneys," (or "reins," since the kidneys and ureters were likened to reins), while finessing "breast" as "within me"; the NJPS translation accepts that *becheqi* refers to the chest cavity, and for consistency substitutes the organ found there for the organs that are not.

Conceivably "kidneys" was understood solely as a metaphor for the emotions. By putting them in the breast, where the heart lies, the poet is mixing his metaphor but his audience would not find it incongruous. Nevertheless, biblical authors appear to use "kidneys" as a metaphor for intention (the image of "reins"), rather than the sense of psychic energy that this passage would require.³

Kilyotai [כִּלְיֹתַי] here is written defectively, without a "vav," although the "vav" is found in the other appearance of this word in Job, where it clearly means the physical kidneys.⁴ I suggest repointing *k[i]ly[o]tai* as *kaliti* [כִּלְיִתִּי] and repointing *kalu* [כָּלוּ] as *kalo*, the infinitive absolute of the same root. This would yield something like, "I am totally exhausted in my breast," giving the correct sense without doing violence to anatomy.

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NOTES

1. *The Holy Scripture According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917) p. 941-942
 2. Job 19:27. *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999) [hereafter "New JPS"] p. 1686
 3. E.g., Jeremiah 17:10: *I the Lord probe the heart, search the mind* [lit. kidneys] *to repay every man according to his ways*; Psalm. 26:2: *Probe me O Lord, and try me, test my heart and mind* [lit. kidneys and heart] *for my eyes are on Your steadfast love.*
 4. Job 16:13. *His bowmen surrounded me; He pierced my kidneys; He showed no mercy.*
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QUESTIONS FROM Rabbi Hayyim
Halpern's book **TORAH DIALOGUES**

- 1. Which Jewish mourning practices can be deduced from Leviticus 10:6 ?**
- 2. The oft-repeated golden rule, "Love your neighbor as yourself," is found in Leviticus 19:18. Why do you think Hillel interpreted this phrase in the negative: "What is hateful to you do not do to another?"**
- 3. Numbers 8:1 opens with the command to kindle the lamps of the seven-branched Menorah. Later, we are told of the silver clarions. What became of these and other treasures of the sanctuary in the course of history?**

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