

Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely a manuscript. The text is written in dark ink on aged, yellowish paper. The script is dense and appears to be a form of classical Arabic or Persian. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words in red ink (rubrication) at the top. The overall appearance is that of an ancient or medieval manuscript page.

# John of Apamea

## I- The Diseases of the Soul

# IN MEMORIAM

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# INTRODUCTION

**Topic:** The “diseases of the soul” in John of Apamea’s *Dialogue on the Soul*

**Aim:** Highlight the introduction of the psychology of vice in Christian Syriac literature.

**Personal Context:** “Passions, virtue ethics, and moral growth in John of Apamea’s *Dialogue on the Soul*”

# Outline

Introduction (author, work)

## 1. DS' Anthropology

*A. Characteristics of the soul*

*B. The body, cause of moral predicament*

## 2. The passions

*A. Nature*

*B. Categories*

### 3. The passions, diseases of the soul

*A. Epistemological impact of the passions*

*B. Theological impact of the passions*

*C. Moral impact of the passions*

*D. The passions as overvaluation of ephemeral goods*

Conclusion

# Introduction

# Who is John of Apamea (JA)?

- Identity debate (multiple- or single-person theories)
- 5<sup>th</sup> century ascetic and Syriac author
  - Aware of Greek philosophy and medicine
- Renowned Spiritual teacher

# *The Dialogue on the Soul (DS)*

- Manuscript (Br. M. Add. 17169) - 581 CE
- Written between 430 and 450 CE (De Halleux)
- Composed of four discourses – Three interlocutors

# Why study *DS*?

- Distinct literary genre and themes
  - Likely due to the influence of Greek thought
- Syriac contribution to modern virtue ethics and Christian counseling

# 1- DS' Anthropology

# 1. The characteristics of the soul

## A. The soul as the “true person” (*barnošo dašroro*)

- Because only humans have been “honored” with a soul
- Based on the eschatological transformation of the person

## B. The Soul as “virtuous”

- Created naturally good (virtuous - *kyono šapiro*)

God “has placed virtue (*myatruto*) in us at the creation of our soul” (50)

- Vice is against the soul’s nature (*lqublo dakyonoh*)

Evil deeds occur when human beings are not acting “in accordance with” (*šalmuto*) the good nature in them or with the Lord’s commandments (29)

- Vice is a “disease” (*kibo*) (21) and “illness” (*kurhono*) (71) of the soul. (Cf. Evagrius via the Stoics)
- Vice manifests as evil thoughts and passions in the person.

## 2. The body, cause of moral predicament

### A. Positive aspects of embodiment

- Willed by God
- The body incentivizes the soul to reflect on creation and marvel in God's wisdom
- Epistemological partnership between bodily senses and senses of the soul

## **B. Moral implications of embodiment**

- Bodily needs and appetites (the “will of the body”) can overpower the virtuous will of the soul.
- These needs and appetites of the body cause the “passions” in the soul.

## 2- The passions

# A. Nature of the passions

## Passions in philosophy

*Intentional*

*Multidimensional*

## Passions in DS

*Neutral, vicious, good*

## B. Categories of the passions

The passions of the body

sleep (*ša(n)to*), hunger (*kapno*), thirst (*ṣahyo*), sexual appetite (*regto*), and luxury (*'osututo*).

The passions of the soul

anger (*ḥemto*), zeal (*ṭnono*), discernment (*poruṣuto*), envy (*ḥsomo*), love of authority (*roḥmat ṣulṭono*), haughtiness (*romuto*), boastfulness (*ṣubhoro*), and desire (*reḥmto*) (43).

# 3- The passions, diseases of the soul

# A. Epistemological impact of the passions

- Passions are the blindness (*samyuto*) of the mind (55).
- Passions can distract (*'aphi*) (27), trouble (*šageš*), and shake (*ṭarep*) the mind (78).
- Hence, healing the passions is a prerequisite to learning.

“It is helpful for man, that, before all else, he be diligent about his passions, so that, after purifying his soul from them, it would be appropriate for him to seek the study of all sciences. It is like a man whose body is afflicted with illness (*kurhono*), and his limbs are full of gangrenous ulcers: it is not suitable for him to pursue the study of crafts. He ought, first, to be diligent about curing his ulcers, and, then, once he is healthy, it is appropriate for him to learn about all things.” (74)

## B. Theological impact of the passions

- Passions impede the knowledge of the Mysteries of God
- The passions are “obstacles” (*syoge*) before the human mind, obstructing “a true vision of that world to come” (61).

## C. *Moral impact of the passions*

- Passions can lead to sinful deeds.

“Those who are troubled by evil deeds are not so because of lack of knowledge of things, but entirely because their lack of diligence concerning evil passions” (75).

# D. The passions as overvaluation of ephemeral goods

## a. Fondness and Stoicism

- “Sickness” concerns the pursuit of/fondness for certain “external” (“indifferent”) objects (e.g., money, fame, power).
- Fondness implies mistaken evaluations for certain objects, meaning that people evaluate these goods as inherently worth pursuing.

## b. Fondness in DS

“The love of somatic persons is not true (*lo šariro*), since it is from mutable (*meštaḥlpon*) things that it begins to boil (*rtah*) in their mind, and on ephemeral (*lo mqawyon*) things their love rests. It is clear that, when these things, which are the cause (*‘elto*) of their love, change, with them their love is altered (*meštagno*). Their love began from beauty which fades (*ḥome*) and from wealth which ceases (*boṭel*) and from authority which passes (*meštre*).”  
(19)

## c. Desire, the core of all passions

### *i. Multiple species of the genus “desire”*

- desire for wealth (*roḥmat 'utro*) (19),
- desire for money (*roḥmat kespo*) (6, 8, 61, 75)
- desire for possessions (*reḥmto dqenyone*) (19)
- desire for beauty (*roḥmat šupro*) (19)
- desire for glory (*roḥmat tešbuḥto* or *šubḥo*) (30, 37)
- desire for praise (*roḥmat quloso*) (35)
- desire for authority (*roḥmat šulṭono*) (43, 45)

## ii. Passions are fueled by desire

“These passions are not naturally of the soul. But because of the things by whose need (*sniquto*) and desire (*reḥmto*) the body is bound, there is a place for these passions in the mind. Tell me, then, from where is envy? Is it not because a person desires (*roḥem*) what he desires, and he sees another who has lots of it: be it wealth, or authority, or beauty, or skill, or being known by the nobles?” (43)

# Conclusion

- **DS emphasizes introspection as a moral and spiritual exercise**
- **Shift from moralistic to medical paradigm**