

When Leaders Become III

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King Charles II of England suffered from uremia, which was most probably a result of gout. It may be assumed that hypertension and overexcitement during lovemaking caused him to lose consciousness the following day and experience a bout of convulsions. Fortunately (or unfortunately), a visiting physician in the palace lost no time and performed bloodletting in a bold emergency action. At the same time the king's personal physician was paged, who, immediately gauging the seriousness of the situation, brought in six more consulting physicians [1]. Treatment was administered without delay: cupping glasses were attached to the king's back and a cleansing enema containing antimony as well as other substances was administered. However, there was no improvement in the king's condition and he continued to convulse and remained unconscious. The medical team decided to cauterize the king's skin with a white-hot iron and to continue the enemas. To everyone's astonishment, even before cauterization had been carried out, the king regained consciousness. Following this successful treatment and the king's improved health, the number of consulting physicians was raised to twelve. However, since improvement in the king's health was thought to have been brought about by the treatment he had received, the medical team decided to continue with enemas, drawing of blood, and administration of a quantity of drugs and herbs that could have felled a healthy human. As the king's health continued to improve, the following announcement was made: "The king's health is assured and he will return to normal within a matter of days." However, while this announcement was being made, the king was already dying and the many attempts by his physicians to save him only expedited his demise. There is nothing new under the sun [2].

The private lives of rulers have been a subject of public interest from the beginning of time. A ruler's illness was sometimes viewed as a punishment for his bad deeds and an affirmation of the fact that he was only human, without any godly attributes. Rulers always consulted with physicians. They themselves were fully aware of the fact that they were mortal and always made sure they were surrounded by the best physicians. When medicine was the realm of prophets, stargazers, or those who could diagnose by examining the patient's liver alone, intuition played a crucial part in diagnosis. Being forced to provide a medical opinion without having the required knowledge, they exercised extreme caution. A long list of kings who suffered from emotional disturbances and madness can be found in Vivian Green's 1993 book *The Madness of Kings* [3]. That same year, another book was published, authored by Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, entitled *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive*

King [4]. The latter was written by a physician, the former by a historian. Both books, however, tell a similar story, which is succinctly summarized in the introduction to Vivian Green's book:

For the majority of historians the forces which shape the moving stream of history, signified by the rise and fall of world civilizations, are largely economic and social, religious and political, in both character and content. In this historical process, questions related to health, whether of a people or individuals, play a minimal part. But the more we investigate the past, the clearer it becomes that epidemics have significantly shaped the course of political, economic and social development ... And that health, corporately and individually, has been an important and sometimes determinant element in the making of history.

The media-medical exposure of the former Prime Minister of Israel's illness has once again raised this question: "What would have happened if ...?" What would have happened had Cleopatra's nose been longer? What would have happened had President Roosevelt arrived at the Yalta Conference in full health? What would have happened had Menahem Begin not suffered from depression? And what can we learn from history regarding the condition of rulers, ancient kings, and heirs to dynasties who inherited ruling positions together with an inherited tendency towards madness, hemophilia, or malignant hypertension?

It appears that the members of the court of European kings did not differ significantly from advisors surrounding modern-day leaders, and that the physicians chosen to treat a ruler's illness served the ruler as well. At the end of the film *Quo Vadis*, the Roman Emperor Nero, surrounded by his advisors and sycophants, plays the harp in front of his subjects who are being consumed by fire. Even those who do not blame Nero for the burning of Rome must admit that he was not fit to be emperor. He squandered public funds, exercised cruelty and today would have been described as a borderline personality with delusions of grandeur. Nero was declared by the Roman Senate to be an "enemy of the people" and evidence to this fact was not lacking. In the book *The Lives of Twelve Emperors* by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus [5], it is said of Gaius Caligula that "his physical health was no more stable than his mental health. In his childhood he suffered from epilepsy. In his youth, he had a certain degree of stamina, but often, due to a sudden bout of weakness, he found it difficult to walk, to stand, and to find the strength to be optimistic. He

himself was aware of his weakness." All this never prevented him from carrying out acts of the basest cruelty and abuse (some of which were described graphically in the film *Caligula*).

The rulers in Shakespeare's plays did not enjoy perfect health. Hamlet acted like a madman. King Richard III was born "so deformed and ugly that dogs would bark at him in the street." It is no wonder that he was forced to murder his entire family before he could be crowned king.

In 1760, the Danish king suffered from both physical and mental retardation. The physician who was appointed to relieve his suffering eventually became his personal friend and took on the king's duties; for 6 months, until it was discovered that he had impregnated the queen, he in effect ruled the kingdom. This true story was recounted by Per Olov Enquist in his book, *The Royal Physician's Visit* [6] (now available in Hebrew).

Although their knowledge was limited, physicians wielded a great deal of influence. Jewish physicians did whatever they could to help their fellow Jews; for example, Rabbi Moshe Hamon, physician to Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) who would accompany the Sultan on his travels, where he would learn of the plight of his fellow Jews scattered throughout Turkey and would plea before the Sultan on their behalf [7].

King George III evidently contracted porphyria, which led to temporary madness. The treatment he received was aptly described in the film *The Madness of King George* in which the court physician is portrayed as a spineless charlatan. The members of the court demanded that another physician with a reputation for curing mental diseases be brought before the king. This physician was then warned by the king's chief advisor: "don't forget that you will be serving as *my* physician, not the king's." The failure to disclose medical information to parliament and the distancing of the king from his subjects while he was undergoing treatment are reminiscent of what modern-day rulers have undergone in an age of mass media; for example, the Shah of Iran, who contracted leukemia and was hidden from the public, President Woodrow Wilson, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, President John Kennedy, Prime Minister Menahem Begin, and others.

The emotional state of tyrants who suffered from paranoia led them to terrorize those in their immediate surroundings and to murder their subjects. To illustrate: Idi Amin, the despotic ruler of Uganda, was uneducated and emotionally disturbed; and the ruler of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, was described in Llosa's book *The Feast of the Goat* [8] as being devoid of sexual inhibitions and an obsessive pedophile. The list is long and horrifying and the questions that it raises are similar to those regarding the ability of a driver to grasp the wheel, or of a surgeon who suffers from depression to carry out a long and complicated operation. The person responsible for warning the public as well as the ruler's court is undoubtedly the physician, just as he must report a patient who endangers the public while driving. It is inconceivable that a person who has gone blind will continue to hold a driver's license or a pilot's license. However, a ruler finds it hard to give up his lofty position with all that it entails, and with the help of his personal physician, whom he usually selects himself (a classical personal appointment), each day is given a clean bill of health.

The king's physician gradually becomes the court physician. He identifies with his 'public' role and attaches less importance to the fact that as a physician his main loyalty is to the health of his patient, despite the fact that his patient is a king or influential ruler. President Woodrow Wilson became ill during a campaign trip to the western United States, first temporarily losing consciousness and gradually exhibiting symptoms leading to a cerebral hemorrhage that completely destroyed his ability to function. However, his personal physician and his wife prevented disclosure of this information to the public, hid him from public view and prevented anyone from seeing him. In fact, for seven months, the United States did not have an active president. The medical announcement gave incorrect information. The president himself at some point told his physician that he was aware of his inability to function and wished to resign, but his physician failed to react or to explain to the president the importance of relegating authority to his vice president. It is hard to understand the physician's behavior, but this is a phenomenon that occurs in many parts of the world with varying degrees of harm. The White House physician noted that while he had assumed that his job was to treat the president and his family, he quickly reverted to being the physician of the president's team, the secret service and even the in-house staff. He was able to identify with those people who were dependent upon the continued functioning of the president for their livelihood. This was true for the United States as it was for many other nations. Since this behavioral pattern has been going on for thousands of years, and the only difference nowadays is the increased ability of modern medicine to do harm, physicians must study history to learn from others' mistakes, and reach the conclusion that leaders must be treated as ordinary human beings.

However, I assume we will probably continue with our folly. Therefore, it is important that we prepare the medical establishment to administer treatment to our leaders in the most professional manner of which we are capable.

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