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DOR LeDOR



They shall beat their swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4)

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EDITORIAL

“The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose” (Shakespeare). Bible students are familiar with the annoying practice of selective quotation. By this device, a writer who is especially interested in advancing his point of view believes that it can be made more authentic by quoting a biblical text to give added support to his argument. After all, if “The Bible says so” then he must be right.

The fact is, of course, that the Bible contains what may be read as supporting teachings for different opinions on many important topics.

Thus, God is described as a God of vengeance, but also as a God of compassion and love. In one place Israel is encouraged to wage a war of extermination against an enemy, while in another place they are instructed to act with sympathy even to the Egyptians although that people sought to destroy the Hebrews. Many texts provide a fearful warning of awful suffering as a punishment for sin, yet the Book of Job cuts the nexus between sin and suffering so that the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. There are numerous texts which underline the theology of Israel as the chosen people, and an equal number which emphasize the ideal of universalism, with all peoples equal in the sight of their heavenly Creator. There are scriptural words for the capitalist and some for the socialist; verses for the Zionist and even some for the Diaspora Jew. And the list of conflicting texts on various subjects can be extended, many of them with implications for our contemporary political, social and theological thinking.

That is why it is blatantly unfair for Bible students — Jewish as well as Christian — to prop up their opinions by selective quotation, choosing only those texts which seem to support their views, while ignoring all the others which might bolster the opposite opinion.

What is needed is the understanding that every Bible text is set in its specific historical background which has its unique challenges and needs. The war against the Midianites, or the battles in the

Book of Joshua, or the grim lawless social conditions of the period of the Judges cannot provide examples to be followed in the twentieth century. Every part of the Bible was addressed to the people at a particular time, and it is therefore always necessary to enquire into that historical background, and to understand the mind of the people who first heard those words.

Of course, and this must be clearly stated in order to avoid misunderstanding of what has been said, the Bible is full of eternal teachings and values which are permanently valid. Every intelligent Bible reader discovers these without too much difficulty. In the main, those doctrines relate to the central theological concept of the Unity of God — the Creator and Source of all things in existence; to the timeless ethical values of justice, truth and peace, as well as to the fundamental laws of the Jewish holiness code. On many other subjects we need judicious care before jumping to conclusions about the import of a biblical verse. It has been well said, that a text without its context may be only a pretext.

CHAIM PEARL
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

BIBLICAL MONOTHEISM SOME OF ITS IMPLICATIONS

SHIMON BAKON

Most scholars are in agreement that biblical monotheism with its emphasis on the Oneness of God, in contrast to polytheism, marked a decisive turning point in human civilization. However, a careful reading of Genesis indicates that God revealed Himself to Abraham in a variety of divine attributes.

He is the *Creator*. We read that, after returning the captured persons and goods to the king of Sodom, Abraham protests: *I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth* (Gen. 14:22).

As Maker of heaven and earth He is universal, not bound by "national" boundaries. God reveals Himself to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. His servant Eliezer, having successfully completed his errand to find a suitable bride for Isaac, *prostrated himself before the Lord in Haran* (Gen. 24:21).

He is the *Judge* of the whole earth. In the planned destruction of Sodom, Abraham objects: *shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?* (Gen. 18:26). And, what is more, God expects the exercise of justice and righteousness from those following Him: *For I have known him (Abraham) to the end that he may command his children and his household after him . . . to do righteousness and justice* (Gen. 18:19).

Finally, He is a God who makes *promises* and *covenants*, affording Abraham a glimpse of the mystery of a transcendental God, above and beyond the forces of nature, yet concerned with man. Thus Abraham is faintly aware that his God is the God of history, and that with him and his seed a story begins of a nation embarked on a particular quest.

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The multi-dimensional aspects of Divinity, as revealed to Abraham, are interrelated and sometimes even disclose paradoxical tendencies. Thus, it is the same universal Lord, who makes covenants with a particular individual. This was the beginning of the “unfolding” biblical monotheism, in which God is the Sovereign over nations and human history. He is the ultimate authority in the realms of ethics, legislation, politics, and social structure.

In their fundamental unity, these divine aspects of God will eventually exert a powerful influence over millennia, spreading to more than half of the world’s population.

Isaiah was on firm ground when, addressing those who seek the Lord, he said:

Look unto the rock whence you were hewn . . .

Look unto Abraham you father . . .

For when he was but one I called him.¹

THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

In the book of Joshua we encounter for the first time the expression: *The Lord of all the earth,*² which designates God the absolute Sovereign who established firm laws in nature, as well as the religious and moral laws of society. The concept of the “*Lord of all the earth*” appears already in Leviticus: *For the earth is Mine — כי לי הארץ.*³ In this context Israel is enjoined to observe the laws of the Sabbatical Year and of the Jubilee. Both these institutions were to have far-reaching impact on the realm of liberty and economy. Israel is told to declare a *solemn rest for the land*, which shall *not be sold in perpetuity*. On the 50th year *ye shall return every man to his possession*. What is more, the Jubilee shall be hallowed by proclaiming *liberty throughout the land and all the inhabitants*

1 Isa. 51:1-2.

2 Josh. 3:11.

3 Lev. 25:23.

*thereof. Bondsmen were to be liberated, for unto Me the children of Israel are servants.*⁴

Thus we see that precisely because He is the Lord of all the earth, freedom for all has become a non-negotiable item. It is from God and can neither be conferred by or taken away from fellow men. All being servants of God, one cannot be a servant of men. We also note that there is moralization of property, the land being the Lord's. Man is not an absolute owner but a lease-holder and, should he by neglect or misfortune lose his holdings, the Jubilee Year rectifies the situation and he gets a second chance.

GOD OF JUSTICE

In Deuteronomy we are enjoined: *Justice, justice thou shalt pursue* (17:20). The prophet Amos viewed the pursuit of justice as the foundation stone of morality. As a divine law it determines the soundness and permanence of national existence. In his great vision of the "Plumbline," he sees:

The Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumbline . . .

And the Lord said unto me, 'What seest thou?'

And I said: 'A plumbline.'

Then said the Lord:

Behold I will set a plumbline in the midst

Of my people Israel.

I will not again pardon them any more.

*And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate . . .*⁵

The message is clear. Laws of nature and those of morality stem from the Lord: just as a crooked "wall" must collapse by the inherent laws of nature, so must a crooked nation.

Ahad Ha-Am puts absolute justice at the heart of Jewish morality.⁶

4 All the biblical quotations are from Leviticus 25, and the verses, sequentially, are as follows: 25:4; 25:23; 25:13; 25:10; 25:55.

5 Amos 7:7-9.

6 Ahad Ha-Am, *Essays in Philosophia Judaica*: trans. Leon Simon, East and West Library (1946).

It is true that the emphasis on justice and righteousness in biblical monotheism had far-reaching consequences and implications. By removing the immorality involved in polytheism, it introduced a needed element of moral certainty into God-man relationship. The corollary of a God of justice is reward and punishment, according to which the course of human life and of the community depends upon conduct. It does not matter here, that belief and reality found themselves eventually in serious conflict, and that the basis of such faith was shaken. Jeremiah agonized: *Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?* (12:1). The Book of Job is entirely dedicated to this problem.

I believe however, Achad Ha-Am went too far in his basic assumption. Not only did he play into the hands of those who assign strict justice to the "Old Testament" and love to the "New Testament", but he missed a significant biblical tenet. Concurrently with being a God of justice, he is also a God of mercy and love. Love and justice were never conceived by biblical monotheism to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, both are divine attributes. Indeed, the full depth of biblical monotheism resides in the fact that it avoids the "either-or" proposition and opts for the "this or that"! Isaiah gave powerful expression to this position when he stated: *I form light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil!* (45:7).

God's love opens the way to repentance and forgiveness, two terms that have great significance in Jewish life. The two divine attributes were summed up beautifully by Jeremiah:⁷

I am the Lord who exercises mercy

Justice and righteousness . . .

For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

It may be of some interest to indicate that the exercise of justice and the possibility of forgiveness through the act of repentance, stand in absolute contrast to modern existentialism. Biblical monotheism stresses the importance of man and proposes the redemption

⁷ Jer. 9:24.

of man through righteous deeds, thus injecting the optimistic element of hope. Existentialism, on the other hand, decries the "predicament" of man, his helplessness to extricate himself from it (including "sin"), thus introducing a pessimistic hopelessness in the affairs of man.

MAN — THE PINNACLE OF CREATION

The special status of Man, in the scheme of biblical monotheism, is no coincidence. The mythologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the two great centers of power and civilization with whom Israel came into contact, are replete with stories about the creation of diverse deities; yet they have very little to say about the creation of man. As if to declare total spiritual independence from the sphere of influence of these two mighty peoples, the Bible is most specific about man, putting him at the apex of creation. There is interdependence between God and man, beautifully expressed by A. J. Heschel, when he speaks of God in search of man, and man, in search of God.

Man is so important in the biblical view that *in the image of God created He him* and only a little lower than the angels.⁸ In the fifth chapter of Genesis we read a seemingly innocuous verse: *This is the book of the generations of Adam.*⁹ Rabbi Hertz comments on this verse: "One of the early Rabbis, Ben Azzai, translated these words 'This is the book of the generations of Man' and declared them to be a great fundamental truth of the Torah. They proclaim the vital truth of the Unity of the Human Race and the consequent doctrine of the Brotherhood of Man."¹⁰

Perhaps, even more emphatic about the indivisibility of mankind, is that remarkable *Mishnah* which states:

"Therefore was a single man created . . . for the sake of peace in the human race . . . that no man might say to his fellow: 'My

8 Gen. 1:27 — Psalm 8:5.

9 Gen. 5:1.

10 Dr. J. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*.

ancestor was greater than thy ancestor.” Asking further why the biblical verse in connection with Cain slaying Abel uses the plural “bloods” — דָּמֵי — *the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground* (Gen. 4:10), the Mishnah responds that “the blood and the blood of his (eventual) posterity depends upon him.”

This Mishnah which warns witnesses in a capital case about their awesome responsibility, continues: “Therefore a single man was created to teach that if anyone destroys a single soul, Scripture charges him as if he had destroyed a whole world.”¹¹

A POLITICAL COVENANT

The God of Abraham is a god who makes covenants. Thus, He has made an everlasting covenant with the earth, the pre-condition of an enduring and orderly universe, in which man’s aspirations have validity, and made separate covenants with some righteous men, and later, with an entire people.

There is another type of covenant in the Bible, which we shall call political, that had a major impact on Western democratic societies, the one we find in Samuel I.

When the people approached Samuel to establish a monarchy, he was visibly shaken, seeing in this request a challenge to “theocracy” — a concept that had been proudly upheld by Gideon. To parry the threat, on one side, and to give in to the *vox populi* on the other, Samuel found an ingenious solution to a seeming impasse. He proposed a tri-partite covenant between the ruler and the ruled, witnessed and sanctioned by God. After a series of negotiations, the Bible records that:

*Samuel told the people the manner of kingship
and wrote it in a book
And laid it up before the Lord.*¹²

11 Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5.

12 I Sam. 10:24, 25.

The king is elected by God, symbolized by the anointment of Saul,¹³ the *shouting of the people, long live the king*, symbolized general acclaim, and the solemn laying of the book of the covenant before the Lord indicated divine sanction of such tri-partite covenant.

If such tri-partite covenant is not entirely explicit in the crowning of Saul, it becomes so in the case of David:

*So all the elders of Israel came to the king in Hebron
And King David made a covenant with them
before the Lord.*¹⁴

This pattern again stands out in the crowning of Joash by the priest Jehoiada.

*And they made him king and anointed him
And they clapped their hands and said: 'Long live the
King.' . . . And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord
and the King and the people.*¹⁵

Because of such thinking, Israel developed a constitutional monarchy, where the king's power was circumscribed by the Torah and by the people. He could never be an absolute monarch. To support my contention I present the episodes in the lives of two kings, Rehoboam and Ahab.

Rehoboam, ignoring the just demand of the people to *make the yoke that thy father did put upon us lighter* (I Kg. 12:6), brought upon himself and upon the future course of Jewish history the disaster of breaking the United Kingdom into two.

Ahab, unable to acquire the vineyard of the commoner Naboth by legal means, fell into deep depression. It is here that Jezebel, his wife stepped in. A Zidonian princess, she could not understand the hesitations of a king. It is most ironic that even she had to take recourse to quasi-legal machinations, buying two false witnesses, accusing Naboth: *Thou didst curse God and the King* (I Kg. 21:10).

13 I Sam. 9:1.

14 II Sam. 2:4, 5:3.

15 II Kg. 11:12, 17.

The concept of the "covenant" was adopted by the 16th century Reformed Church as best expressing the burgeoning ideals of religion and political freedom. It is the Puritans who, clinging to the biblical covenant idea, set down their political views in the renowned Plymouth Compact (1642).

We do by these presents solemnly and mutually in ye presence of God and one of another, covenant and confine ourselves together in a civil body politick.

Later, the concept of "covenant" was rediscovered by the "Natural Philosophers" and guided the political thinking of Locke and Rousseau. Eliminating God, as one of the contracting parties, they turned this covenant into the well-known "Social Contract".

Thus we see an almost direct line from the Exodus to the genius of Samuel, who forged these ideas into a tri-partite covenant and finally to the political thinking of modern democracies.

GOD IN HISTORY

We have indicated before that the mythologies of the two dominant civilizations of antiquity, Egypt and Mesopotamia, had little to say about the creation of man. These two civilizations also had little concept of history, each for opposite reasons.

Babylonian dynamism had its drawbacks. Its cosmos was unstable, marked by brutal, internecine strife of its deities, who convened once a year to determine events for the coming year. Thus, even the celestial regime was unpredictable, leaving Babylonian society in a state of flux and anxiety, which was not conducive for creating an orderly unfolding of historic events.

The opposite holds true for the Egyptians. To quote H. Frankfort: "The Egyptians had very little sense of history or of the past or future for they conceived their world as essentially static and unchanging . . . Historical incidents were consequently no more than superficial disturbances of the established order, or recurring events of never-changing significance."¹⁶

16 H. Frankfort *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East*, London 1957.

Biblical monotheism set the conditions in which historical events could unfold and develop. First, the covenant with Noah assured a stable cosmos, where the aspirations of man could find adequate expression. Second, a people had to be singled out with whom God would enter into a reciprocal agreement, a people who would follow a destiny determined by God and largely implemented by the people itself. Third, Jewish history, as embodied in the Bible, contains three significant elements. There is purpose; man, having free will, is to a large degree responsible for his own destiny, and it is directed to the future.

Jewish history begins with Abraham, who, following God's "call", abandoned country, home, and family, for a future-directed life. The other seminal event is the Exodus, when God reveals Himself as the *I Am That I Am*, the Eternal, the Emancipator, and the Source of the good life, fully involved in the affairs of man — a God of history.

It was primarily Isaiah's prophecy of the End of Days that brought about a vision that time flows toward a goal of perfection. And in the words of Zechariah *it will be the Day . . . that the Lord shall be King over all the earth . . . In that day shall the Lord be One and His Name one.*¹⁷

Biblical history is comprehensive, beginning with the age of innocence in Paradise, and spanning the golden age of the End of Days. What lies between is history of a special sort. It is "*Heilsgeschichte*", a story of a people engaged in the Sisyphean effort of effecting its own and the world's redemption. Kings are not judged by their victories, but by their religious-moral conduct. In biblical history God is much involved, but man has a significant role in it, for he can hurry or delay the End, and he has both the magnificent opportunity and the awesome responsibility of assisting in the process of "perfecting" the world under the Kingdom of the Almighty — לתקן עולם במלכות שדי, part of the Alenu prayer recited three times daily by devout Jews.

¹⁷ Zech. 14:9.

TWO VIEWS ON JACOB

JACOB, THE WRESTLER

ERNEST NEUFELD

Perplexing, bewildering, mysterious are the ways Bible scholars and commentators have described Jacob's wrestling match with an unidentified being as he is returning from Haran to his homeland after an absence of twenty years in the service of his uncle, Laban. Indeed, the succinctly told story in the Bible raises many difficult questions. Answers drawing on hermeneutics, mythology, folklore, allegory, homiletics and psychology have been advanced and have helped illuminate many aspects of the encounter. However, questions still abound. Before considering them, a review of the events surrounding and involved in the incident may be helpful.

Jacob has fled to Haran after stealing Esau's birthright and blessing. His mother had urged him to leave to escape his brother's vengeance and had arranged for his departure by convincing his father, Isaac, on his death bed that she was worried lest Jacob marry a Hittite woman. So Isaac sent Jacob away to seek a wife among the daughters of Laban, his cousins. Now, after two decades in the service of Laban, Jacob is returning to the land of his birth.

As Jacob approaches the border of the Promised Land after his long, self-imposed exile, he becomes apprehensive of meeting his brother. He sends messengers of peace to him, no doubt to ascertain at the same time his disposition toward him. They return with the report that Esau is advancing to meet him and that he leads a host of four hundred men. Jacob is *greatly afraid and distressed*. He hastily divides his "camp" into two parties in the expectation that if Esau strikes one, the other may escape. In his mental anguish, Jacob prays to the Lord for deliverance.

Ernest Neufeld is retired after a career in journalism, law and municipal government. His last position was as Director of the N.Y. City Council's Division of Finance staff.

Then, during the night, under cover of darkness, Jacob sends his family, retainers, and herds ahead. All alone now, he is attacked by "a man." In the struggle, *the hollow of Jacob's thigh is strained*, but he holds on to his adversary. The man pleads to be let go, *for the day breaketh*, but Jacob refuses unless the other blesses him first. His opponent thereupon demands to know his name. Jacob gives it. He is then informed that no longer is he to bear that name but that of Israel, *for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed*. Jacob in turn asks for his attacker's name, only to receive the retort, *Wherefore is it thou dost ask my name?* But he blesses Jacob anyway.

Jacob calls the place of his encounter "Peniel," declaring as the reason that *I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved* (Gen. 27:41-46; 28:1-4).

As we have noted, the account presents many difficulties. Why, after sending off his servants with a princely present for his brother, does Jacob rise during the night to dispatch his wives and children across the Jabbok, while he stays behind alone? If it is meant to enhance their safety, why does he leave them without his immediate protection? Is he so afraid for his life that he is willing to interpose his family as a shield between himself and Esau?

What is the purpose and meaning of the wrestling match between Jacob and his opponent? What is the significance of the injury to Jacob's thigh, or hip? Why does Jacob's attacker ask for his name? Why does he change Jacob's name to Israel? Why does Jacob refuse to release his opponent until he bestows a blessing on him? What does Jacob mean when he exclaims after the struggle that he has come face to face with God and his life has been preserved?

Some answers may be provided by considering the questions from the point of view of the literary art of the biblical narrative. The use of type-scenes, repetition, manipulative language, etc., has been analyzed by Robert Alter.¹ Word play, employment of cognates have

1 *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, N.Y., 1981.

been explored by others. If we apply this kind of analysis to the Jacob story, we can gain a number of insights.

Let us compare the nocturnal incident involving Jacob at Peniel with that he experienced at Bethel on his flight from home to Haran. The reader will recall that at Bethel Jacob had the famous dream of the ladder to heaven, on which angels were ascending and descending, and that the Lord appeared to him, promising that his seed would be *as the dust of the earth*, that indeed he and his descendants would inherit the Promised Land, and further, that in him all the families of mankind would be blessed. Jacob awakens and says, *Surely, the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not, adding, How full of awe is this place!* Thereupon he calls it Bethel, House of God (28:11-21).

We observe at once common motifs in the Bethel and Peniel accounts. There is the obvious apposition of the encounter with God at Bethel to the encounter with the "man" at Peniel. In the former case Jacob is about to leave the borders of his homeland; in the latter, he is about to cross the Jabbok stream back to his native land. In both cases, Jacob is a lonely figure. At Bethel he is solitary, without any possessions, facing an uncertain future in an alien land; at Peniel, all alone, he is returning rich, but all he has, including his life, is in jeopardy.

We observe also that at Bethel Jacob is in flight from the wrath of Esau. At Peniel he is approaching the nemesis he fears. Angels are associated with both encounters. Both episodes occur at night. As to Peniel, we are left wondering whether Jacob slept again after he sent his family across the Jabbok. Did he dream the wrestling match? We shall return to this matter, but a number of commentators are of the opinion that he did.

The angels (*malakhe Elohim*) in the dream of the ladder to heaven are absent at Peniel, that is, only one is mentioned in connection with the wrestling when the assailant is referred to as *elohim*, meaning *an* angel or divine being, not God as rendered in the translation as cited above. (Neither the tetragrammaton nor *Adonai* — Lord, is employed in the verse — 32:29.) However, the

angel motif is carefully introduced as a preface to the Peniel episode. The narrator tells us that after Jacob parted from Laban prior to sending his servants off with the gifts for Esau, he has a meeting with "angels of God" (*malakhe Elohim*). Nothing more is said of these angels. They do not participate in the action any more than those at Bethel, where they serve merely to indicate a holy presence. By introducing the angels as a prelude to the Peniel story, the narrator not only reutilizes the angel motif but also provides dramatic suspense. We are led to expect, recalling the angels in Jacob's dream at Bethel, some portentous, heaven-inspired event. And of course, one follows.

Comparison of the two experiences in Jacob's life reveals other similarities. The motif of the blessing at Bethel recurs at Peniel. The loneliness element, integrally part of the Bethel story, is repeated at Peniel, and is crucial in setting the stage for the dramatic confrontation to follow. Jacob's motivation in arranging to be alone at Peniel is ambiguous, but it accords with the contending emotions and impulses which animate him. His emotional turmoil parallels his distress at Bethel as he was leaving home and country for an unknown land and unknown future.

The similarities we have found in the formulation of the Bethel and Peniel accounts, argue forcibly for a dream setting at Peniel as well. But aside from the evidence adduced from literary analysis, there is every earmark in the illogical aspects of the story pointing to a wrestling match transpiring in a sleeping state. The contradiction in the text as to identity of the assailant, the puzzling questions and statements by him, Jacob's odd request for his opponent's blessing, his naming of the place as one where he came face to face with God and lived, all combine to give a surrealist, phantasmagorical aura characteristic of a dream.

It is not by happenstance either that Jacob is all by himself at Peniel. He *arranges to be alone* in sending his family across the Jabbok. In this way he deliberately seeks to recreate the circumstances under which he experienced the dream at Bethel and is inviting another divine intervention and assurance from on high.

Under the imminent threat of death, when dream comes — for we must conclude it is a dream, it is itself disturbing and threatening. It appears to be a projection of the enduring rivalry between him and Esau, reenacted as a wrestling match in Jacob's nightmare.

For the dream at Peniel is apposite in character to that at Bethel. It is counterposed in its strife to the peace and serenity accorded to Jacob in the dream at Bethel. The contrast nevertheless operates to echo Jacob's distress on both occasions, though at Peniel its intensity is amplified.

The stirrings of mixed and turbulent emotions within Jacob are evident before he is attacked by the "man." His prayer for deliverance discloses his mental state. The mistake he makes in his reminder to God, if it is a mistake, that He promised to make his descendants as *the sands of the sea*, instead of as *the dust of the earth*, betrays an agitation of spirit that culminates in his decision to send his family ahead, he avoids even as he beseeches God for His protection, any allusion to death. He substitutes sand for dust in his subconscious effort — if not deliberately — to suppress the thought. For though dust and sand are both of the earth, the exchange by Jacob is a sublimation, since dust is associated with death in the Bible. The sublimation may be partially rooted in the association in Jacob's mind of the promise of the land that was joined in the Lord's pledge to make his progeny uncountable in number. It kindles in Jacob's mind the expanse of the land as another dimension of the number of his descendants who are to inherit it, and so he thinks of its borders as he stands at its eastern limit. His thoughts fly to the edge of the sea and so to the sand on its shore, which now supplants the allusion to dust he subconsciously wants to eliminate from his mind.

If the repeated motifs haunt us, how much more were they stirring pangs of conscience in Jacob as now all alone he expects the pending confrontation with Esau. And it appears rather persuasively from the narrative structuring that, although the text does not explicitly say so, the encounter with the "man" at Peniel was in the course of a dream. The strife in the dream at Peniel is a reflection of Jacob's disturbed mental state. His fears, mixed with guilt feelings, loom

up in vision of a wrestling contest, a subconsciously-induced metaphor for the wrestling between him and Esau from their birth. The shadow of death is cast on him by the advancing Esau. His terror reaches its peak when his opponent grapples with him in the region of his thigh, the seat of his generative powers. The Hebrew word *yerekh* in the text, generally translated as hip, also means thigh. Nahum M. Sarna, citing W. Robinson Smith's *The Religion of the Semites*, states that the thigh, regarded as "the seat of reproductive powers, would acquire an especially sacral character."² The late Dr. J. H. Hertz indicates that the "touch" at Jacob's thigh came as the climax of the struggle. The assailant, verse 26 tells us, resorted to this maneuver *when he saw that he prevailed not*.³ This indicates clearly that he was striving to gain the upper hand by hurting Jacob in a most vulnerable part of his body. The rest of verse 26 relates that *the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him*, that is, the touch or blow at the thigh occurred while the struggle still continued and did not terminate it. This is evident from the next verse, where the "man" asks Jacob to release him. One may be justified in concluding, therefore, that the limp Jacob incurred in the wrestling bout (32:26, 32) was caused, at least in part, by Jacob's desperate effort to avoid injury to his reproductive organs, for if the attacker had succeeded in inflicting a blow on those organs, it could not have caused the limp.

Verse 30 reveals that Jacob has not been grappling with a man but *elohim*, a word that means either God or divine being. Commentators generally have taken the divine being to have been an angel. Legend even specifies that it was the angel Michael.⁴ In a dream rapid transformations, abrupt and seemingly illogical, may be induced by subconscious associations. Jacob perceives himself in

² *Understanding Genesis*, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1974, p. 206. See also Judges 8:30, where the Hebrew clearly refers to the generative organs.

³ *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed., Soncino Press, London, 1980, p. 124, footnote 26.

⁴ Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Bible*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1975, p. 186.

the course of his struggle to be contending with a man, who materializes into an angel, the angel of death. Another metamorphosis, and Jacob images him as Esau! The phantom pleads with Jacob to release him from his hold, *for the day breaketh*, but Jacob refuses, demanding that the other bless him first. For Jacob cannot be reconciled with himself unless Esau is reconciled with him, and this is reflected in his refusal to let his assailant go. As the conflict continues, the apparition demands Jacob's name (27:28).

On its face, this demand is incomprehensible. Would not *elohim*, or if Jacob discerns him as Esau in his dream, know his name? If in fact, he was an *elohim*, an angel, and did not know who Jacob was, why would he contend with him? The angel's question becomes meaningful only if we regard it as aimed at eliciting an admission of guilt by Jacob. For Jacob's very name, with not a word more, will suffice for that. Jacob means "supplanter," "usurper." We may permit ourselves to detect a mocking irony in the question and surmise that it does not escape Jacob. We can imagine his whispered, one-word reply, "Jacob." What a volume is comprehended in that name.

"I am Jacob, the supplanter. I am Jacob, the usurper. I am Jacob, the two-faced deceiver who took advantage of you. I reached out my arm to take your birthright. I am Jacob indeed. Yes, I am Jacob."

The man, the angel, then declares, *Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for thou hast striven with God (Elohim) and with men, and hast prevailed* (29). At the psychological level this may be read as signifying that Jacob has striven with the divine — his better self confronting his past and the past self reflected back in the image of Esau. The change of name marks a change in Jacob's character. And in the Bible the name expresses the very essence of a person, "The very fact of a new name distinguishes and even effectuates, to an extent, the transformation of destiny."⁵ Abraham's name is changed from Abram when God "appears" to him to establish His covenant with him and now promises to make him "the father of a multitude of nations" (17:4). Such a theophany, com-

⁵ Sarna, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

mentators generally agree, would occur in the course of a dream, and just as in Abraham's case the new name symbolizes his enhanced destiny, it also carries that connotation in the case of Jacob. And if the change in Abraham's name happened in a dream, it further reinforces the deduction that Jacob's wrestling at Peniel also transpired in a dream.

The limp with which Jacob is marked physically is a sign to remind him of his altered and humbled status. For even though he was destined as foretold to his mother, Rebekah, to prevail over his brother (25:23), he had to learn that if that prophecy was to be fulfilled, it would come about not through his chicanery, not through his will, but the will of God.

Now it is Jacob who inquires after his opponent's name. (Is he an angel or is he Esau?) The answer is, *Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?* (32:30). It is comprehensible only if the being in Jacob's vision is Esau. We can hear in this question Esau saying incredulously, "You profess not to know my name? You have every reason to remember me and what you did to me!" And with that we have the return of the blessing motif as Esau blesses Jacob, the blessing he bestows serving to further identify him as Esau. The blessing implies that the recipient is worthy of being blessed, deserving divine favor. It thus connotes Esau's reconciliation with his brother.

Jacob now awakes from his dream. In wonderment he calls the place "Peniel," for *I have seen God (Elohim) face to face, and my life is preserved* (31). We recollect his awe on awaking at Bethel.

In the context of our discussion, this statement need not be read in the usual sense that no man may see the face of God and live. It may mean no more than that Jacob, having striven with the ghosts of his past, has recognized that his ways had not been the divine ways and has overcome his former self. A new Jacob has emerged from the wrestling bout.

As Jacob comes within Esau's sight, he beholds a limping, humbled figure, one who has acknowledged by his extravagant presents and behavior that he is conscious of having wronged him.

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THE SELLING OF THE BIRTHRIGHT MAKING SENSE OF A PERPLEXING EPISODE

REUVEN P. BULKA

The selling of the birthright by Esau to Jacob is one of the more perplexing episodes in the Bible. It raises many questions, not the least of which is the questions of Jacob's motivation in wresting this title from Esau.

The relevant verses spelling out the episode are found in Genesis (25:29-34). They read as follows:

And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came in from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob: 'Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this red, red pottage; for I am faint.' Therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said: 'Sell me first thy birthright.' And Esau said: 'Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?' And Jacob said: 'Swear to me first'; and he swore unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So Esau despised his birthright.

There are some striking anomalies in the episode as reported in the Bible which merit some reflection.

Firstly, why was Jacob making a pottage? This certainly does not seem to be the role or obligation of the child, considering that, according to the Talmud (Baba Batra, 16b), Jacob and Esau were at that time only fifteen years old. This is slightly out of the ordinary, to say the least.

Secondly, when Esau asks, in desperation, to be given some of this pottage to eat, Jacob immediately reacts with the request that he be sold the birthright. There is no feeling of concern that his brother is

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hungry and faint; only a cold, detached demand for the birthright. Is this the normal reaction that a brother would have to a request of his own sibling? Why did it enter into Jacob's mind that he should even raise the subject of the birthright? This is certainly unusual, and at the same time not very exemplary behavior. In brotherly love, we think of people helping each other without looking for recompense or seeking to gain advantage from having helped. On the surface at least, Jacob does not seem to follow in this tradition of brotherly love.

Finally, the episode concludes with the statement that Esau despised the birthright. Why is this statement left for the end? The contempt was already heaped earlier, before the eating, most significantly in verse 32, where Esau says that ". . . I am going to die, what use then is this birthright to me?" Why is the statement about his contemptuous attitude to the birthright left to the very end?

The perspective on this episode is best gained through an appreciation of two matters; 1) the significance of birthright at that time, and 2) the financial conditions prevailing in the household of Isaac and Rebecca, the parents of Jacob and Esau.

Whilst it is a standard biblical principle that the first born male receives a double portion of the inheritance, it can be doubted whether this rule operated in the time of Jacob and Esau. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that even in that period the first born did have specific responsibilities, which would have justified a greater share of the inheritance.

Those responsibilities could have included looking after the parents when they were unable to do so on their own, and also looking after the younger children. The first born was to a certain extent a buffer between the parent generation and the child generation; a child to the parent, but almost a parent-like sibling to the rest of the family.

The first born thus would have assumed the mantle of leadership within the family circle, and under normal circumstances would have been the one most identified with the spiritual values of the family.

Insofar as the financial conditions of the family are concerned, Ibn Ezra (Genesis, 25:34) suggests that at that time, Isaac and Rebecca were quite poor. It is not outside the realm of possibility that all the wealth that Isaac was given by his father Abraham may have been lost. Why else would Esau sell his birthright for a pottage, if there was food aplenty in the household? It would seem as if there was very little food, and that Esau's desperation was accentuated by the fact that this may have been the only food available to him at the time.

Ibn Ezra raises other questions, including why it was that later on when Jacob was sent away from the house to escape the wrath of Esau, he was sent without any provisions or money, so that he had to entreat God for food and clothing (Genesis, 28:20). The suggestion that Isaac had become poor would go a long way towards explaining the reality of the situation as it unfolded in this birthright episode.

Jacob making a pottage is perhaps a little bit out of the ordinary, but this may have projected his assumption of responsibility for taking care of the family needs. If indeed the family was poor, Jacob took it upon himself to help in the family situation through contributing his little bit, by alleviating the burden of the parents by helping with the preparation of the food.

At the very same time that Jacob took these responsibilities very seriously, his brother Esau, not nearly as beholden to the family, was having a good time in the field. The scene for the situation is thus set with verse 29, *And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came in from the field and he was faint*. Esau had enjoyed himself, with a day in the field, and the Bible specifically makes no mention of the fact that he was tilling in the field or working the field, just that he "came in from the field," suggesting quite strongly through the glaring omission that Esau was in the field just for personal pleasure. The faint Esau then understandably asks Jacob for some of the pottage. Jacob's reaction, as reported in verse 31, is to ask for the birthright.

What at first glance seems to be a request coming from nowhere, now begins to make more sense. If in fact the responsibility of the first born is to look after the family needs, and to assert leadership

when leadership needs to be asserted, then it should have been Esau who was preparing the food for the family. Instead, he had abdicated that responsibility role that was thrust upon him by virtue of being the first born, and had left it for Jacob to take care of things while he was enjoying life to the full.

Jacob was understandably upset with this reversal of roles and said to Esau, in effect: If you want this role reversal to continue, and that I should make the food for you and feed you rather than the reverse, then at least acknowledge this officially. At least come out in the open and say that you no longer want the responsibilities that are incumbent upon the first born, and that you hereby acknowledge that I, Jacob have these responsibilities, and any advantages that pertain thereto.

Since Isaac was poor, it mattered little to Esau whether a first born would have any preferential treatment in the inheritance. Two times nothing is nothing, and any advantage that would have been coming to him by virtue of his being the first born, was totally neutralized by the bad financial situation in which Isaac was mired. Consequently, with the role of birthright now being a burden without any material advantage, Esau was ready to sell it for whatever benefit.

Is this critical judgment a little unfair? After all, Esau was desperately hungry and one may have dismissed his willingness to sell the birthright as being a reflection only of the desperateness of his situation. This is where verse 34 comes in. After Jacob had given to Esau what he had asked, and Esau had eaten ravenously, all Esau did was to get up and to leave. After having his desperate plight alleviated, and his hunger satisfied, Esau might have spent a little time contemplating the reality of the relationship. He could have asked whether it was wise to abdicate his responsibilities, and expressed regret to his brother. He should have said: "Jacob, what you have been doing until now is really my responsibility. I realize that I have unfairly removed myself from this and it has fallen on your shoulders. This experience has awakened me to the errors in my behavior, and from now on I would like to behave in the manner

fitting for the first born." But Esau said nothing of the sort, he just got up and left. It is this failure to contemplate the implications and repercussions of his actions, that leads the Bible to say, *so Esau despised his birthright*. The unwillingness to make amends even after the emergency had disappeared, was the ultimate show of contempt. Herein Esau showed that he wanted nothing of the leadership role in the family; he only wanted his freedom to indulge himself.

It was thus eminently fair and in fact necessary for Jacob to get this official acknowledgment from Esau that his brother wanted no part of family responsibility, so that Jacob would know that because of Esau's ill advised decision, that responsibility now became his.

It is important to understand this episode in the context of the complex realities that prevailed within the household, because it is upon this that much of ensuing Israelite history is based. With this understanding, one can hardly suggest that Esau was cheated or outwitted! If anything, it is he who through his irresponsible behavior, caused the birthright roles to be reversed.

JACOB, THE WRESTLER

(Continued from page 99)

Esau observes a pathetic picture, a cripple abasing himself by bowing to the ground over and over again — seven times. It is Jacob now in accordance with measure for measure and in appropriate allusion, who now drags his leg, a reminder forever of his attempt to hold back Esau from being the first born.

It is not at all the presumptuous brother who arrogated to himself the firstborn's rights of Esau. As the blessing in the dream hinted, Esau has forgiven him, thus legitimizing the blessing that Isaac was tricked into conferring on Jacob. He runs to meet Jacob, falls on his neck and kisses Israel! For the brother in his embrace is not Jacob. And they weep (33: 1-4).

WHAT WAS THE ACTUAL EFFECT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE?

NAHUM M. WALDMAN

What was the actual effect upon Adam and Eve of their eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the light of our commentators? The Torah tells us that God planted the tree of knowledge of good and bad (Gen. 2:9) and warned Adam not to eat of it, for *as soon as you eat of it you shall die* (i.e., become subject to mortality; *ibid.*, 2:17). We ask: Why should God be opposed to their gaining wisdom? Does He want them to remain in ignorance? The serpent tells Eve that when she and Adam eat the fruit of the tree they will not die but will be like Elohim (God, Divine beings, or angels?), knowing good and bad (Gen. 3:5). They eat of the tree of knowledge and nothing happens to make them in any way like God or angels. What profound knowledge do they obtain? What enhancement of vitality or pleasure do they experience? Their eyes are opened and they realize that they are naked. They sew figleaves together and make loin-cloths (*ibid.*, 7). Perhaps there is wisdom in realizing the value of modesty and in knowing how to sew a rudimentary garment and this may have been the result of eating the fruit, but this is hardly wisdom on a divine level. The serpent, then, sly and deceitful, was lying.

What, then, is the "knowledge of good and evil"? Is it intellectual, moral or hedonistic knowledge? All of these, in various combinations, have been suggested. The commentaries are legion. *Targum Onkelos* paraphrases: "those eating the fruit of [the tree] can distinguish between good and evil" (on Gen. 2:17). This would mean that Adam and Eve, prior to eating the fruit, could not make moral distinctions. Paradoxically, then, they attained a very desirable quality, moral discrimination, through their sin. We

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may respond, citing Saadiah Gaon, and say: Adam and Eve lacked knowledge of good and evil. They were given commandments, and one without reason is not expected to keep commandments.¹

Maimonides dealt with the problem of enhancement or diminution of Adam's intellect. He states that a learned man raised with him a serious question, saying: "It thus appears strange that the punishment for rebelliousness should be the means of elevating man to a pinnacle of perfection to which he had not attained previously." Maimonides answers that Adam already possessed the intellectual faculty of distinguishing between true and false. What he did not have, until he ate of the fruit, was an awareness of consensual truths, values and mores of propriety which are not rational or scientific but are the conventions of society. Adam and Eve were in a state of innocence. They did not know that nudity is improper. When they ate of the fruit, however, the result was not beneficial. Adam was beset by desires originating in the imagination. He then became obsessed by the consensual categories of proper and improper and neglected the intellectual categories of true and false (*Guide to the Perplexed*, I, 2).

Abrabanel also follows this general line. Adam possessed the human excellence of being able to choose between good and evil. It was not the tree that gave that to him. He was also endowed with intellect, but that intellect suffered a change because of the sin. Adam's perfect intellect had been both practical and theoretical, but his knowledge of good and evil was intellectual, not worldly. When he sinned he became absorbed with conventions and values created by men, illusory and transient.

Other commentators believed that Adam and Eve, by eating the fruit, attained the sexual desire which they did not have before. Nahmanides, mentioning this common view, rejects it. Adam and Eve, in his view, already had a sexual life, which did not originate with the eating of the fruit. What changed was their attitude to it. Until their disobedience, they performed sexually without any

1 Moshe Zucker, *Perushei Rav Saadiah Li-Vereshit* (New York, 1984), 274.

desire or feeling. They functioned innocently in accordance with the requirements of nature. The fruit of the tree of knowledge introduced in them the element of lust and passion (Nahmanides on Gen. 2:39). Bezalel Safran has pointed out that Nahmanides believed that, before his sin, Adam had a spiritualized body, where *nefesh*, soul, predominated over *guf*, "body." With the sin, the body lost its spiritual quality, and this will be restored only with the coming of the Messiah.²

Ovadhiah Sforno understands "knowledge" to mean "attention, commitment," and "good and evil" to refer to that which is pleasant or unpleasant. Mankind will pursue pleasures or avoid pain, even when pleasure is harmful and pain is necessary (Sforno on Gen. 2:9). He knows good and evil by virtue of being in the divine image, but now he will cast away the intellect and pursue pleasure (on Gen. 3:22).

The objection we may raise to these views is: if the intellect suffered a diminution of its function and an increase in its preoccupation with sexuality, how then could God say, *Now that the man has become like one of us knowing good and bad . . .* (Gen. 3:22). Man should now be less similar to God and the angels than he was before. The answer lies in the interpretation of *mimmenu* by many commentators, not as "one of us" but as "one who independently (knows good and evil)." The problem then shifts to that of man's freedom to use his flawed intellect for the wrong purposes. He must then be expelled from the garden. But reading *mimmenu lada-at tov va-ra* in this manner is homiletic and is not supported by Hebrew syntax.

Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nahmanides and Sforno, even with their differences, have in common a regressive interpretation, that is, an original intellectual perfection in Adam degenerated, because of the fruit, into undue attention to consensual values or sexual desire. Other commentators envision an enhancement of powers because of

2 Bezalel Safran, "Rabbi Azriel and Nachmanides: Two Views of the Fall of Man," in I. Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nachmanides: Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1983), 86-98.

the fruit of the tree. Speiser, in his *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Genesis, is an example. Since, he says, in II Sam. 19:36, "good and evil" refers to physical pleasures, he suggests that "good and evil" means being in full possession of physical and mental powers. Cassuto proposed that knowledge of good and evil meant "knowledge of all thing," that is, omniscience. If man had already achieved this God-like quality, immortality from the fruit of the tree of life would make him like God.³ To all these interpretations pointing to regression or enhancement, we can counter: the text gives no evidence that sexuality, moral choice or intellectual capacity were in any way affected by the fruit, neither initiated, enhanced nor decreased.

The interpretation of Saadiah Gaon is of special interest, because he limits the extent to which the Tree of Knowledge was effective in being the exclusive source of new knowledge. Like the other, later commentators we have cited, Saadiah states that Adam and Eve lacked nothing in intellect and moral recognition. How else would God have given them commandments? Only a few areas of knowledge, of limited scope, were unknown to them, such as embarrassment in the state of nudity. They became aware of this through the fruit of the tree, but had they not eaten of it they would have learned the same things from God directly over a longer period of time. The sin of eating the fruit gave them the knowledge immediately, but deprived them of being the direct disciples of God and of the reward for engaging in a struggle to learn. A similar limitation is applied to the Tree of Life, which Saadiah does not interpret as a tree bestowing eternal life but rather a tree of healing (he is followed in this by Joseph Bekhor Shor). The tree provided simple, exact remedies, and without it man would have to grope slowly over time toward the same knowledge, making many mistakes along the way.⁴

In the light of the problems raised by the various commentaries, I would like to suggest that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was limited in its effectiveness, as Saadiah states, or, to go even further,

3 U. Cassuto, *Me-Adam ad Noah* (Jerusalem, 1953), 72-78.

4 Moshe Zucker, *ibid.*, 273-290.

was a totally inert substance. The fruit of the tree was attractive and alluring because of exaggerated expectations planted in the minds of Adam and Eve by the serpent (*the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom*; Gen. 3:6) but once eaten had no effect on body or mind. Benno Jacob has pointed out that the “good and evil” are nothing other than obedience to God’s command and disobedience: “The command was given man to preclude him imagining he was a god, to make him aware there was a master over him. The fruit of the tree was not harmful or deadly, but, on the contrary, good to eat.”⁵ The idea that the prohibition of the fruit was a test of man’s obedience is also hinted at by Saadiah. He states that, even if the tree had been an ordinary one, God’s wisdom would have been expressed in the prohibition of eating its fruit. Adam would receive a reward for staying away from it and, every time he would see the tree, he would remember God’s dominion and His commandment.⁶

Much ambiguity concerning the Tree of Knowledge is inherent in the biblical narrative, allowing for exaggerated and false claims about its power. Are we permitted to say that this ambiguity was intended by God so that the humans could project their exaggerated wishes upon the tree and fall victim to their fantasy? Can we go further and ask if God was guilty of deliberate misinformation, and was putting a stumbling block before the blind? This is a serious charge. Yet there is the incident where the spirit of falsehood overpowers the prophets of Ahab, forcing them to tell him that he will be victorious and thus deceiving him into entering a battle which he will lose. God endorses this act of deliberate misinformation (I Kings 22:20-23), but we can answer here that Ahab was not an innocent. He had sinned grievously prior to this incident and merited his punishment of deadly misinformation. This case might be compared to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Maimonides, *Yad Hazakah, Teshuvah* VI:3). Adam and Eve, however, are innocents.

5 Cited in N. Leibowitz, *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem, 1972) 23-24.

6 M. Zucker, *ibid.*, 274-75.

There might be, however, a possible parallel in the story of Adapa, discovered in the El Amarna archives and in the library of Assurbanipal. Adapa the sage, whose name has been compared by scholars to Adam, broke the wing of the south wind, who had submerged his boat. The gods are angry. Adapa is advised by the god of water, wisdom and craftiness, Ea, to go up to heaven in mourning garments to apologize. He tells him that he will be offered the bread and water of death and that he must refuse it. When Adapa arrives in heaven he is offered the bread and water of *life*, which he refuses, following the instructions given to him. The gods in heaven did not tell Adapa what they were offering, and Ea's information was also incorrect. One gets the impression that the gods wanted to trick this human, to be certain he did not attain eternal life.⁷

Can we connect this story with the biblical narrative and suggest that God did not want Adam and Eve to have eternal life? No, we cannot. God designated the Tree of Knowledge in a manner which would permit many interpretations, but He did not present any false ones, as did the serpent. He made no claims regarding positive results from eating of the tree, only a negative one. However, that, too, was ambiguous: *for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die* (Gen. 2:17). Eve thought that this meant instant death upon touching the tree. Once she saw that this did not happen, "you shall die" no longer held any danger for her and Adam. "You shall die" has been understood in many ways. It could mean that Adam will be subject to death as a punishment, on a time schedule different from his dying merely because he is a composite of body and soul (Nahmanides on Gen. 2:17). It could mean that, having sinned, Adam is not permitted now to eat of the tree of life and must remain mortal (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Gen. 3:21). Saadia's view might also be cited: Adam will not be able to partake of the Tree of Life, which he understands as a Tree of Healing, and will be subject to illness and consequent death.

⁷ J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton, 1969, pp. 101-3.

Let us be clear. God was ambiguous as to the effects of the Tree of Knowledge, but he was quite clear on the prohibition itself. As we have suggested, with Benno Jacob and Saadia, that was all that Adam and Eve were supposed to take into consideration, not the effects of the fruit but God's commandment. The Adapa story bears no resemblance to the biblical narrative, except for the general motif that humans do not attain immortality. God did not trick Adam and Eve, but, through the ambiguity, increased the level of the temptation and testing and made heavier the burden of moral choice.

A further point must be made. The fact that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge did not increase Adam and Eve's store of knowledge indicates that this story is taking a stand on the question of the religious value of knowledge. It has been suggested that chapters 2-3 of Genesis belong to the biblical genre of wisdom literature.⁸ The wise men of ancient Israel, including Solomon, accumulated a large amount of practical and moral wisdom as well as a significant body of observations of nature (not, however, free of folklore and fantasy). Job's friends draw upon traditional wisdom, but they cannot explain adequately why he suffers. Job also believes in the value of knowledge and demands that God appear to clarify his situation. When God does appear he pounds Job with questions about creation and the world of nature. It is evident that chapters 38-41 of the Book of Job contain a considerable amount of scientific and natural observations. Ironically, however, this knowledge is being paraded to highlight Job's ignorance. It will not fully answer his questions, because God remains transcendent and inaccessible, but it will give him some assurance that the world has order and that God does exert moral control *Have you ever commanded the day to break, assigned the dawn its place, so that it seizes the corners of the earth and shakes the wicked out of it?* (Job 38:12-13). According to

8 Luis Alonso Schökel, "Sapiential and Covenant Themes in Genesis 2-3," *Theology Digest* 13 (1965), 3-10; reprinted in James L. Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 468-480.

this view, the knowledge man attains is limited and fails to answer his ultimate questions, but it can give some limited reassurance.

However, there is yet another view in the book of Job, expressed in ch. 28: *But whence does wisdom come? Where is the source of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living . . . God understands the way to it; He knows its source . . . He said to man, 'See, fear of the Lord is wisdom, to shun evil is understanding'* (Job 28:20-28). This view is even more conservative than that of the author of the speeches of God from the whirlwind. It seems to hold that technical or intellectual wisdom does not serve to answer the real questions at all. True wisdom is not intellectual but moral. The wise person is defined, not as a student of nature, but as one who obeys God's commandments, in the spirit of *The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord* (Ps. 111:10) and *The fear of the Lord is the beginning* (or: best part) *of knowledge* (Prov. 1:7).

The narrative in Genesis 2-3 is another way of stating this view: the only significant wisdom for man is obedience to God, not the accumulation of information and experience. Thus Schökel suggests that the narrative of Gen. 2-3 assumes a tone of challenge, as if to say, "Your knowledge consists in living with God and observing His commandments."⁹ Adam had practical knowledge, as seen by his being charged with the management of the garden and his ability to name the animals. He thought he would obtain so much more from the Tree of Knowledge, but he learned only that he was naked, that is, set apart, embarrassed. He failed, however, to understand that true knowledge is obedience. We may, for ourselves, accept or reject this view. Jewish tradition presents us with examples of both negative and positive attitudes to philosophy and critical examination. However, we must note that both Gen. 2-3 and Job 28 have a shared conservative view of the relative values of wisdom and obedience.

We have tried to show that the fruit of the tree of knowledge did not affect Adam and Eve's intelligence or sexuality in any way and that

9 Schökel, *ibid.*

God's intent was to show that true wisdom is obedience. Why, then, does God say, *Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever?* (*ibid.* 22). God seems to agree with the serpent, that Adam and Eve have attained a divine quality, when the text gives no evidence for this. How shall we then interpret Gen. 3:22? We have indicated that we cannot accept interpretations such as those of Rashi and Onkelos, that Adam is unique in creation in that he can distinguish between good and evil. Nor can we accept that of Saadiah, that man is such a creature that of himself (*mimmenu*; not *mimennu*, "one of us") he can distinguish good and evil.

The verse, I suggest, is intended ironically. It is as if the words were said with a mocking smile or enclosed in quotations, as when we refer to one who is very unfriendly as "our good friend." God does not really think that Adam and Eve have become like the angels or Him. Adam erroneously thought that would happen, as Ibn Ezra laconically states: *al machshavto*, "[the verse is meant] according to [Adam's] thought" (on Gen. 3:22). Again, the emptiness of Adam and Eve's pursuit of knowledge, according to the view of the writer of Gen. 2-3, is underscored.

COULD MOSES' HANDS MAKE WAR?

BEREL DOV LERNER

Soon after leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, the Children of Israel were attacked for the first time by their eternal nemesis, Amalek. The Torah tells us that in response to the attack, Moses sent forth Joshua to assemble an army to oppose the Amalekites. Meanwhile, Moses ascended a hill overlooking the scene of battle, taking with him Aaron, Hur and the "rod of God", which had assisted Moses in the performance of previous miracles. *And it came to pass, the Torah relates, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed* (Exodus 17:11). Eventually, Moses became incapable of keeping his hands up by himself, so he sat on a rock and let Aaron and Hur support his arms. With their help, Moses was able to hold up his hands until sunset and Israel's victory over the Amalekites.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this story is the swiftness of Moses' response to the Amalekite attack. Instead of first consulting God, Moses immediately takes steps to counter the enemy military and sets off for his hill-top vigil. One can easily imagine how God's rebuke of his hesitation at the Red Sea — *Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward!* (Ex. 14:15) was still fresh in Moses' mind. There is no time for standing on ceremony when the Jewish people is in danger.

Although Moses' treatment of the Amalekite threat was in itself unimpeachable, it opened the door to possibly grave misunderstandings of his role in the performance of miracles. In describing practically every other episode in which the Jewish people enjoyed supernatural aid under Moses' leadership, the Torah is careful to point out that whatever miracle occurred happened only after Moses had prayed to God and/or received prophecy. These divine consul-

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tations leave no doubt in the reader's mind that the power of the Almighty, and not the power of his servant Moses, stands behind the wonders depicted. In the case of the battle with the Amalekites, this divine consultation is missing.

Judaism's attitude towards Moses as a miracle worker has always been caught up in a dynamic tension between apparently contradictory purposes. On the one hand, the miracles which Moses performs serve to authenticate his authority over the Jewish people. Thus we are told that the children of Israel *believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses* only after witnessing the downfall of the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:31). From this standpoint, it is important that the Bible stresses Moses' greatness as much as possible, even his connection with miracles, in order to underpin the uniqueness and ultimate authority of Moses' prophecy, i.e. the Torah:

And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the Land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants and to all his land, and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.

(Deut. 34:10-12)

On the other hand, Moses' very greatness constitutes a potential threat to Jewish monotheism. As the philosopher Walter Kaufman has pointed out,¹ it has often been the fate of the founders of major religions to be deified and worshipped by their followers. Even the Buddha, who was personally opposed to such practices, was eventually enlisted as an object of worship. Of all the founders of ancient religions, Moses alone escaped the dangers of man's inclination towards idolatry. Yet his frequent involvement in the appearance of signs and wonders only increased the risk of deification.

The Torah and Judaism in general are aware of this danger. As mentioned above, the Torah almost always makes sure that the

1 *The Faith of a Heretic* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961) 200-201.

reader realize that God, not Moses, was the source of miracles. A common interpretation of the Torah's statement *and no man knoweth of his [Moses'] sepulchre unto this day* (Deut. 34:6) underlines the secrecy surrounding Moses' burial place as a means of protecting Judaism from the evils of ancestor worship. In the words of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch:

When one considers how often a cult of worship verging on idolatry has grown round the places of the graves of great men who have deserved great honor amongst mankind, one can understand the greatness of this last phase in the picture of the life of our Moses.

(Hirsch Deut. 34:6)²

In light of the problems involved in Moses' role as miracle worker, especially during Israel's first encounter with Amalek, Mishna Rosh HaShana 3:8 takes on new significance:

And could Moses' hands make war or break war? Rather [the verse's intention is] to tell you that when Israel gazed upwards and subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven they would prevail, and if not they would fall.

Many rabbis, including R. Ovadia Bertinoro in his commentary on this Mishnah, have noted its emphasis on the importance of Israel maintaining a religious stance, even while involved in a military conflict. The military success of the Jewish people resulted from their having "subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven." It is because of this emphasis that our Mishnah found its way into a chapter dealing with the laws of the *shofar*, appropriately following a discussion on the requirement of *kavana*, the state of mind proper to the performance of a mitzvah, religious command. However, if my preceding analysis is taken into account, it becomes clear that the importance of *kavana* is not the only lesson to be learned from our Mishnah. More than questions regarding Moses' part in splitting

² *Deuteronomy*, vol. 5 of *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch*, trans. Isaac Levy (London, 1962), 685-686.

the Red Sea or bringing forth water from a rock, miracles which were preceded by divine consultations, the opening question, "and could Moses' hands make war or break war?" is one worth asking in its own right. Our interest now centers on Moses himself, and his abilities as a miracle worker. But it must first be established that the victory over the Amalekites was of a miraculous nature to begin with.

While our Mishnah makes it clear that Moses himself was not responsible for the outcome of the battle, it is somewhat ambiguous about the nature of Israel's victory. Did it require divine intervention? Some commentators on the Torah say that Moses merely rallied the troops on:

"For such is the manner of the arrangement of battles. As long as they [the combatants] see the banner aloft . . . they prevail. And when it is cast away they are wont to flee and be vanquished"

(Rashbam on Exodus 17:11)

In that case, the soldiers were sustained in battle by their religious fervor, and no obvious miraculous intervention was necessary. If so, Moses' actions could invite no misunderstanding. Superficially, one might argue that such naturalistic interpretations are closer to the plain meaning of the text. Yet a broader view of the situation, taking into account the conditions under which the war broke out, would support Israel's need of blatant divine protection from Amalek. Thus Nahmanides, who believes that the battle had been won through supernatural means, writes in his commentary:

"And Moses our Master did all of this because Amalek was a very strong and powerful nation, while Israel was not skilled in warfare and had never seen war, as it said, 'lest peradventure the people repent when they see war [and return to Egypt]' (Ex. 13:17) and it [Israel] was 'faint and weary' as it is written in the Mishne Torah"

(Deut. 25:18) (Ramban on Ex. 17:9)

Given that miraculous events had determined the course of the battle, we can again ask about Moses' role in bringing about these

miracles. Did Moses possess some special power which allowed him to effect an Israelite victory? R. Eliezer, who does not mention *kavana* as a factor, agrees with our Mishnah that Moses was not really personally responsible for Israel's military success:

"R. Eliezer says: And could Moses' hands make Israel victorious or break Amalek? Rather, when Israel performs God's will and they believe in what Moses had been instructed by God, then God performs miracles and feats for them".

(Mehilta BeShalah 17:11)

Considering how theologically problematic the story of Israel's battle with Amalek is for Judaism, one would expect the Torah to make some gesture towards preventing its readers from attributing the victory to Moses' own powers. A hint, and perhaps more than a hint, of this concern may be found in a rather peculiar detail of the Torah's narrative:

But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the one on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

(Ex. 17:12)

It is most unusual for the Torah to tell us of someone kept from acting out their intentions by simple human frailty. When Jacob decided to roll a large stone off of the well at Haran (Gen. 29:10), his strength did not fail him. Moses himself is not recorded as having experienced difficulties when he fasted forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai (Deut. 9:18) to appease God's anger after the sin of the Golden Calf. Later in the Scriptures (Josh. 8:26) we are told how Joshua held out his spear all through the day-long battle at Ai, and no mention is made of his fatigue. If Joshua's stamina lasted the whole day, why couldn't Moses endure a similar test?

It is my contention that the Torah deliberately mentions Moses' weakness in order to avoid any confusion about his human status. True, Moses did not consult God before assuming his vigil on the

hilltop. And it is also true that when he raised his hands, Israel prevailed. But to the questions, "Could Moses' hands make war or break war?", "was Moses some kind of divine or semi-divine being gifted with autonomous magical powers?", the Torah answers with a firm negative. Not only was it beyond Moses' ability to determine the course of battle, he did not even possess complete control of his own body. How could he bear the burden of defeating the entire Amalekite nation if he was incapable of bearing the burden of his two hands? And so the problem addressed centuries later by the sages had already been answered by the Torah itself.

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To standardize spelling, the American usage will be employed. Quotations from the Bible should follow one of the Jewish Publication Society's translations, unless a special point is being made by the author for the purpose of his article.

The following transliteration guidelines, though non-academic, are simple and the most widely accepted:

א and א	assumes the sound of its accompanying vowel = e.g., Amen, Alenu, Olam, Eretz.
ה	= H e.g., Hodesh.
כ and ק	= K e.g., Ketuvim, Kadosh.
ח	= Kh e.g., Melekh.
צ	= Tz e.g., Tzaddik.
ב	= E e.g., Ben.

Standard transliteration of biblical names remains unchanged.

THE SYMBOLIC ACTS OF EZEKIEL (CHAPTS. 3-5)

JOSHUA J. ADLER

More than any other literary prophet, Ezekiel is associated with performing all kinds of bizarre acts such as those found in chapters four and five of his book. Nevertheless, we must not forget that other prophets, even staid ones, such as Isaiah who lived more than 100 years earlier, also performed some eccentric acts such as walking around the streets of Jerusalem naked for a period of time. Some Bible commentators do not think that the word "naked" should be taken literally but rather that it means he was to be dressed only in his undergarments or in a loin cloth or that the whole thing was but a vision. However such views do not exactly fit the text which explains Isaiah's symbolic act, *So shall the King of Assyria drive off the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Nubia, young and old, naked and barefoot and with bared buttocks . . .* (20:4). Also, Jeremiah, an older contemporary of Ezekiel frequently performed unusual and dramatic acts such as when, at the command of God he walked around with a yoke (27:28), or when he purchased and wore a special girdle and then hid it among the rocks in the Efrat valley (Ch. 13), or when he took a vase and publicly smashed it in the Hinnom Valley (Ch. 19). In these symbolic acts he ranks just behind the prophet Ezekiel.

As for Ezekiel, his first unusual act was to eat a scroll upon which were written dire warnings of *lamentations, dirges, and woes* (2:10). What is more unusual was that the prophet actually found this meal of papyrus to be delicious! (3:3). Some commentators, as with the case of Isaiah's nakedness, do not take this or his other symbolic acts literally but think that they were all part of a dream or

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vision. Some see this act of eating the word of God as symbolizing Ezekiel's willingness to accept his task fully and without complaint – in contrast to both Jeremiah and Moses who were reluctant to accept their mission from the beginning (Ex. 3; Jer. 1). Others see the eating of the scroll as symbolizing the unification of Ezekiel's whole being with the word of God so that the prophet loses all of his individuality, personal desires and normal human inclinations. We see this when his beloved wife dies and, instead of mourning her, God commands him *not* to mourn (24:16). A third view, sees the turning of the scroll into a meal which tastes like honey as showing his pleasure at the fact that he was the person chosen by God to be His messenger.

Yet, despite the interpretations which make Ezekiel an eager prophet there is at least a hint of his being ambivalent about his mission as we shall soon see. Just after being commanded to speak and warn the people (chap. 2-3), God tells the prophet to *Go, shut yourself up in your house . . . and you shall not go out among them . . . And I will make your tongue cleave to your palate . . .* (3:24-26). How does one explain this unusual command which contradicts the earlier one in which Ezekiel is commissioned to speak and be a reprover to the people?

There are some who explain this period of silence as a necessary watershed in Ezekiel's life demonstrating a dramatic break from his past, from being a person with his own thoughts and words to being one who is exclusively the mouthpiece of God. Others think that his silence is only commanded for normal discourse but he is not restricted from delivering the divine messages to the people. But there may also be a different explanation altogether, a psychological one, which points to some ambivalence about his mission. When Ezekiel first accepted his charge, he was caught up in the excitement of the revelation at the River Chebar which completely overwhelmed him so that in the throes of his excitement he did not think through the meaning of his mission. Only afterwards, upon more sober reflection, did the prophet possibly have a change of heart. He may have hoped that God would also change His mind and release him

altogether. It was only after this period of prolonged silence and his attempt to "escape" by remaining housebound and cut off from people that Ezekiel finally came to realize that it was too late and that there was no escape from his mission. This is when we read God's charge to the prophet: . . . *I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, . . . He who listens will listen and he who does not will not . . .* (3:27). In any case, Ezekiel's prolonged period of silence and his cutting himself off from all normal social contacts must be added to the pattern of unusual forms of behavior which is typical of this prophet.

Following this period of silence or perhaps even during it, Ezekiel performs a series of symbolic acts in which he takes on various roles. At times he represents the suffering people such as when he lies on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side another forty days (4:4), or when he is told he can only eat about eight ounces of bread and a liter of water per day (4:10, 11). He does this apparently as a way of *sharing* the suffering of his people (Jer. 8:8). Yet, when he is commanded to make the model of Jerusalem which is being besieged he now represents the attacking enemy rather than the Jerusalemites (4:1-3). Later he shaves off all the hair on his head and face and divides the hair into three parts with one third to be burnt, one third to be struck with a sword and one third to be scattered to the wind. He is then told to take a few remaining hairs and tie them up in his skirt and burn them. This indicates that even the surviving remnant will not be permitted to enjoy peace and tranquility but will be subject to additional suffering (5:4). At other times, Ezekiel becomes a dramatic actor such as when he dresses up and equips himself as one who must abandon his home and go into exile in order to serve *as a portent to the House of Israel* (12:6).

In sum, prior to the destruction Ezekiel is perhaps the gloomiest of the prophets in his predictions, and perhaps the most eloquent in making use of every device and symbolic act in order to preach the divine message. It is only in the period after the destruction that balance returns to his prophecy when he predicts the resurrection of the Jewish people in their homeland and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Cf. Chap. 37).

A GARDEN OF VEGETABLES

HAIM GIL'AD

For the land into which thou goest to possess it is not as the land of Egypt from whence thou comest out, where thou didst sow thy seed, and didst water it by foot, like a garden of vegetables. (Deut. 11:10)

And Ahab said to Naboth, Give me thy vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden. (I Kg. 21:2)

Bible scholars who search for the meaning of the phrase *Gan Hayarok*, translated as "a vegetable garden" ask whether the inhabitants of The Holy Land grew vegetables in biblical times and what part vegetables played in the diet of those days. So far a clear and positive answer to this question still eludes us. The Bible texts do not help us to solve this problem. Research on the vegetation of biblical times and the period of the Talmud leaves us with conjectures and a multitude of suggestions.¹

Only once do we find the names of specific vegetables mentioned in the Bible – (Num. 11:5):

We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.

This sentence presents us with some problems:

a. Only two of the five plants mentioned are vegetables; two of the other three, the melon and the cucumber are of the pumpkin group of

1 See Prof. Y. Felix: "Lack of mention of the names of vegetables probably means that the cultivation of vegetables was not common in the times of the Bible. It would appear mainly that those vegetables which grow wild are used for food" (*Olam Hatzo-meach Hamikrai* p. 140). The *Encyclopedia Mikrait* under "Ma'achalim and mash-kaot" (vol. D, column 547) would seem to come to a similar conclusion.

plants, and the identity of *Hatzir*, which is translated here as "leeks"² has long been a subject of discussion.³

b. The plants mentioned are those grown in Egypt whose former inhabitants longed for them during their sojourn in the desert, but there is no proof that they were not cultivated in the Holy Land. Since it is known that in Israel many plants of the onion family grow wild, no doubt these were also cultivated and used as food. The *Lodge in a garden of cucumbers* mentioned in Isaiah⁴ provides proof that watermelons, cucumbers and pumpkins⁵ were widely cultivated. These needed to be guarded against unwelcome visitors. *Hatzir* is frequently mentioned in the Bible, but it is not clear whether a vegetable for human consumption or a grain for animal fodder is intended.⁶

We find an indirect reference to vegetables in Proverbs:

*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it.*⁷

The accepted view has been that vegetables were associated with those in humble circumstances, whereas their richer brethren feasted mainly on meat and animal products. We are given a glance of the menu at King Solomon's court where vegetables are not included:

*And Solomon's provisions for one day was thirty kor of fine flour, and sixty kor of meal, ten fat oxen and twenty oxen out of pasture and a hundred sheep apart from deer and gazelles and fallow deer and geese.*⁸

2 Numbers 11:5.

3 See Felix as above regarding *Hatzir* p. 178.

4 Isaiah 1:8.

5 The pumpkin is not mentioned in the Bible but apparently it was cultivated with the other plants of the *miksheh*. "It appears that the name "dil'an" (Joshua 15:38) was taken from it." – according to Felix.

6 *Perhaps we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive* (I Kings 17: 4), *He causes the grass to grow for the cattle* (Psalms 104:14) *as the green herb, as the grass on the house tops* (II Kings 19:36) to name just a few examples.

7 Proverbs, 15: 17. See also Proverbs 17: 1 *Better a dry morsel and quietness with it, than a house full of feasting with strife.*

8 I Kings 5:2.

The food that the people of Mahanaim served David and his men consisted of grain and animal products:⁹

And wheat and barley and flour and parched corn and beans and lentils and parched pulse and honey and butter and sheep and cheese of cow's milk.

However, we cannot infer from this that vegetables were not served to the guests of the royal court of David and Solomon. Perhaps no specific mention is made of them because it was taken for granted that vegetables graced all tables, not only those of the poor.

WHAT IS A "VEGETABLE GARDEN"

Let us leave for a moment the literal translation – a level space used for the cultivation of vegetables – and take a look at two texts in the Bible. We will find that no specific vegetation is mentioned but rather the aesthetic combination of greenery and landscape is implied.

In Deuteronomy chapter 11 Moses gives a moving climatic and topographic description of the land *that thou goest to possess it* and compares it to the land *from whence thou camest out*. It is a land that *drinks water of the rain of heaven and the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year*. Its moisture and freshness are a gift of heaven. Egypt on the other hand has virtually no rainfall and producing vegetation involved hard labor: *Thou didst water it with thy foot like a garden of vegetables* – a task with which the erstwhile slaves were well acquainted. The second text in this study refers to Naboth's vineyard¹⁰ that Ahab coveted in order to transform it into a *Gan Yarak*. It is not likely that Ahab intended to use it to grow vegetables to feed his followers. As already mentioned, vegetables were not of prime importance in the diet of the Royal Court and those that were required did not have to be grown "in the backyard."

9 II Samuel 28-29.

10 I Kings 21:1 ff.

Acquiring the vineyard would have meant infringing the hallowed concept of *Nahlat Avot*, the "Family Inheritance" which was considered by the people to be the "Inheritance of the Lord." Ahab's motive behind the purchase of the vineyard was to enhance his political and personal prestige. The honor and status of a king in the eyes of his people, and more so in the eyes of other rulers depended to some extent on his ability to compete with his fellow kings in the way of luxurious palaces and beautiful ornamental gardens. He had to entertain his royal guests to gala events, feasts and royal receptions and to impress ambassadors, princes and rulers. Thus we read in the Book of Esther: *When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty.*¹¹ Ecclesiastes describes the splendor of his reign as king in Jerusalem: *I made great works for myself: I built houses, I planted vineyards; I made gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits; I made pools of water from which to water a forest of growing trees.*¹²

Ahab had two palaces, his main residence in the capital, Samaria, and a winter residence in Jezreel. This was built on the north-western slopes of the Gilboa and he wanted to make additions too so that it would conform with the standards expected of a royal palace by surrounding it with ornamental gardens. However, he was limited by topographical conditions; the southeastern side of the palace was a steep rocky slope and unsuitable for the ample leisure and pleasure space envisaged which would also require easy access for chariots and large numbers of people. The only level space near the palace were family inheritances zealously guarded by their owners since the days of Joshua. The land nearest to Ahab's palace was that of Naboth the Jezreelite.

To summarize: the "vegetable garden" quoted in the two biblical passages at the head of this article gives no indication as to whether vegetables were grown for food in the Holy Land. The question still remains open.

11 Esther, 1:4.

12 Ecclesiastes 2:4-5.

THE "MOLTEN SEA" AND THE VALUE OF π

R. C. GUPTA

I Kings 7:23 contains the statement:¹

And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other; it was round all about, and the height thereof was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

Almost the same passage is repeated in II Chronicles 4:2. As such, and without bothering about any minute details as to the shape of the 'molten sea', the passage was taken to mean that the diameter of the round or circular top measured 10 cubits and the corresponding *circumference* measured 30 cubits, thereby implying

$$C=3D \quad (1)$$

that is,²

$$\pi_1 = C/D = 3 \quad (2)$$

Generally this interpretation has been accepted by historians and other scholars of mathematics such as Smith,³ Hobson,⁴ Eves,⁵

1 *King James Version of A.D. 1611* published by the American Bible Society, New York, 1958. Unless otherwise stated, it is this edition which is used for quotations from the Bible.

2 Following Smeur (see ref. 9 below, p. 252), the constant [(Circumference)/(diameter)] is being denoted here by π_1 , and the constant [(area of a circle)/(square of the radius)] by π_2 . Of course we know that $\pi_1 = \pi_2$, but this was not always recognized in ancient times.

3 D. E. Smith, *History of Mathematics*, Vol. II, Dover, New York, 1958; p. 302.

4 E. W. Hobson, et al., *Squaring the Circle and Other Monographs*, Chelsea, New York, 1969; p. 13.

5 Howard Eves, *An Introduction to the History of Mathematics*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969; p. 89.

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Coolidge,⁶ Beckmann,⁷ Miller,⁸ and Smeur.⁹

The Bible is a religious and not a mathematical book. The source material compiled in the Hebrew Bible belongs to a remote period. The editors of its various books cannot be presumed to have serious knowledge of mathematics. Hence the above passage might truly indicate the knowledge only of the simple rule (1), although Hebrew *mathematics* of that time might be familiar with better rules and values of π other than (2).

The widespread knowledge and use of the simple rule (1) in various ancient cultures and culture-areas can be easily documented. We mention only some selected instances as follows:

1. Babylonia (about 2nd millennium B.C.E.): e.g. cuneiform text BM 85194 in which $C = 3D$ as well as $D = C/3$ are found used.¹⁰
2. Indian Vedic literature: Although the view of certain scholars that the *Rgveda*, I, 52, 5 reference to *trita* implies a concept of $\pi_1 = 3$ is difficult to accept,¹¹ the rule (1) is clearly used in the *Baudhayana Sulba Sutra*,¹² the oldest text of the category (about 500 B.C.E. or earlier).
3. Buddhist Cosmography: In ancient Buddhistic cosmography (centuries before Common Era), the rule (1) is used; e.g. for the circular Godaniya island C and D are given to be 7500 and 2500 *yojanas*.¹³
4. The canonical *Suryaprajnapti* (belonging to the Jaina School), *sutra* 20 quotes three rules of earlier scholars (about 500 B.C.E.) each

6 J. L. Coolidge, *A History of Geometrical Methods*, Dover, New York, 1963; p. 6.

7 Peter Beckmann, *A History of π (Pi)*, Golem Press, Boulder, 1971; p. 13.

8 G. A. Miller, "Approximations in Mathematics Regarded as Exact", *Mathematics Student*, VI (1938), p. 137.

9 A. J. E. M. Smeur, "On the Value Equivalent to π in Ancient Mathematical Texts: A New Interpretation", *Archives Hist. Exact Sciences*, 6 (1970), p. 263.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

11 D. D. Mehta, *Some Positive Sciences in the Vedas*, Book II, p. 29 (New Delhi, 1961).

12 S. N. Sen and A. K. Bag (editors), *The Sulbasutras*, INSA, New Delhi, 1983, p. 22, text 4.15 (or I. 112-113); transl. p. 82.

13 See Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosam* edited by Dvarikadasa, *Bauddha Bharati*, Varanasi, 1981, Part I; III, 48 (p. 507) and III, 55 (p. 512).

of whom used the formula (1) with D equal to 1133, 1134, and 1135 *yojonas*.¹⁴ Although these rules are rejected, they nevertheless indicate that $\pi_1 = 3$ was employed earlier.

5. Egyptian Demotic Mathematical Papyri: During Hellenistic period, the value $\pi_1 = \pi_2 = 3$ was used in Egypt, e.g. in the Cairo papyrus (about 3rd century B.C.E.).¹⁵ It should be noted that the very ancient Egyptian rule $(8D/9)^2$ for finding the area of a circle implies a value of π_2 (and not π_1).¹⁶

6. China (about 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.): In the very early Chinese text *Chou Pei Suan Ching* ("Arithmetical Classic of the Gnomon and the Circular Paths of Heaven") which was written in the Han Period (202 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.) but certainly based on earlier material, occurs the statement:¹⁷

At the winter solstice the sun's orbit has a diameter 47600
(Chinese) miles, the circumference of the orbit being 142800
miles.

This clearly implies $\pi_1 = 3$. The same value is also found in the famous *Chiu Chang Suan Shu* ("Nine Chapters on Mathematical Art") belonging to the Han Period, and other Old Chinese texts.¹⁸

7. The Roman Vitruvius (1st century B.C.E./C.E.) in his *De Architectura* used $\pi_1 = 3$ in giving periphery and diameter of wheels.¹⁹

8. Indian Epic and Puranic literature: The use of $\pi_1 = 3$ is attested in the *Maha-Bharata* while giving the dimensions about Sun, Moon

14 See the *Ganitanuyoga*, compiled by Muni Kanhaiyalal, Sanderao, Rajasthan, Virabda 2495, pp. 339-341.

15 See *Isis*, 65 (1974), p. 110.

16 Smeur, *op cit.* (under ref. 9 above, p. 265) does not agree with O. Neugebauer's suggestion that the implied value $(16/9)2$ was used for calculating C.

17 Y. Mikami, *The Development of Mathematics in China and Japan*, Chelsea, New York, 1961; p. 8.

18 *Ibid.*, and J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol., III, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959; p. 99.

19 John Pottage, "The Vitruvian Value of π ", *Isis*, 59 (1968), 190-197 where some earlier wrong views are also examined (cf. Smith, ref. 3 above, Vol. II, p. 307).

and Rahu, e.g. *Bhismaparva*, XII, 44 mentions²⁰ diameter and circumference for the Sun to be 10000 and 30000 *yojanas*. In several Puranas such as *Vayupurana*, *Matsyapurana*, *Adityapurana*, the same value is used.²¹

9. The use of $\pi_1 = 3$ for C/D is also reported to appear in the *Koran*.²²

The above examples clearly show that the most common practice in various ancient civilizations was to take the ratio C/D to be simply 3. The Talmud, which is essentially a commentary on the Hebrew Bible published about 500 C.E. states:²³

That which in circumference is three hands broad is one hand broad.

The Mishnah, compiled about 200 C.E., also takes the same view.²⁴ Under these circumstances, the inference that the Bible used $\pi_1 = 3$ looks to be justified, although it may not be a historical fact.

From time to time and recently in particular, scholars have advanced reasons to indicate better Hebrew knowledge of the circle measurement of that time and worked out several improved biblical values of π . We shall describe and examine these briefly.

It is often argued that the Israelite slaves who left Egypt with Moses (about 1300 B.C.E.) must have been familiar with the better value of π known to the Egyptians then. But it must be noted that the Egyptian rule for quadrature was to take $(8D/9)$ and then square the result. This means that the value $256/81$ implied here is that of $\pi_2 (=4 \cdot \text{area}/D^2)$ and *not* of $\pi_1 (=C/D)$. Moreover the knowledge of the better value was confined to mathematical works and to the priestly class of Egypt and may not have been known to the working slaves. We also dismiss the claim of the 18th century German commentators

20 R. C. Gupta, "Some Ancient Values of Pi and Their Use in India", *The Mathematics Education*, IX (1975), Sec. B., p. 1.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 2, and E. Sachau (transl.), *Alberuni's India*, Two parts in one, Delhi, 1964; Vol. I, p. 168.

22 This is stated by Miller, *op. cit.*, (ref. 8 above), p. 138.

23 Beckmann, *op. cit.* (ref. 7 above), p. 138.

24 Smith, ref. 3, Vol. II, p. 302, Pottage, ref. 19, p. 195.

25 Beckmann, ref. 7, p. 73.

that the "molten sea" was hexagonal in top or section because it completely ignores its description as "round all about" or "round in compass" (II Ch. 4:2).

In 1960 C.B. Read²⁶ came out with the suggestion that the word "round" (*agol*) does not necessarily mean circular and that the top edge was possibly elliptic with 10 cubits as its minor axis. He forgot that in that case the encompassing peripheral length should be much greater than 30 cubits (as actual $10\pi_1$ itself is greater than this value). Four years later he again examined the whole questions but arrived at no definite shape for the top.²⁷

However, a few months later P.A. Stevenson²⁸ correctly pointed out that the symmetrical mounting of the container (i.e. the molten sea) as described in I Kings 7:25, supports a circular shape. Moreover in ancient times "round all about" generally stood for circular or spherical as distinct from oval or elliptical.

Stevenson also gave two more sound suggestions which were elaborated by other scholars later on. One of the explanations is that the biblical writer did not intend to make or record exact measurements, as such accurate figures which would have certainly involved fractions, were not considered to be of much practical importance in the context. Thus Jean Meeus²⁹ thinks that the author of the biblical passages has rounded the values to the nearest whole numbers. Consequently the diameter might have measured between 9.5 and 10.5, and the perimeter between 29.5 and 30.5 cubits. Hence the biblical value of π_1 should be taken to lie between $29.5/10.5$ and $30.5/9.5$, i.e. between 2.81 and 3.21. This explanation saves the biblical writer from discredit of crude value ($\pi_1 = 3$) but it does not give him any credit either or help us historically.

26 C. B. Read, "Historical Oddities Relating to the Number π ", *School Science and Math.* 60 (1960), p. 348.

27 Read, "Did the Hebrews Use 3 as a Value of π ?", Same journal, 64 (1964), 765-766.

28 P. A. Stevenson, "More on the Hebrew's Use of π ", Same journal, 65 (1965), 454.

29 J. Meeus, "Pi and the Bible", *Jour. Recreational Math.*, 13 (1980-81), p. 203.

The second explanation is that the brim of the molten sea container might have been bent outward like a flower of lily, and the circumference was for convenience measured by passing a line slightly below the top edge where the diameter was 10 cubits. In fact I Kings 7:26, according to a translation quoted by Zuidhof,³⁰ does mention that the brim "was made like the brim of a cup, like the flower of lily", that is, bent outward. It should also be remembered that for a circle of diameter 10 cubits, the perimeter even by a rough measurement would come to about 31.5 cubits (and not 30 cubits as given). Hence presuming that the biblical writer was not so careless in measuring and also not so crude in recording, the above explanation is quite sound. In fact the "molten sea" as reconstructed by Gressman (figure 1)³¹ or that discussed by Zuidhof (figure 2) both have the top edge bent outward:

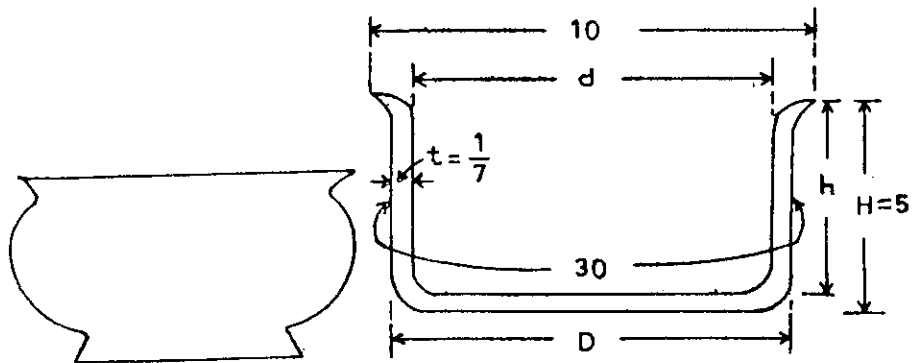


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Zuidhof has investigated the whole matter of the bronze-cast molten sea and carried out careful analysis. According to him the word 'round' here means either cylindrical or hemispherical. It was mounted symmetrically on 12 bronze Oxen with their hinder parts inward (I Kg. 7:25). The flat back of these Oxen would provide

30 Albert Zuidhof, "King Solomon's Molten Sea and π ", *Biblical Archeologist*, 45 (1982), p. 179.

31 *Sagrada Biblia*, Editorial Catolica, Madrid, 1955, as quoted by Beckmann (Ref. 7 above), pp. 14 and 186.

a proper support for the flat bottomed cylindrical container. So hemisphere is ruled out (otherwise also its capacity is only 2/3 of the cylinder).

According to I Kings 7:26, the thickness, t , of the metal was one hand breadth which is 1/7 royal cubit of 28 fingers (51.8 cm). Since the given circumference $C = 30$ cubits is assumed to be measured under the brim, the 10 cubit diameter across the top becomes unrelated to C . Now the various dimensions are:

External (below the brim)

$$D = C/\pi_1 = 30\pi_1 \text{ cubits,}$$

$$H = 5 \text{ cubits} = 140 \text{ fingers.}$$

Internal

$$d = D - 2t = (30/\pi_1) - 2/7 \text{ cubits}$$

$$h = H - t = 5 - (1/7) \text{ cubits.}$$

Hence we easily get

$$\text{external volume } V = \pi_2 D^2 H / 4 = \pi_2 1125 / \pi_1^2$$

and

$$\text{internal volume } v = \pi_2 d^2 h / 4 = 34\pi_2 (105 - \pi_1)^2 / 343\pi_1^2$$

Taking $\pi_1 = \pi_2 = \pi$, we have, actually

$$V = 1125/\pi = 7860,980.4 \text{ cubic fingers}$$

$$v = 34(105 - \pi)^2 / 343\pi = 7186,255.7 \text{ cubic fingers}$$

and

$$V - v = 674,725 \text{ cubic fingers.}$$

However, Zuidhof takes $\pi = 3.14$ in the above calculations and rounds off to 4 significant figures at various stages. His values are³²

$$V = 7870,000; v = 7195,000; V - v = 675,000.$$

To Zuidhof, this value of $V - v$ looked very interesting, being factored as $3^3 \times 5^2 \times 1000$. Being allured by the charm of simpler factors, he rounded off the "complicated" value of v to $7200,000 = 2 \times 60^2 \times 1000$ which "makes sense in ancient mathematics." With this changed value v' , he recalculates V as

$$V' = v' + (\text{vol. of metal}) = 7200,000 + 675,000 = 7875,000.$$

To his satisfaction V' is $3^2 \times 5^3 \times 7 \times 1000$, and working backward

32 Zuidhof, *op. cit.* (under Ref. 30 above), p. 183.

he got a new value of pi:

$$\pi' = C^2H/4V = 2^3 \times 7^2/5^3 = 3.136$$

Thus Zuidhof claims that by his above analysis he has uncovered a Hebrew value 3.136 (of π) which is better than an older Babylonian value 3 or 25/8, or the Egyptian 256/81.

Many other interpretations also have been given. According to Rabbi Nehemiah (200 C.E.)³³ the "molten sea" container was cylindrical (without outward bend at the top) in which the external diameter D_1 from brim to brim was 10 cubits, the internal circumference C_1 was 30 cubits, and the value of π_1 implied was, as the "people of the world say", 22/7. If t_1 be the thickness of the wall, then $(D_1 - 2t_1)$ will be the internal diameter, and hence we should have (see Fig. 3):

$$(10 - 2t_1) \times 22/7 = C_1 = 30.$$

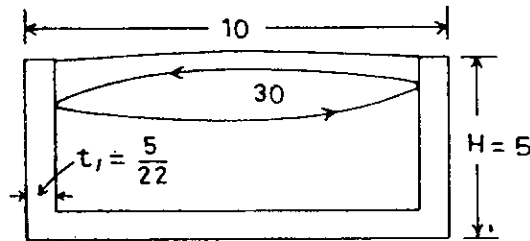


Fig. 3

This yields t_1 to be 5/22 cubits. But the text value of the thickness (I Kg. 7:26) is 1 handbreadth which is equal to 1/7 (royal) cubit or 1/6 (common) cubit. So Nehemiah's explanation cannot be accepted.

On the basis of the Hebrew Bible or Masoretic text, M.D. Stern³⁴ has given a different interpretation. He found that the word translated as "line" is written *qwh* but read as *qw*.³⁵ Now according to the well known alphabetical notation, the Hebrew letters *qoph* (*q*), *waw*

³³ See Beckmann, ref. 7, pp. 72-73. It must be noted that Nehemiah's authorship (and date) of *Mishnat ha-Middot* is very doubtful and confusing. G. Sarfatti has persuasively argued (1968) that the Hebrew work *Mishnat ha-Middot* belongs to the 9th century or even later (see, J. W. Dauben, *The History of Mathematics from Antiquity to the Present: A Selective Bibliography*, N.Y., 1985, p. 93).

³⁴ M. D. Stern, "A Remarkable Approximation to π ", *The Math. Gazette*, 69 (1981), 218-129.

(w), and he (h) have the numerical values 100, 6, and 5 respectively. So that qwh is 111 and qw is 106. Taking the ratio 111/106 as the "correcting factor" for the apparent value $30/10 = 3$, Stern calculates a better value namely,

$$\pi_1 = 3 \times (111/106) = 3.141509.$$

This may look all right but it cannot be accepted because, as a reviewer points out,³⁶ there is no evidence of the use of letters as numerals before Alexandrian times.

Recently, Posamentier and Gordon³⁷ have pointed out that the above interpretation using *gematria* was already given by Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna (Poland) of the late 18th century. He noticed that the Hebrew word for "line measure" was written as qwh in I Kings 7:23, but as qw in II Chronicles 4:2. He computed the necessary correcting factor as

$$(q + w + h)/(q + w) = 111/106 = 1.0472$$

to 4 decimal places, and finally obtained

$$\pi_1 = 3 \times 1.0472 = 3.1416$$

which is correct to 4 decimal places. This value is the well known Indian value explicitly given by Aryabhata I (born 476 C.E.). It went to the Arab world in the 8th century, thence to Spain (11th century) and other European countries. Recently it has been shown to have been known in China earlier and claimed for the Greek Apollonius of still earlier time. However, it must be noted that if we accept the above interpretation of Rabbi Elijah, the rules as given in the Book of Kings would have no meaning until the Chronicles were written much later on. In other words the above more accurate value of π_1 could not have been used in making the "molten sea". Moreover, if the correction refers to "line measure", each C and D should be corrected separately and not their ratio.

35 The word is in fact qaw , but vowels are not considered proper letters in Hebrew and are excluded.

36 See *Mathematical Reviews* 86 m: 01006, p. 5410.

37 A. S. Posamentier and N. Gordon, "An Astounding Revelation on the History of π ", *Mathematics Teacher*, 77 (1984), pp. 52, 47.

KING SOLOMON'S GOLDEN WEALTH

ABRAHAM RUDERMAN

Does the Bible exaggerate King Solomon's golden wealth? An answer to this question is given by Alan R. Millard in the *Biblical Archeological Review*, May 1989. The enormous quantity of gold in Solomon's Temple staggers the imagination. Here is its description in I Kings 6:14 ff.

So Solomon built the house and finished it. The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and twenty cubits high and he overlaid it with pure gold . . . And Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold and he drew chains of gold across in front of the inner sanctuary and he overlaid it with gold. And he overlaid the whole house with gold until all the house was finished. Also the whole altar . . . he overlaid with gold.

The narrative proceeds with a description of the cherubim, ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the other, and the cherubim were overlaid entirely with gold. Even the floor of the inner and outer rooms and the carved figures on the walls were all overlaid with gold. The olive-wood doors, decorated with cherubim and palm trees were all inlaid with gold. Such a dazzling sight! There was more. Not only the altar was inlaid with gold; the table for the shew bread was made of solid gold, as were the lampstands, the flowers, the tongs, the cups, the snuffers, the basins, dishes for the incense, and the firepans. Commentators have tried to explain this abundance of gold by stating that it must have been gold paint. But it was hardly gold paint when we are told in I Kings 10:16 ff

King Solomon made 200 large shields of hammered gold, 600 bekas of gold went into each shield. He also made 300

Rabbi Abraham Ruderman was ordained at the Jewish Inst. of Religion, served as a chaplain during WW II, and was spiritual leader of congregations in Poughkeepsie, Elmont, Hazleton, and South Africa. He came on Aliya in 1976 and has been the editor of the weekly Bulletin of the Jerusalem Rotary.

small shields of hammered gold with three minnas of gold in each shield. Then the King made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with gold. All of King Solomon's goblets were gold and all the household articles in the palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold.

If there are those who would question such extreme affluence, Allan R. Millard puts them at ease. He has indicated that such excessive practices were common among monarchs in ancient times. Golden cups and dishes which adorned the palace of the kings of Ur were recovered by Sir Leonard Wooley in 1927. Egyptian pharaohs ate and drank from vessels of gold. Museums the world over feature objects of gold dating from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E. King Tutankhamen's tomb, buried about 1331 B.C.E., produced a glorious gold throne. Gold plated furniture was found in the great pyramid (2600 B.C.E.), all of which are in the Cairo museum. In the Tel El Amarna letters (14th cent. B.C.E.), there is a description of gifts exchanged between royalty consisting of great quantities of jewelry, gold bowls, and chariots plated with gold. Millard cites numerous monarchs in ancient times who have been credited with enormous wealth. One of these is King Sargon II of Assyria (714 B.C.E.) who conquered parts of Uratu (biblical Ararat). His campaign, described on a large tablet, now in the Louvre, provides a list of the booty taken: 25,212 bronze shields, 1514 lances, 305,412 daggers in addition to much gold and silver bullion, plus six huge shields weighing 700 pounds all of shining gold. This description of shields would confirm the existence of shields in Solomon's Temple. Accounts of Babylonian and Assyrian kings who boasted of gold temples would also support the probability of golden extravagance in Solomon's palace. Similar evidence comes from Egypt where Amenophis III (1386 B.C.E.) built a temple at Thebes plated with gold throughout. Another monarch built a huge barge covered with gold.

If Solomon had so much gold why haven't we found it? Where did it go? It all went to Egypt. After Solomon's death his kingdom was divided between Judah in the south ruled by Rehoboam, and

Jeroboam in the north. In the 5th year of Rehoboam's reign Shishak, king of Egypt, invaded Judah and Israel. We are told in I Kings 25:26

In the 5th year of the reign of Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the Temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything including all the gold shields Solomon had made.

Within a year of his conquest Shishak was dead and his throne was occupied by his son Osorkon I. On a granite pillar in the Temple at Bubastie in the eastern Nile Delta are recorded the extraordinary lavish gifts to the gods and goddesses of Egypt which include "383 tons of gold and silver . . ." This precious metal can only have come from Solomon's Temple plundered by Shishak, father of Osorkon I.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

The footnote on page 206 in the Summer 1990 issue (No. 72) of the J.B.Q. (Dor Le Dor) speaks of the late Prof. H. Gevaryahu as Chairman of the "Israel Committee of Biblical Research."

To be exact: Prof. Gevaryahu was Chairman of the Israel Society for Biblical Research. Under his chairmanship this Society organized 38 annual conferences, where hundreds of Bible lovers and scholars lecture and learn for three consecutive days. Through the initiative of this Society, the World Bible Contests for Adults and for Jewish Youth were started. This Society founded the Beth Mikra Quarterly and published more than 30 volumes of treatises in almost every branch of biblical research. The last (to-date) of these, the Haim Gevaryahu Volume was presented to our chairman on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

Besides the annual conferences, regional days of biblical studies were organized in the various districts of our land.

The pride of the Israel Society for Biblical Research is its many study groups which meet weekly in various settlements, cities, and villages, from the Negev to the Galilee.

These activities are currently reported in the quarterly Letter to Members (אגרת לחברים), one of the numerous activities in which our late Chairman took part.

Yosef Freund

General Secretary

The Israel Society for Biblical Research

Sir,

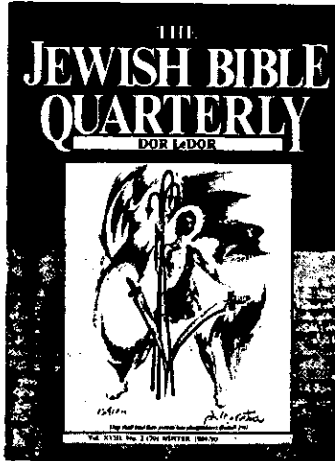
Dr. Gottesman's article on Shavuot (Summer, 1989) is interesting; however the following points might be relevant.

Apart from the difficulty of giving an exact dating to Shavuot — Sivan 5th or 6th — or even the dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees, there is an interesting point arising from the fact that the Torah commands a festival exclusively agricultural in its explanation to a people recently freed from long decades of slavery and who were on the verge of becoming a nomadic people. While I very much liked the idea of the waving of the Omer reflecting the gentle waving of the standing corn in the breeze, one might [gently] ask if this would have been very meaningful to those standing at the foot of Mount Sinai?

In this connection, I refer to the Book of Jubilees. Though this is outside the Bible, relegated to the second collection of Apocryphal books, nevertheless it has some importance — it is held sacred by Ethiopian Jews — and in many ways reflects biblical and rabbinic traditions and teachings, and there are some reflections of its thoughts in talmudic literature.

Jubilees is a more concrete expression within the first century B.C.E. of the rabbinic teaching that the Patriarchs kept the whole Torah, even to Eruv Tavshilin! Perhaps — I say only perhaps — this might suggest that in Egypt the Israelites recalled various highlights of the lives of the Patriarchs. Jubilees XVIII 1-19 takes the origin of Pesah as being the Akedah, the festival of the 15th Nisan, so that when Moses calls upon Pharaoh to allow the Hebrews to go to celebrate a festival to the Lord — Exod. 5:3 — it may well be the celebration of a festival connected to that crucial patriarchal event, which was subsequently given a new meaning and historical importance with the Exodus.

In this connection, therefore, I draw attention to the edition of the book of Jubilees SPCK edition of 1917/1927, with an excellent introduction by Dr. Box in which he comments about the difficulty of



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assessing whether the Jubilee was in fact the 49th or 50th year, and that the writer of Jubilees may well have had in front of him a text of the Torah that lacked the word **חמשים**, though he obviously sided with the Sadducean interpretation of fixing Shavuot on a Sunday. But the Book of Jubilees, XIV 1-20 interprets the word **שבועות** as being "OATHS", "PROMISES", based on **שבע** meaning to promise, and understands it as being a renewal of earlier festivals in connection with Noah, and as a celebration of the Covenant **ברית בין הבתרים**. And just as this was a binding Covenant with God and Abraham, so it was renewed at Sinai — a binding Covenant underpinned by a sacred oath — **שבועות**. In Jubilees XVIII 17 one will see that Be'er Sheva is taken as 'The Well of the Oath'.

Now it is well possible that in Hebrew — as in one or two other cognate languages — there are two 'ayins' — **ע**. Since **ערב** meaning sweet, has no connection with **ערוב** meaning mixture, evening (twilight) mixture of foods **ערוב**, it is possible that there are two separate roots. **שבע**, one meaning 'seven', 'week' etc., and the other meaning 'to swear'. But I think it highly likely that even if it were so, there is a common basis since **שבע** seven, has a hint of 'the religious' — Sabbath, the 7 branch menorah, the sacred occasions based on 7, the perfect 7 x 7 for the Omer, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. I therefore think there is ample evidence to interpret **שבועות** as being the Festival of the Oaths, as represented by the Covenant and pact made at Sinai and renewed in the Plains of Moab just before the death of Moses.

I think, therefore, that the writer of Jubilees presents us with an additional idea behind the Festival of Shavuot, one which has been gradually lost, eliminated, what you will, but which would have had more significance for those who stood at Sinai recalling the patriarchal events than a yet-to-come harvest festival.

L. L. Tann
Edgbaston, Birmingham
England

עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

November-December 1990		December 1990-January 1991	
17	שבת Haftarah: I Samuel 20:18-42	16	S Psalms 148
18	S Psalms 121-122	17	M Psalms 149-150
19	M Psalms 123-124	18	T Proverbs 1
20	T Psalms 125-126	19	W Proverbs 2
21	W Psalms 127-128	20	Th Proverbs 3
22	Th Psalms 129	21	F Genesis 44:18-47:27
23	F Genesis 28:10-32:3	22	שבת Haftarah: Ezekial 37:15-28
24	שבת Haftarah: Hosea 12:13-14:10 (A) Hosea 11:7-12:12 (S)	23	S Proverbs 4
25	S Psalms 130-131	24	M Proverbs 5
26	M Psalms 132	25	T Proverbs 6
27	T Psalms 133-134	26	W Proverbs 7
28	W Psalms 135	27	Th Proverbs 8
29	Th Psalms 136	28	F Genesis 47:28-50
30	F Genesis 32:4-36	29	שבת Haftarah: I Kings 2:1-12
DEC.		30	S Proverbs 9
1	שבת Haftarah: Hosea 11:7-12:12 (A) Obadia (S)	31	M Proverbs 10
2	S Psalms 137	JAN.	
3	M Psalms 138	1	T Proverbs 11
4	T Psalms 139	2	W Proverbs 12
5	W Psalms 140-141	3	Th Proverbs 13
6	Th Psalms 142	4	F Exodus 1-6:1
7	F Genesis 37-40	5	שבת Haftarah: Isaiah 27:6-28 (A) Jeremiah 1-2:3 (S)
8	שבת Haftarah: Amos 2:1-3:8	6	S Proverbs 14
9	S Psalms 143	7	M Proverbs 15
10	M Psalms 144	8	T Proverbs 16
11	T Psalms 145	9	W Proverbs 17
12	W Psalms 146	10	Th Proverbs 18
13	Th Psalms 147	11	F Exodus 6:2-9
14	F Genesis 41:44:17	12	שבת Haftarah: Ezekiel 28:25-29:21
15	שבת Haftarah: Zechariah 2:14-4:7	13	S Proverbs 19
		14	M Proverbs 20

January-February 1991

15	T	Proverbs 21
16	W	Proverbs 22
17	Th	Proverbs 23
18	F	Exodus 10-13:16
19	שבת	Haftarah: Jeremiah 46:13-28
20	S	Proverbs 24
21	M	Proverbs 25
22	T	Proverbs 26
23	W	Proverbs 27
24	Th	Proverbs 28
25	F	Exodus 13:17-17
26	שבת	Haftarah: Judges 4:4-5:31
27	S	Proverbs 29
28	M	Proverbs 30
29	T	Proverbs 31
30	W	Job 1
31	Th	Job 2

FEB.

1	F	Exodus 18-20
2	שבת	Haftarah: Isaiah 6-7:10
3	S	Job 3
4	M	Job 4
5	T	Job 5
6	W	Job 6
7	Th	Job 7
8	F	Exodus 21-24
9	שבת	Haftarah: II Kings 11:17-12:17
10	S	Job 8
11	M	Job 9
12	T	Job 10
13	W	Job 11

February-March 1991

14	Th	Job 12
15	F	Exodus 25-27:19
16	שבת	Haftarah: I Kings 5:26-6:13
17	S	Job 13
18	M	Job 14
19	T	Job 15
20	W	Job 16
21	Th	Job 17
22	F	Exodus 27:20-30:10
23	שבת	Haftarah: I Samuel 15:1-34
24	S	Esther 1-2
25	M	Esther 3-4
26	T	Esther 5-6
27	W	Esther 7-8
28	Th	Esther 9-10

MAR.

1	F	Exodus 30:11-34
2	שבת	Haftarah: I Kings 18:1-39
3	S	Job 18
4	M	Job 19
5	T	Job 20
6	W	Job 21
7	Th	Job 22
8	F	Exodus 35-40
9	שבת	Haftarah: Ezekiel 36:16-38
10	S	Job 23
11	M	Job 24
12	T	Job 25
13	W	Job 26
14	Th	Job 27
15	F	Leviticus 1-5

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