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A NEW INTERPRETATION OF “THE DIALOGUE OF A MAN AND HIS BA”

Yordan Chobanov

“The Dialogue of a man and his Ba” is one of the most frequently discussed literary works from the Middle Kingdom. The text presents a sequence of speeches done by an unidentified person during his lifetime, alongside speeches by his Ba. Due to the great number of uncertain passages, the use of terms that do not appear in other texts, and the missing beginning, the interpretation of this work is difficult. Although over 100 years have passed since the text was first published by Adolf Erman in 1896 under the title “Gespräch des Lebensmüden mit seiner Seele”,¹ scholars continue to disagree on the role and place of this text within the Egyptian literary tradition. Miriam Lichtheim classified the text as an example of the so called “didactic literature” and placed it into a separate category together with “The eloquent resident of the oasis”.² Richard Parkinson introduced the term “reflective discourses”, grouping together texts with a pessimistic character. He classified “dialogues” as their sub-genre and assigned to this category works such as “The Dialogue of a man and his Ba” and “Ipuwer”.³

Egyptians themselves distinguished with a specific title only “teachings” (*sb3jt* – “Lehre”, “Unterweisung”, “instruction”, “teaching”, “wisdom” Wb. IV. 85 – 86; FD. 219). In his study of didactic literature in Egypt and West Asia, Kenneth Kitchen collected all texts belonging to this genre and argues that only those titled *sb3jt*, or the demotic *mtrt* should be classified as “teachings”. He excluded from this group texts such as “The eloquent resident of the oasis”, “The Dialogue of a man and his Ba”, “Neferty” and “Ipuwer”, which he grouped together under the term “social literature”.⁴ Ronald Williams added to this group “The Harper’s Songs”, “Haheper-raseneb” and “Sasobek” to which he referred as “works of a speculative nature”.⁵ The common feature among these classification attempts is that they divide the

¹ Erman 1896.

² Lichtheim 1996, 252–3.

³ Parkinson 1996, 302–5.

⁴ Kitchen 1979, 238.

⁵ Williams 1981, 1.

texts mainly on the basis of external characteristics, rather than by tracing connections in their meanings.

The actual interpretation of the text also presents difficulties. Erman regards the text as a recreation of internal conflict of a man on the brink of despair who contemplates ending his life.⁶ Without disputing Erman's hypothesis, Alexander Scharff developed it further by regarding the dialogue as a conflict between two viewpoints: Ba defends a hedonistic viewpoint and incites the desperate person to enjoy life.⁷ Raimond Weill followed the same line and interpreted the text as a representation of sociological controversies: he argued that the "Dialogue" conveyed the "arguments" of two social strata: "La thèse de négation de la religion funéraire... en opposition avec la thèse religieuse orthodoxe."⁸ Ziegfrid Herman's analysis marked a new step in the understanding of the text. He rejected the idea that the text represented two distinct viewpoints and argued that it was in fact a unified teaching, conveyed in the form of a dialogue, about the relation between Ba and the corpse of a man after his death.⁹ Following the same logic, Katherina Lohmann interpreted the text as "eine Weisung im Rahmen eines Bittgesuches" and argued that Ba played the role of a sage, while the man played that of a "listener". According to her, Ba links death with the fleeting nature of present life which, as the only chance, must be lived to the fullest.¹⁰ An interesting interpretation of the text is presented by Andrey Bolshakov.¹¹ For him the "Dialog" represents the process of thinking. The man and Ba are not separate personalities but rather personifications of two different viewpoints of the thinking of the protagonist. The man represents the desperation of someone who envisages life as an endless vileness, from which death seems the only salvation. Ba at the other hand represents the viewpoint that the strive towards death is pointless.¹²

More recently, returning to the ideas, expressed by Erman, James P. Allen envisages the text as a discussion about life and death.¹³ For him the text presents the inner struggle of a man, attracted by the thought of death as a release from great personal distress but uncertain and fearful of the consequences a premature death might have for his afterlife. The solution of the dilemma is to turn to the gods for assistance and to accept death as the ultimate end of life rather than a more imme-

⁶ Erman 1896. For a detailed review of all opinions, regarding the text before 1969 see: Barta 1969, 101–121. For more recent studies see: Allen 2011, 1–3.

⁷ Scharff 1937, 7–8.

⁸ Weill 1947, 137.

⁹ Herrmann 1957, 78–9.

¹⁰ Lohmann 1998, 207–210.

¹¹ Бoльшaкoв 1985.

¹² *ibid.* 21–23.

¹³ Allen 2011, 137.

diate solution. Only in this way can the man resolve his inner turmoil, so that both he and his soul reach the West in harmony.¹⁴

These interpretations hinge on the idea that the text deals with issues concerning the afterlife. An alternative interpretation would be to see the text as recreating a specific type of search, which originates from the tumultuous times of the First Intermediate Period. When the state has been destroyed and, instead of the cosmic order, Maat chaos and anarchy reign on Eearth, what is the correct behaviour which one must maintain; how is it possible for the man to manage this situation and where should he seek salvation? Before we approach the answer to this question, we must first ascertain whether the protagonist really finds himself at the brink of suicide.

Similarly to “Haheperpaseneb”, the speaker in “The Dialogue” is not a regular person, but rather a sage whose name we would expect to have been mentioned in the missing beginning of the text. The afterlife in Egyptian beliefs is constant. It is ruled by the laws of the gods and remains inaccessible to the irregularities of the human world:

*wnn ms ntj im m ntr ʿnh
hr hsf iw n irr sw*

“Indeed, he who is there (the world beyond) is in the capacity of a living god, In fighting off the wrongs of those who create them.

*wnn ms ntj im (m) ʿhʿ m wi3
hr rd.t di.t(w) stpt im r r3.w-
pr.w*

Indeed, he who is there is standing in the divine bark, In ordering the distribution of that which has been selected there for the temples.

*wnn ms ntj im m rh-ht
n hsf.n.t(w).f hr spr n Rʿ hft
mdw.f¹⁵*

Indeed, he who is there is in the capacity of a sage. He shall not be repelled from appealing before Re, when he speaks.”

But this does not mean that the speaker is in the despair of someone who is at the brink of suicide. Quite the contrary, he is in no way ready to die at any price:

*m.tn b3.j hr th.t.j
n sdm.n.j n.f hr sB.j r mwt
n ijt(j) n.f hr h3ʿ(j) hr ht r
s3mt.j¹⁶*

“Behold, my Ba is diverting me. I shall not listen to him, lest I be dragged towards death. [I] shall not come (?) to him, lest I be thrown onto the fire until I have burnt.”¹⁷

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵ *Leb.* 142–7.

¹⁶ *Leb.* 11–13.

¹⁷ For a different interpretation of this passage see: Большаков 1985, 23–5.

The verb *thi* has a strong negative character and is used to illustrate a wrong action. He who “is diverting”/who is “doing wrong” is contravening the order, Maat, and is acting according to Isefet. This is especially apparent in chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, the so called ‘Negative confessions’, in which the dead person declares twice: *n th.j* (“I have not diverted”¹⁸). In Urk. IV 1021, 10: “As regards to anyone who will come for the words...” *m rd(.w) th tw r ir.t ht-nb(.t)*; “Do not allow someone to be diverted from the doing of everything.” The most negative case to which this diversion could lead is for the heart to become *th*. In “The eloquent resident of the oasis” Hueninpu accuses the “chief overseer”, Rensi, son of Meru:

<i>s3 Mrw tnm(.w) hr:f</i>	“The son of Meru (continues to be) misguided by himself.
<i>hr:f šps(.w) r m33.t.f</i>	His face is blind for what it has seen,
<i>sh(.w) r sdm.t.f</i>	Deaf for what it has heard.
<i>th ib hr sh3jt n.f</i> ¹⁹	The heart diverts from what has been reminded to it.”

Exactly because Rensi’s heart has diverted, Hueninpu advises “the chief overseer” in his ninth plea:

<i>m nm^c(.w)</i>	“Do not be one-sided!
<i>m sdm(.w) n ib</i>	Do not listen to the heart!
<i>m hbs(.w) hr:k r rh(.w).n.k</i>	Do not cover your face for what is known to you!
<i>m šp(.w) hr:k r dg(.w).n.k</i> ²⁰	Do not blind your face for what you yourself have seen!”

For the ancient Egyptians the heart was not only an organ of the anatomy, but also the centre of human conscience, intellect, and emotions²¹. The heart to them was the core of the human person, which controlled all of the limbs of the body. It was the centre of both perceptions and cognition.²²

The teachings reveal that the ideal behaviour is to „follow the heart“ (*šms-ib*)²³. The fullest study of this phrase to date was done by David Lorton. He considered all known examples and discovered three main nuances in the meaning of *šms-ib*: “to follow your conscience”; “to act upon your will” and “to serve someone else’s will”²⁴.

¹⁸ Budge 1999, 578, 14.; 579, 24.

¹⁹ Peas. B1.218–20

²⁰ Peas. B2.104–6

²¹ Lekov 2004, 33.

²² *ibid.*, 55.

²³ See for instance Ptahhotep – Dévaud 186–96; Лекков 2004, 132–3.

²⁴ Lorton 1968, 41–54.; as well as: Lorton 1969–70, 55–7.

The heart is also the link with god and the divine; when this link is sufficiently strong, the “following of the heart” also implies following the divine bidding, that is, being inscribed in the harmony of “everything that takes place”. The Egyptian king is an example of this link. His plans come into being because he is in fact following “god’s plans”.²⁵ In Ptahhotep we are told: *hpr ht šms ib*²⁶ “Wealth comes into being (when) you follow your heart”. Why then should Rensi not listen to his heart? Because his heart is *thi*, it has diverted itself from the correct way of acting; so for Rensi to follow his heart in this case would mean to take the path of *isft* which can only lead to final destruction in the afterlife.

Let us return to our text. Similarly to Rensi’s heart, the man’s Ba is diverting him – it leads him away from the right path. This is why the man declares that he is not going to listen²⁷ to it, because for him this would mean a certain death and a repeated death (*m(w)t m whm*) in the afterlife.

The burning in Amduat is a punishment for Re’s enemies.²⁸ The man’s being “thrown onto the fire until he burns” means his total destruction in the afterlife.²⁹

The goal of every Egyptian in the afterlife is to “repeat life (after death) as Re each day”.³⁰ This is possible if the person follows Maat’s principles during his lifetime. The pursuit of death contradicts these principles:

ir sh3.k krs

“If you think of funeral –

nh3t-ib pw

This is fury of the heart.

in.t rmjt pw m sind s

This is to cause tears through making a man miserable.

*šd.t s pw m pr.f h3c(.w) hr
k33*

This is taking a man from his house, he (being at the same time) cast upon the hill.

*nn pr.n.k r-hrw m3.k r^c.w*³¹

You will not go up (to) gaze at the sun.”

Thus, the person needs to prepare for death, but not to strive for it: *nh3t-ib*³² is a term expressing a negative state of the heart. It comes from the word *nh3* “wild”, “schrecklich”, “gefährlich” which can be used as an attribute of a Lion, the god Set, etc.

²⁵ Лекков 2004, 132–3.

²⁶ Dévaud 192.

²⁷ *sdm*, the same verb as we met above in “The eloquent resident of the oasis”.

²⁸ Amduat II. 192–194.

²⁹ For the destruction through fire in the netherworld see Zandee 1960, 133–42 (page 139 comments our passage).

³⁰ See BD. 38 b.

³¹ Leb. 56–60.

³² “Sadness”, “a sad matter” FD. 136.

Wb. II 290. The term could be translated as “a furious heart”³³: *dr nh3t-ib.f*³⁴ “The fury of his heart has been expelled.”

The term would most probably imply that the heart has diverted itself from its rightful state and thus has become restless and anxious.

...*n sšr irt n.t nh3-ib*
*dmi pw n hrw-ib...*³⁵

“... The eyes of the furious-hearted do not dry up (from tears),
This is the abode of the one who is pleased with his heart...”

Thus, *hrw-ib* appears to be the opposite state of *nh3-ib*. The one whose ‘heart is furious’ is doomed to suffer; his eyes will be forever full of tears. The expression appears also in the biographical texts:

hsj.f tw mrj.f tw
*di.f n.k ḥw n nh3t-ib*³⁶

“He praises you, he loves you.
He gives you continuance of life without fury of the heart.”

In Ipuwer’s lament we find:

nh3t-ib.w ḥpr(.w)
s3rj ḥr w3t nb.t
nf3 pw n wn.f
*wn n3 ntr:w ḥr ib irj*³⁷

“The fury of the hearts has happened.
The need is on every road.
It is so – it does not pass.
These gods exist upon their corresponding hearts.”

In Ptahhotep it is possible to recognise yet another instance of the expression. It is not entirely reliable, because the initial *n* from *nh3t* is missing from the text:

m ir(.w) st bwt ms pw
šw.k m (n)h3t-ib n r-c-nb

“Do not do this, it is indeed disgusting!
(Let you be) empty of “fury of the heart” each day!

ir whh(.f) m skn ḥr.s
*n m-c:r.n šhr nb m-c.f*³⁸

If [he] fails through meddling (?) in this,
No plan shall succeed in his hand.”

The man wants Ba to bring his heart into a state of *w3h*³⁹, but if the man thinks only of a funeral, this will actually bring his heart into a state of *nh3t*. The very

³³ So Barns 1956, 6 – “the furious-hearted man”.

³⁴ Eb. 39, 12.

³⁵ P. Ram I Bi 15.

³⁶ Urk. IV 1578, 4–5.

³⁷ Adm. 12, 3–4.

³⁸ Dévaud L2 294–7.

³⁹ See lines 51–2 – “Centre my heart, my Ba, my brother, until my heir appears.” (The heart of the man and of Ba is one and the same).

thought of death is what diverts him and hinders his heart from being ‘centred’. A person should prepare for death, but not actively seek it. Thus, in describing the ills of the world, ‘Ipuwer’s lament’ reveals the following:

<i>iw ms i3w šri [hr] mr:j</i>	“Indeed, both the old man and the youth [say]: ‘I wish to be dead!’
<i>mwt.j</i>	
<i>hrd.w ktt.j(w) hr tm.w sw r</i>	[Even] little children say: ‘Oh that he (the father) had not caused me to live!’”
<i>rd.t ʿnh[j]</i> ⁴¹	

h3ʿ(.w) is probably an old perfect form, third person sg., relating to the man – *s*.⁴¹ Hans Goedicke suggests that *h3ʿ* probably relates to *pr* and translates the passage as: “which remains deserted on the high ground”.⁴² *h3ʿ* means “werfen”, “legen”; e.g. “auf den Boden, ins Wasser werfen” Wb. III 227, 4–5. A passage in pap. Abbott talks about tomb owners: *iw.sn h3ʿ(.sn) hr knr*⁴³ “They have been cast upon the hill/ground.” This example gives Alan Gardiner reason to interpret *knr* (“Boden” Wb. V 55, 1.) as identical with *k33* from our example.⁴⁴ The word *knr* is found three times in “Ipuwer’s lament”: twice using the construction *rdi + hr* and once *dr + hr*:

<i>hrd.w n.w nht di.tw hr knr</i> ⁴⁵	“The children, who were prayed for, have been given on the hill.”
<i>iw ms wn.w m wʿbt di.tw</i>	“Indeed, those who are in the embalming-place are given on the hill.”
<i>hr knr</i> ⁴⁶	
<i>m.tn nb.w-wʿbt dr(.w) hr</i>	“Behold, the lords of the embalming-place have been driven out on the hill.
<i>knr</i>	
<i>tm.w ir.n.f krs m pr-hd</i> ⁴⁷	He, who has not prepared a funeral, is in the treasury.”

The examples show that being “cast upon/given on/driven out on” the hill would mean not having prepared a funeral, and/or not having heirs who would take care of the ritual. That is, if one strives for the afterlife, he will not only be taken

⁴⁰ Adm. 4, 2–3.

⁴¹ So Scharf – Barta1969, 33, note 48 and others.

⁴² Goedicke 1970, 124.

⁴³ pap. Abbott 4, 3.

⁴⁴ Adm. p. 37.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 4, 3.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 4, 4.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 7, 8.

away from his home after his death, but will have also been unable to arrange his funeral and will not be taken care of.

The sentence *nn pr.n.k r-ḥrw m3.k rḥ.w* is the conclusion of the thought and is at the same time parallel to the introductory stanza: *ir sh3.k ksnt*. In some cases the negation *nn sdm.n.f* can be used to denote an emphasis of something which might or might not happen⁴⁸. Thus: "If you think of funeral – You will not go up (to) gaze at the sun."

The several examples given above clearly show that the man has not in fact directed his thoughts to suicide. The yearning for death would in fact deprive him of the favourable fate in the afterlife – which is what every Egyptian is trying to achieve. The biggest fear of the man in our text is in fact that he might have been "diverted" (*thi*). This means that in the afterlife he would face a "repeated death".

To understand the text correctly, we now need to focus on the Egyptian term Ba and the way in which it is understood by scholars. The terms Ba, Akh, Ka, the shadow, the corpse, etc. denote different essences or states of existence⁴⁹. Sometimes these essences are exceedingly difficult to disentangle: often, their meanings are entwined, and when they are personified, it is also possible for them to perform the same functions⁵⁰. Ba is that essence of the human which retains its ability to move freely in the afterlife between the world of gods and the corpse and can adopt different manifestations. In his "Hieroglyphica" Horapollo was the first author who interpreted Ba as the soul, regarding it as inhabiting the heart. In later times, the translation of "Ba" as "soul" became common⁵¹. Wallis Budge translated Ba as "heart-soul", considering the close link between Ba and the heart. He regarded Ba as one of the principles of life in the human.⁵² Alan Gardiner interpreted Ba as an "external manifestation" and noted that after his death each person can assume different forms (*ḥpr.w*), and the form taken by him is called his Ba.⁵³

The first monographic study on Ba was written by Louis Žabkar.⁵⁴ He rejected the idea that ancient Egyptians understood Ba to be one of the components of

⁴⁸ G. Gr. §418 A.

⁴⁹ See Лекков 2004, 70–77.

⁵⁰ Žabkar 1968, 113. = Лекков 2004, 74.

⁵¹ See for instance FD. 77.

⁵² Budge 1999, 76.

⁵³ G. Gr. p. 173.

⁵⁴ Žabkar 1968.

the human being, his spiritual element, or soul. Žabkar argued that Ba represents man in the entirety of his mental and physical qualities. He proved that Ba is associated with the body and flesh and that its essence is not immaterial. Ba is the personification of human vitality and represents the true nature and form which is adopted by the deceased.

Ziegfried Morentz sees Ba as vitality and a divine substance which is not part of something, but which carries the notion of entirety. In his view, Ba was created, in order to distinguish the divine essence from the human predisposition to form⁵⁵. The human's Ba takes shape during his lifetime and must be formed under the guidance and advice given by the father/teacher for a righteous life and wisdom.⁵⁶ Ba's independent manifestation however is possible only after death. In our text we find perhaps the only known exception to this rule. Here we can also add the observation made by Eric Hornung that each sacred animal is the Ba of its respective deity, that is, the visible manifestation of an invisible power.⁵⁷

In "The Dialogue of a man and his Ba" it would be wrong to see Ba as a separate being which argues with the man and defends a different point of view. More likely, Ba is another state available after death that the sage manages to summon while still alive, when faced with an extremely difficult task. As Haheperraseneb turns to his own heart, the speaker in our text turns to Ba. In his quest, the man actually directs his attention inwards, in order to find salvation.

The narrator in "The Dialogue of a man and his Ba" is not a desperate man on the brink of suicide, but a sage who lives in a time of chaos and disorder, when, in Haheperraseneb's words, Maat has been "cast out, while Isefet is inside the palace hall"⁵⁸. Here we ought to return to Leb. 11–13. Why is Ba "diverting" the man? The one who should secure the happening of Maat is the Egyptian king. He is the one who, in his role of representative of the whole of humanity, offers Maat daily back to the gods.⁵⁹ But the king is absent. Because of this, Isefet has been allowed to enter the world of humans unhindered, and everything and everyone are filled with her: "the brothers are evil"⁶⁰, "hearts are greedy"⁶¹, "mercy has been destroyed"⁶², "yesterday day has been forgotten"⁶³ and so on. The man in our text, as part of that

⁵⁵ S. Morentz 1973, 157–8. = Леков 2004, 93.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁷ E. Hornung 1982, 138.

⁵⁸ BM 5645, Pl. 17 Recto 11 = Adm., p. 102.

⁵⁹ Леков 2004, 270–71; Hornung 1982, 213–16.

⁶⁰ Leb. 103.

⁶¹ *ibid.* 105.

⁶² *ibid.* 107.

⁶³ *ibid.* 115.

world, is no exception. Thus Ba, and hence the man himself, will be filled with Isefet from which they need to free themselves. Until this happens, Ba will continue to "divert" the man and he will remain *thi*.

What is the correct behaviour the man should adopt, and how is he to deal with this situation? These are the questions that the narrator seeks to answer by looking inwards. We find the solution to this problem in another text the story in which takes place during the First Intermediate Period: "The eloquent resident of the oasis". Standing before Rensi, the "chief overseer", Hueninpu talks of the injustices in the country:

<p><i>sr.w hr ir:t ijt</i> <i>tp-ḥsb n mdt hr rd.t hr gs</i> ⁶⁴</p>	<p>"The magistrates are causing harm. The norm of speech is inclined to one side."</p>
<p><i>dr nw hr ir:t nwdw</i> ^ḥ<i>k3 kj hr ḥ3bb</i> <i>wf3 kj ir ijt</i> ⁶⁵</p>	<p>"He, who must repel weakness, does perversions. One advances by distorting, Another, who does injustice, earns a reputation."</p>
<p>^ḥ<i>k3 s3tj n t3 r dr:f</i> <i>k3nj n bw-ḥwrw hr ntf ḥsp.f</i> <i>m iwjtj</i> <i>r shpr ḥsp.f m grg</i> <i>r ntf ijt n dt</i> ⁶⁶</p>	<p>"Prosperous on earth to its limit is the one who distorts. The gardener of evil is watering his garden with evil deeds So that his garden is made to overflow with lies, So that the injustice of the estate is watered."</p>

Yet, despite this, Hueninpu advises Rensi to do the right thing and follow the principles of Maat:

<p><i>dr ntt wr:s 3^c.s w3ḥ.s</i> <i>gm.w.tw kft.s</i> <i>sb.w s(j) r im3ḥw</i> ⁶⁷</p>	<p>"Because great is she (Maat), grand is she, enduring is she. Her reliability (?) is known – She accompanies towards the state of imahu (blessed dead)."</p>
<p><i>iw swt m3^ct r nhḥ</i> <i>h33.s m-^c irr s(j) r hrt-ntr</i></p>	<p>"Because Maat is for eternity. She descends together with him who abides by her, to the necropolis."</p>

⁶⁴ Peas. B1 129.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 137–9.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 293–6.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 351–3.

iw krs.t(w).f Buried is he.
sm3 t3 im.f The earth is joined with him.
n sin.tw rn.f tp-t3 His name is not obliterated from earth.

iw.f iw sh3.tw.f hr bw-nfr He is remembered because of the good.
*tp-ḥsb pw n mdw-ntr*⁶⁸ This is the norm of the word of god.”

It is only through following the principles of Maat that a person can “repeat life” in the netherworld. Even if the state has been ravaged and the king has ceased being a guarantor for his subjects, the individual person must fulfil his obligations to Maat.

Here we reach the source of drama in “The Dialogue of a man and his Ba”. Isefet, with whom the world is filled, makes the narrator unhappy and causes him to suffer. Because he is also part of the world, the man himself has been touched by Isefet and has “diverted”. In order to be able to return on the path of Maat, he needs to purge himself from this burden – the suffering – by sharing it:

iw.j 3tp.kwj hr m3ir n g3w “Burdened by sorrow am I, through the absence of a ‘close
ḥk-ib friend.”⁶⁹

In order to liberate himself from what is troubling him, the man needs to share it, take it out of himself. In other words, he needs to perform a sort of confession. Thus in “Haheperraseneb” it is said:

sh3k.j ht.j hr ntt im.s m fh n “I have drained my body from that which is in it through free-
*dd(.w).j nb*⁷⁰ ing everything that has been said by me”

We find a pictorial description of this process in “The eloquent resident of the oasis”:

iw grt ht.j mh.t(j) ib.j 3tp(.w) “Because my body is full and my heart is burdened.
pr(.w) is m ht.j n ḥ irj It is ‘pouring out’ of my body due to my respective state.

ngt pw m dnit This is a crack in the dam –
mw.s 3s.w Its water has started flowing.
wn r3.j r md.t Open is my mouth for speaking.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 339–42.

⁶⁹ Leb. 127–8.

⁷⁰ BM 5645, Pl. 17 Recto 3 = Adm., p. 96–7.

<i>ḥꜥ.n.j mri.j</i>	I have used my depth-measuring pole (?).
<i>pkn.n.j mwj.j</i>	I have scooped out my water.
<i>snf.n.j ntt m ht.j</i>	I have emptied that which is in my body.
<i>iꜥ.n.j š3mw.j</i>	I have washed my soiled linen.
<i>hn.j hpr(.w)</i>	My speech has happened.
<i>m3ir.j dr(.w) hft-hr.k</i> ⁷¹	My misery has reached its end before your face."

In such a moment, in the absence of another person to turn to, Haheperrasen-eb turns to his own heart:

<i>dd.j st wšb n.j ib.j</i>	"I am saying this so that my heart can respond to me.
<i>shd.j n.f r mn.j</i>	I am revealing to it about my suffering.
<i>win.j n.f 3tpw ntj hr psdw.j</i> ⁷²	I am entrusting it with the burden which is upon my back."
<i>ir ib kn m st-ksnt</i>	"As for the brave heart in a troublesome situation,
<i>snw pw n nb.f</i>	it is a friend for its master.
<i>h3 n.j ib m rh whdw</i>	Since I have a heart that knows pain,
<i>k3 ir.j.shnj hr.f</i>	Then I shall rest upon it.
<i>3tpw.j sw m mdt n.t m3ir</i>	I shall burden it with words of misery.
<i>dr.j n.f mn.j</i> ⁷³	I shall thrust onto it my suffering."

The sage in our text seeks such relief and consolation in his Ba:

<i>hnd(.w) r.k hr isft w3h</i>	„Tread down the injustice (<i>isft</i>), (because) my misery is
<i>m3ir.j</i> ⁷⁴	enduring!"

The "poem" in the man's last uttering is exactly one such "emptying of that which is in the body" and "washing of the soiled linen", directed towards Ba.⁷⁵

Having liberated himself this way from Isefet, the man is prepared to continue his life, following the principles of Maat. Now, having found a way to his Ba, the

⁷¹ Peas. B1 306–11.

⁷² BM 5645, Pl. 18 Recto 7 – 8 = Adm., 100.

⁷³ BM 5645, Pl. 18 Recto 13–14 = Adm., 104–5.

⁷⁴ Leb. 21–2.

⁷⁵ Leb. 86–142.

man has been purified from Isefet. This, as the last lines in the text tell us, is what will guarantee him eternal life in the netherworld:

<i>dd.t.n n.j b3(.j)</i>	“What was said by my Ba to me:
<i>imj r.k nhwt hr h33 n-sw.j</i>	Place your lament onto the pole (?) my kin, my brother!
<i>pn sn.j</i>	
<i>wdn.k hr °h</i>	Make an offering on the fire!
<i>dmi.k hr °nh mi dd.k</i>	Hold on to life, just like what you said!
<i>mr(.w) wj °3 win.n.k Imnt</i>	Desire me here (when) you have thrust the West aside.
<i>mr(.w) hm ph.k Imnt s3h</i>	Desire, really, to reach the West [when] your body has
<i>h°w.k t3</i>	reached the earth.
<i>hnj.j r-s3 wrd.k</i>	[I shall] land after you have become tired.
<i>ih ir.n dmi n sp</i> ⁷⁶	Let us make the haven manifest itself.”

The protagonist in “The Dialogue of a man with his Ba” is a sage who is attempting to solve an extremely complicated problem of his time. The state is full of chaos and disorder. The king is absent and there is no guarantor for Maat by whom right and wrong could be determined. Hence all Egyptians, including the man in our text, are filled with Isefet. However, behaviours which go against Maat, guarantee “a repeated death” in the netherworld. This is the fate that every Egyptian is striving to escape. It turns out that even when the king is absent, people are still individually responsible before the principle of Maat and must abide by it. But how is it possible for them to do Maat whilst being part of a world of chaos and disorder in which all norms have been overhauled? It turns out that this is possible through confession, sharing that which is troubling the person with a man of pure heart. Since no righteous person exists in the world who could take this confession, it needs to be directed inwards. Thus, in “Haheperraseneb” the man addresses his own heart, in order to entrust it with his suffering. The protagonist in our text addresses his Ba. It has to take onto itself the man’s pain and to “tread down Isefet.”⁷⁷ This is the only way for the man to be delivered from his suffering and set on the path of Maat.

⁷⁶ Leb. 148–154.

⁷⁷ *hnd(.w) r.k hr isft* (Leb. 21–22).

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