**Wishing for Death or Fighting for Life?:**
**Death Wish as Negotiating Strategy in the Hebrew Bible.**

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I want to give you a first taste of my new research project called *Discourses on Death*. My presentation will be twofold, the first part will be a more conventional paper presentation called: *Wishing for Death or Fighting for Life?: Death Wish as Negotiating Strategy in the Hebrew Bible*, and as a second part I want to present some ideas for the bigger project, which hopefully will be a new book project.

"I was sitting on a rock … It was sunny, in winter. I just prayed to die, but it didn't work." So Robert Rijxman, a survivor of Bergen-Belsen, recalls. "Praying for death 'didn't work' is what he said. 'Not to this day,' he added." (*New York Times* 22/01/09) Several of the characters in the Hebrew Bible also express a wish, a hope to die. Jonah, Elijah, Job, and others with them, all wish their lives would end; some even wish it had never started. They pray for death but death does not come.

The Hebrew Bible also has stories of characters who do decide to die, characters who take their lives and deaths in their own hands and commit suicide. In these stories death wishes as a lament or prayer to God is not expressed, with the exception of Samson. To me many of the death wishes expressed in the Hebrew Bible seem to have very little to do with death; and in this paper I will primarily investigate one overlooked function of the death wish: the death wish as a negotiating strategy. The conclusion of what I am going to talk about can be summed up in the following sentence: "A death wish is not a wish to die."

**Ideas for new project: Wishing for Death or Fighting for Life?: Discourses on Death**

Introduction:

- Point of departure was the Hebrew Bible's characters praying for death, then I saw the nuances: not everyone who expresses a wish for death wants to die.
- Can all death wishes be treated as one category with different functions or are there different categories?
- A death wish is not necessary a death wish!

What is death?

Establishing material / texts (Criteria for identifying death wishes)

a. Is the death wish part of a lament or not? How do death wishes function within the lament tradition? There are no death wishes in the psalms of lament, is that significant somehow?
b. Is the death wish a prayer addressed to God or not?
c. Is the character in the narrative "only" questioning the meaning of life or a real death wish
d. What does the character want to achieve in expressing a death wish?
e. What about Jeremiah and Job who wants to extinguish their whole life? Geburstverwünsch!
    i. From death wish to discourse on death?
    ii. What is a discourse on death?

Death wish as negotiating strategy: An overlooked use of the death wish in the Hebrew Bible.

- This actually seems to be the main use / function of the death wish expression (or at least one of the main ones)
- Death wish as a negotiating strategy is a form of empowerment!

Death wish in despair

- It is enough now… Death as the last solution?
- Geburtsverwünsch – the wish to eradicate one's life

"Let me die with the philistines…" Suicide-murder Samson

Wishing for Death - Fighting for Life.