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Meaning and Usage of the Term תִּשְׁבָּה

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THE word תִּשְׁבָּה, which occurs five times in Job, four times in Proverbs, once in Isaiah, and once in Micah, is called by Gesenius "ein von der Chokmaliteratur geprägtes Wort," and by the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon "a technical term of the Wisdom Literature." This of course is merely a description; and hides, one suspects, some uncertainty as to what technical distinction it really stands for. Nor is the suspicion allayed when we note how many proposed meanings we have to select from. Brown-Driver-Briggs defines the word as "sound, efficient wisdom, abiding success." Taking the various translations of it in the Authorized Version, the Revised Version, and by Professor Toy (in his Commentary on Proverbs) we may have our choice of "wisdom," "deliverance," "skill," "enterprise," "worth," "business," "understanding," "working," "effectual working," "sound wisdom," "sound knowledge," "that which is," and "the thing as it is," — more translations than there are occurrences of the word.¹ Evidently it has been something

¹ Since this study was in type, my attention has been called to an article by Dr. Karl J. Grimm on "The Meaning and Etymology of the word תִּשְׁבָּה in the Old Testament," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. xxii, pp. 85. Dr. Grimm thus sums up his study: "A detailed investigation of all the passages where תִּשְׁבָּה occurs thus reveals the fact that it signifies 'support,' then 'help, success, power, source of help, reliability.'" For the words "reveals the fact" I should be inclined to substitute "strengthens the opinion," i.e. Dr. Grimm's opinion. The original signification of the word, he thinks, was 'prop' or 'support'; which he finds most primarily suggested in a *Qerš* of the last word of Job 30 2, translating the clause, "Thou allowest me to totter without support." In a long list of meanings proposed by scholars ancient and modern, the nearest to the one given in my paper is thus noted: "Hengstenberg regards 'insight' (*Einsicht*) as the only proper rendering of the word."

of a puzzle to scholars. And to one who is interested in the history and terminology of the Wisdom literature it cannot but be a challenge.

Its root affinities, doubtless, have been the guide to several of the translations I have enumerated. When the Authorized Version renders it "that which is" and the Revised Version "effectual working," they are thinking of the unused root רָשָׁה which, not knowing how to define, they connect with the frequently used רָשָׁה , *being, substance, existence*, the nearest Hebrew equivalent of our verb *it is*, or *there is*. This derivation, so far as it goes, would seem to point to a sense of the reality of things, or as we should put it in modern phrase, of truth absolute. We seem to come especially near that sense in Job 11 a, where the Authorized Version translates Zophar's words $\text{כִּרְכַּפְלִים לְרוֹשִׁיָּה}$, "that they (namely, the secrets of wisdom) are double to that which is" (whatever that may mean), and where in my *Epic of the Inner Life*, with the light I then had, I ventured to translate, "For there is fold on fold to truth." I should modify that now, as the sequel will show, though I am not sure I should translate it differently. The derivation and affiliation help us indeed a little way; but for the life, the *feel* of the word we have to go from the isolation of the dictionary to its vital function in the context and in the situation which it mirrors.

In all the occurrences of the word one senses more or less distinctly the relation of its essential idea to truth absolute, or as we may express it, to the רָשָׁה of things. That is why the connotation of soundness, efficiency, finality, is so generally associated as a kind of woof with its fundamental warp of wisdom. The word means wisdom in a certain relation to that which is. What then, specifically, is that relation?

My idea of it came as I was reading Micah 6 9, one of the two passages outside of the Wisdom books wherein the word occurs. The passage, by the way, as is not unusual with texts not immediately transparent, has been pelted with the epithet 'corrupt'; but I recalled what Carlyle once said about the epithet 'mystical,' with which the scholars of his

day depreciated the German literature. "Mystical," he writes, "in most cases will turn out to be merely synonymous with *not understood*." One suspects that the word "corrupt" may sometimes merit the same synonym; at any rate the passage seemed to make sense as truly as if it were integral. And when I read, "The voice of Jahveh calleth unto the city, and תושיה³ will see thy name," it occurred to me that in this pairing off of the two terms, קול ידוה and תושיה, lay the key to the meaning of the word. Micah is speaking from the prophetic consciousness, and magnifies his office; to him the קול ידוה, the voice from above, or as we should say revelation, is the authentic guarantee of truth to men; but, he says, תושיה, the insight from below, or as we should say common sense, by simply tracing cause to effect, ought to recognize the same thing, and then goes on to give his hearers a lesson in cause and effect, expressed in the terms of market and traffic which are characteristic of their Wisdom dialect.

Here then, I think, is suggested the distinctive meaning of the term תושיה. It is the subjective aspect of Wisdom, as חכמה is its objective and as it were professional aspect. It is human intuition looking up toward truth absolute from beneath, as distinguished from the קול ידוה, divine revelation speaking authoritatively from above. From time immemorial the Hebrews had been schooled in the implicit idea that truth, to be really authentic, must come from God, spoken to Moses or heard by prophetic ears; but in the use of this word תושיה it seems that they are coming to value

³ Or *the man* of תושיה, for the verb is masculine. There is a conflict of genders here, which even the Greek translation, *καὶ σώσει φοβούμενους τὸ δόγμα αὐτοῦ* does not resolve. Is there an omission in the Hebrew text, or has our word, in becoming a *terminus technicus*, become masculine, like the word קדלה, another *quasi* technicalism? The Greek, in translating as if the word were *איש*, may have had another text, or it may have attempted to correct what it had, in order to make a sense more intelligible to its later time. It seems that the sense of תושיה was lost to the agnostic age which doubted that such a thing was possible; Koheleth, for instance, paraphrases it, Eccl. 7 a, "Far off, that which is (פרושיה), and deep, deep—who shall find it?" Whatever the true reading, however, it does not affect the suggestion that I derived from the Massoretic text; which must stand on its own merits.

their human intuitions too, and to accord to their findings an authentic and *quasi* revelatory value. The human initiative in thought is coming to trust in itself, without conscious support and authorization from heaven.

As we take this implication for תושיה and apply it to the passages where the word occurs, they seem to radiate a new light. Of the four occurrences in the Book of Proverbs only one is in the older Solomonic section, and this we may regard as the earliest use of the word. It is at 18 1, a verse whose stigma of "corrupt" seems really to lose its motive under the application of the word's new sense. It reads, "He that separateth himself (that is, from human sympathies and affairs) seeketh his own desire, and quarreleth with all תושיה," or as we might interpret, egoism is at odds with sane and trustworthy insight,—a truly acute observation. If this is the true sense, the remark seems to indicate that the sages are exploiting the values of intuition, as if it were something analogous to that vision without which the people perish (cf. 29 18), and are noting the spiritual conditions favorable or unfavorable to it. The other three occurrences, which are all in the introductory and presumably latest section, seem to mark the enhanced spiritual value which came to be set upon the quality, raising it as an ingredient of the objective חכמה almost to divine rank. In chapter 2 7, "He layeth up תושיה for the upright"; in 3 21, 22, "Keep תושיה and discretion; so shall they be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck." In 8 14 that remarkable personification Our Lady Wisdom, enumerating her perfections, says, "Counsel is mine, and תושיה," as if intuition were one of the endowments which give her rank as a master-workman sporting in the creative presence of God and in his habitable earth (8 30). All these seem to reflect the sages' delight in having discovered a new spiritual potency in man.

When we come to the Book of Job the word has become well naturalized in the Wisdom terminology, though its value seems to be felt only from the native human side. It is used by Job himself, by Eliphaz, and by Zophar. In chapter 5 12 Eliphaz, girding in an insinuating description at the

bewildered Job, seems to set the quality over against craft and cunning: "He frustrateth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform תושייה." If this is a covert reproach of Job, it is given, except for the craft, not without apparent reason; for Job himself in his answer, bewailing the gloom into which his affliction has cast him, complains, 6 13: "Is it not that I have no help in me, and that תושייה is driven quite from me?"—a natural enough thing for him to say, if the injustice he suffers belies all his intuitions of the world order. The passage 11 6, wherein Zophar wishes that God would show Job the secrets of wisdom, "for there is a double fold to תושייה" (as much as to say תושייה sees two things in one), has already been cited. It seems to indicate that in the sages' speculations the sense of penetrative insight was reaching out to mystic inner meanings in the phenomenal world, as if, like Goethe, they were discovering that

„Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichniß.“

In his answer to this, 12 16, Job, who has not yet emerged from the eclipse into which his unjust affliction has thrown him, relegates the whole matter of authentic insight to his enigmatic God: "With him," he says, "are strength and תושייה; the deceived and the deceiver are his." This is just at the point in his experience where the old truisms of Wisdom are felt to be one and all inapplicable to his case, and he is left resourceless. Immediately thereafter, however, detecting his friends' selfish insincerity in urging them upon him, he indignantly rejects their "proverbs of ashes"; and from that point, committing himself anew to his sense of the godlike, he makes a magnificent recovery and pushes his new-found faith to the height. The friends continue in the old strain, exaggerating it to a veritable *reductio ad absurdum*; and by the time Bildad has delivered the last feeble dregs of their argument Job retorts in ironical vein, 26 3, "How hast thou counselled the unwise, and made known תושייה in exuberance!" Evidently he has so regained the intuitive sense which had suffered temporary eclipse that he can ridicule the lack of it in others. And this is quite in

keeping with the course of the argument. The Book of Job exists largely to depict the contrast between the obtuseness of a fossilized dogmatism and the clarity of an intuitive faith to discover "the thing that is right" (cf. 42 7).

Only one more citation remains; but that is one of the most illuminating of all. It is the use of the word by Isaiah, and because it is a reading from the prophetic consciousness, it may well be compared with that of his contemporary, Micah. The occasion is noteworthy. In chapter 28 he has been urging his reiterated warnings on the self-confident nobles, only to be met by their sneer that he is talking baby-talk to them; they are weaned, they say, and no longer need such thin diet. Evidently, like their ancestors of old, their souls loathe the monotonous fare that is provided them from heaven. Whereupon Isaiah proceeds to compose them a passage in the popular Wisdom idiom; calls their attention after the manner of the sages (cf. 28 23 with Prov. 22 17), and then gives them a masterly little discourse about timeliness and fitness in the operations of husbandry, in plowing, and sowing, and threshing. Here then is their prophetic warning molded in the analogical style and industrial subject-matter that the current thought of the age delights in. Just as Micah says, "And רוֹשֵׁה will see thy name," so Isaiah's implication is, "Your human insight, working with the analogies of your common work, ought to discern the signs of the times, the divine fitness of things." Then summing up at the end, 28 29, he identifies the source of true Wisdom values with that of prophetic values: "This also cometh forth from Jahveh of hosts, who maketh counsel wonderful, and magnifieth רוֹשֵׁה." The same Being who sends his word from the unseen also gives the augmenting touch which lifts human intuition beyond itself, and gives it a claim on truth absolute. The power to see clearly and interpret soundly is an attribute which the human derives from the divine; "himself from God he cannot free."

This word of Isaiah's is thus an implied tribute to the human potencies of wisdom; but also it is tinged with reproach. It implies that his audience is not living up to its

powers and occasion. The passage was called forth by the political diplomacies that the nobles deemed so clever, wherein they bragged of the covenant they had concluded with death and Sheol. Yet all this was deserting divine authority in sole reliance on human finding. A little later, and in connection with this same inner crisis, as he inveighs against their Egyptian alliance planned without reference to Jahveh's will, he says, 31 2, "Yet he also is wise (חכם), and will bring evil." There is wisdom up there, as well as down here. They are acting as if they had the monopoly of political sagacity, and as if revelation no longer counted. But the very capacity for clever management of affairs on which they so pride themselves is of the very essence of the prophecy which they so despise. This is quite parallel with what I have just cited. He magnifieth intuition; wisdom is his, as well as man's.

The clause parallel to the one in which our word occurs must not escape notice. Not only does Jahveh enhance intuition, but also הפלא עצה, he supernaturalizes counsel, makes it transcend the ordinary and earthly. Counsel, sagacious direction of affairs, was the practical and utilitarian object of the Wisdom philosophy. In Prov. 8 14, as we have seen, the personified חכמה, speaking of her rich endowments, couples it, just as Isaiah does here, with תושיה; as much as to say counsel is one of the creative attributes. But Isaiah, looking from the divine point of view, is the representative of a higher standard and reach, a counsel touched to more spiritual issues. This too Jahveh vitalizes, gives it transcendency, — for this is what הפלא means, not simply that he makes it astonishing. And this is exactly parallel to, and exegetical of, the enhancing of human intuition; he gives to תושיה as to עצה the light of the divine, the light that never was on sea or land. This is a tremendous tribute to human powers. Nor does he make it in order to arrogate such divinely touched insight to the prophetic order alone. From this remarkable assertion our minds turn back to an earlier passage wherein the prophet uses the same root-words. In chapter 9 a, where he announces the birth of

the Child with the four mystic names, the first name he gives the Child is פֶּלֶא יִצְעָק, Wonder-Counsellor. The child that is born, whomever the prophet has in mind, has such spiritual potency in him that the counsel he gives is not a mere prudential earth-creeping thing but infused with the miraculous, the divine. There is no occasion here to speculate on who or what is meant by this Wonder-Child, though it would not be foreign to our subject; suffice it that such a power, the power of a פֶּלֶא יִצְעָק, is born into the remnant of the nation. And we can feel how parallel this is to the prophet's idea that, with the vital touch from above, human insight, תְּוֹשִׁיָה, acquires divine value.

All this throws a good deal of light on the development of the Wisdom philosophy. It looks as if, in Isaiah's thankless time of struggle to make spiritual values prevail, the Wisdom strain of thinking was so in the ascendant that he must needs speak in its idiom to make his austere warnings viable. Both he and Micah accentuate their message by appeal to this popular strain. And by the tribute they pay to the potencies of תְּוֹשִׁיָה they do much to bring the two literatures, that of Wisdom and that of prophecy, as it were under one vocabulary. The identification would not be lost on the sages. From this time on, one may conjecture, the devout cultivators of Wisdom became increasingly aware of the *quasi* revelatory value of their disciplined intuition; its כַּפְלִים character, fold on fold, as Zophar averred, was aimed at the secrets of God. Nay, one is tempted to think that with some this daring estimate may have been liberated to the verge of excess. Do we not detect a hint of this in the fact that Agur the son of Jakeh, in Proverbs 30, who disclaims ability to penetrate transcendent things and is agnostic about God, yet calls his contribution to Wisdom הַמְשָׂא, *the oracle*, and introduces it with גַּם הַנְּבִיאִים, employing the mystic word which hitherto men have ventured to apply only to an utterance of God? Was this a kind of impudence on his part, thus to usurp the גַּם, or was it his conviction that the findings of his intuition ranked with the word from above, so as to be, as the Rabbis say, מִפִּי הַנְּבוּרָה, from the mouth of

Might, or Authority? I leave the question not for answer but for meditation. Agur's utterances are perhaps as little worthy as any scripture to bear out such high claim; they are in fact not of the finest vintage; and by so much they tend to provoke the conjecture that there was a shade of arrogance in some of the later Wisdom. But at any rate, as a sublime contrast to this, and as a worthy fellow in revelatory value to Isaiah, we can put forward such a book as the Book of Job, to prove how in wealth of faith and insight into the divine world order Jahveh sets his seal on the candid exercise of **תושיב**; magnifying and transfiguring it until in spite of the fiercest assaults of adverse circumstance and opinion it can rise to speak of Jahveh "the thing that is right."