

# THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY



Vol. XXVIII:4 (112)  
October - December 2000

A Psalm for Sabbath ? A Literary View of Psalm 92

Biblical Metaphor and the Dynamics of Jewish  
Demography: A Modern Midrash

Strife in the Household of King David

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A Theological Reason for Ambiguity

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Ecology in the Bible

Imperative Verbs Followed by the Preposition  
Lamed: Compulsory or Precatory?

Darshanut: Bread on Water

# THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY

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The **Jewish Bible Quarterly** provides timely, authoritative studies on biblical themes. As the only Jewish-sponsored English-language journal devoted exclusively to the Bible, it is an essential source of information for anyone working in Bible studies. The Journal publishes original articles, translations from scholarly Hebrew journals, book reviews, a triennial calendar of Bible reading and correspondence. All viewpoints are considered. The **Jewish Bible Quarterly** can be of value to every teacher and student.

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WE MOURN THE LOSS OF  
**ABRAHAM RUDERMAN ז"ל**



**Rabbi Abraham Ruderman**

Chairman of the  
**JEWISH BIBLE ASSOCIATION**

**אברהם בן בנימין יונה**

was a  
member of the Board of the  
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**WE DEDICATE THIS ISSUE TO HIS MEMORY**

**יהי זכרו ברוך**

## A PSALM FOR SABBATH? A LITERARY VIEW OF PSALM 92

DAN VOGEL

The essay that follows is based upon the source provided below:<sup>1</sup>

*A psalm for the Sabbath day:*

מזמור שיר ליום השבת

*It is good to praise God,  
to sing hymns to Your name, O Most High.*

טוב להודות לה'  
ולזמר לשמך עליון

*To proclaim Your kindness in the morning,  
Your faithfulness each night.*

להגיד בבקר חסדך  
ואמונתך בלילות

*With a ten-stringed harp,  
with voice and lyre together.*

עלי - עשור ועלי - נבל  
עלי הגיון בכנור

*You have gladdened me by Your deeds, O God;  
I shout for joy at Your handiwork.*

כי שמחתני, ה' בפעלך  
במעשי ידך ארנן

*How great are Your works, O God,  
how very subtle [or profound] Your designs.*

מה-גדלו מעשיך, ה'  
מאד עמקו מחשבתך

*A brutish man cannot know,  
a fool cannot understand this:*

איש-בער לא ידע  
וכסיל לא-יבין את-זאת

*Though the wicked sprout like grass,  
though all evildoers blossom,  
it is only that they maybe destroyed forever.*

בפרח רשעים כמו עשב  
ויציצו כל-פעלי און;  
להשמדם עדי-עד

*Dan Vogel was a professor of English at Michlalah - Jerusalem College for Women. He wrote this essay in memory of Rabbi David Mirsky of Yeshiva University, New York. It is reprinted by permission of Jewish Thought from its issue of Spring 5753. He is currently an Associate Editor of the Jewish Bible Quarterly*

<i>But You are exalted, O God, for all time.</i>	וְאַתָּה מְרוֹם לְעַלְמֵי הַיּוֹם
<i>Surely, Your enemies, O God, surely, Your enemies perish; all evildoers are scattered.</i>	כִּי הִנֵּה אֵיבֵיךָ הָיָה כִּי-הִנֵּה אֵיבֵיךָ יֵאָבְדוּ יִתְפָּרְדוּ כָל-פְּעֻלֵי אוֹן
<i>You raise my horn high like that of a wild ox; I am soaked in freshening oil.</i>	וְתָרַם כְּרֵאִים קַרְנֵי בְלַתִּי בְשֶׁמֶן רַעֲנָן
<i>I shall see the defeat of my watchful foes, and the fall of the wicked who beset me I shall hear.</i>	וְתִבַּט עֵינַי בְּשׂוֹרֵי בְקַמִּים עָלַי מְרַעִים תִּשְׁמַעֲנָה אָזְנִי
<i>The righteous one blooms like a date-palm; he thrives like a cedar in Lebanon.</i>	צְדִיק כְּתַמְרֵי יִפְרַח כְּאַרְזֵי בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה
<i>Planted in the house of God, they flourish in the courts of our Lord.</i>	שְׁתוּלִים בְּבֵית ה' הָיוּ בְּחִצְרוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרִיחוּ
<i>In old age they still produce fruit; they are full of sap and freshness.</i>	עוֹד יִנוּבּוֹן בְּשִׁיבָה דְּשָׁנִים וְרַעֲנָנִים יִהְיוּ
<i>Attesting that God is upright, He is my Rock, in Whom there is no wrong.</i>	לְהַגִּיד כִּי-יֵשֶׁר ה' הָיָה צוּרִי וְלֹא-עוֹלָתָהּ בּוֹ

## INTRODUCTION

The only psalm in *Tehillim* that is assigned to a day of the week is Psalm 92, *But You are exalted, O God, for all time* - *A psalm for the Sabbath day*, and for nearly 2000 years, sages, scholars, and Sabbath observers alike have wondered why. As has been universally observed, not one word in Psalm 92 refers to the Sabbath, and its encomiums to the Lord are unique neither to this psalm nor to the day it purports to honor. Suggestions why the psalmist linked this psalm to the Sabbath range widely, taking us from the beginning of history to its end.<sup>2</sup>

## AUTHORSHIP AND AUDIENCE

Many *midrashim* attribute our psalm to Adam, stating that it was "composed by him on the first Sabbath of creation."<sup>3</sup> The Midrash relates that Sabbath saved Adam from a decree of instant death after his sin, whereupon the day, as it were, said to him: "I and you will say this hymn to the Holy One Blessed be He" (Yal.Sh. Tehillim 843). As Adam's descendants, we continue this tradition. Alternatively, Adam composed Psalm 92 after being assured that the Lord had reprieved his son Cain from execution.<sup>4</sup>

Yet this psalm was forgotten by Adam's generation, and it remained unknown until Moses reintroduced it, concealing his name in the initial letters of its heading, מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר לַיהוָה which form the word לְמֹשֶׁה ("for Moses").<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on Tehillim, S.R. Hirsch maintains that Psalm 92 was given to Moses that he might teach the Jewish people the sanctity of the Sabbath, but how it was to serve this educational function without even mentioning the holiness of the day remains unclear.

In any case, we recite Psalm 92 no fewer than three times during Sabbath: once at night, to usher in Sabbath, and twice the following morning, once within the preliminary service and once as the psalm of the day. Following the Sabbath morning service, we also read Mishna Tamid 7:4, which lists the psalm associated with each day of the week. The Mishna identifies six of these seven psalms by quoting the first significant verse of each. Regarding the psalm for Sabbath, however, the Mishnah cites only the introductory verse "A psalm for the Sabbath day," emphasizing an eschatological vision: "It is the psalm for the hereafter, for the day that will be wholly Sabbath and rest for eternity."

In this vein, the Talmud tells us that the world will last 6000 years, each day of the week alluding to a millennium. Sabbath corresponds to a seventh millennium, the "Sabbath" of the future, when all mankind will acknowledge God's sovereignty. This millennium will be the period between the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead, when God will be alone, for none will walk the earth.<sup>6</sup> If so, we might wonder, what is in Psalm 92 for us?

That Psalm 92 was thought to have a homiletical, personal dimension seems clear from its inclusion in the liturgy. Perhaps a literary approach to the psalm will reveal its relevance both to Sabbath and, in turn, to those who recite it every week on that day.

This approach is one of *explication de texte*. In fact, it is but an extension of traditional hermeneutical exegesis, examining the structure and imagery of the biblical poem. After devoting many years to close readings of non-biblical poetry, I can think of no better application of this technique - sanctioned and sanctified by Rashi, Radak, and other traditional commentators - than in the service of isolating and explicating a sacred text like Psalm 92. As our sages tell us, "Like a hammer that shatters a rock' (Jer. 23:29) - Just as this hammer [causes the rock (Rashi)] to be split into several fragments, so too one [verse from] Scripture may diverge into several explanations" (Sanhedrin 34a).

#### THE MACRO-STRUCTURE OF PSALM 92

Psalm 92 contains 16 verses. Discounting Verse 1 as simply a signature verse attributing the psalm to Sabbath, the remaining 15 verses are symmetrically divided according to metrical balance:

Part I: Verses 2-8	7 verses, each containing an <i>ethnachta</i> (caesura)
Part II: Verse 9	1 verse, no <i>ethnachta</i>
Part III: Verses 10-16	7 verses, each containing an <i>ethnachta</i>

A further breakdown, based on content, reveals an even more detailed, seven-stanza symmetry:

Stanza 1	Stanza 2	Stanza 3	Stanza 4	Stanza 5	Stanza 6	Stanza 7
v. 2-5	v. 6	v. 7-8	v. 9	v. 10-12	v. 13-15	v. 16
Man to God	Encomium	God vs. the wicked	Fulcrum	God vs. the wicked	God and the righteous	God

Symmetry is not merely a pleasing artistic device. It betokens order, a careful edifice of technique and thought. As such, it reflects the close connection between Creation and Sabbath: out of chaos came order, a process culminating in Sabbath. Thus, the very formation of Psalm 92 parallels the order and equilibrium of God's Creation, satisfying our hunger for order in the universe. Likewise, we preface our recitation of each day's psalm by noting its relationship to



Sabbath in the weekly cycle (e.g., on Sunday we say, "Today is the first day in relation to Sabbath"; on Monday, "Today is the second day . . ." etc.). This way, we too impose order on the chaos of the workweek, making Sabbath its pinnacle. "By counting the days of the week with reference to the forthcoming Sabbath," writes R. Nosson Scherman, "we tie our existence to the Sabbath."<sup>7</sup> On Sabbath, we sit back and contemplate the system of Creation.

THE MICRO-STRUCTURES OF PSALM 92: STANZA, VERSE, AND IMAGE

Stanza 1:

**92:2. *It is good to praise God, to sing hymns to Your name, O Most High.***

Verse 2 announces that it is good to thank and praise God, a vague generalization expressed throughout Psalms. Note, however, the sudden change from third person to second, from *It is good to praise God . . .* to *to sing hymns to Your name*. Having entered the presence of the King, as it were, we initially address Him formally, but immediately we turn to familiar language. Indeed, seven times throughout Psalm 92, the Tetragrammaton is used in "direct" address, unbuffered by any preposition. These seven instances combine formality and familiarity, distance and closeness.

**92:3. *To proclaim Your kindness in the morning, Your faithfulness each night.***

Verse 3 illuminates both the relationship between form and theme in Psalm 92 and the connection between the psalm and Sabbath. The verse is beautifully balanced, the infinitive *to proclaim* introducing two parallel Divine attributes and the time of day when each should be affirmed:

1.	2.
His kindness	His faithfulness
morning	night

"The purpose of parallelism," asserts Robert Alter, writing about biblical poetry, "like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception - that is, to make a unique semantic modification."<sup>8</sup> Here, then, *morning* parallels *night*, and each time of day parallels a Divine attribute.

The sequence of "time followed by attribute" is reversed in the second hemistich, however, effectively completing a cycle: morning → kindness → faithful-

ness → night. As we shall see, this cycle anticipates the over-all circuit of the psalm.

Furthermore, universal symbolism underlies the images of *morning* and *night*, demonstrating why the former is the time to relate God's *kindness* and the latter His *faithfulness*. The light of morning symbolizes manifestation, and kindness must be manifest. The darkness of night represents fearsome hiddenness, when observation is impossible and faith alone must sustain us.

"In the morning," explains R' Scherman, "we express gratitude for already existing *kindness*, while in the evening we express our *faith* in something that has not yet taken place."<sup>9</sup> Thus, these symbols contain both personal and eschatological relevance. Alternatively, S.R. Hirsch interprets,

"His rule and His will speak to us through each phenomenon of nature בְּקֶרֶךְ לַהֲגִיד בְּבִקְרָה and through every event of history בְּלִי לֹת" (com. on Tehillim 92:2). Nature is a tangible manifestation of God's kindness; our history, a history of exile, demands intangible faith in our future redemption. Similarly, Scherman comments, "During the harsh night of exile, we refer to אֱמוּנָתְךָ *Your faith*, because our faith, rather than our intellect, testifies to His goodness."<sup>10</sup>

Yet this comment is as ambiguous as the verse itself: Whose faith is implied here - God's, Israel's, or both? Cast in the second person ("Your faithfulness"), the verse apparently pertains only to God. But can it also refer to Israel's faith? All levels of indeterminate meaning are valid in *explication de texte*. Consequently, the psalmist here implies both sources of faith and both objects of faith, God's and Israel's:

God's faithfulness  
in Israel

Israel's faith  
in God

We now see how Sabbath comes into all this: The historic exiles of the Jewish people are simply an extension of the exile of each workday from Sabbath. The Lord showed His kindness in the six days of Creation; on the seventh, this manifestation ceased. The six days of the week therefore remain days of material manifestation, sensory activity, and work, days of viewing God's handiwork in nature and in life. On Sabbath, however, we are thrown back upon our faith. It is not a day of external tangibility; it is a day of inner certainty, of withdrawal, of striving for spirituality.

Psalm 92 asserts that faith is no mere romantic dream; it is knowledge. The knowledge that each week eventually culminates in Sabbath reassures us that the "Sabbath" of the hereafter will eventuate as well, regardless of all indications apparently to the contrary. **וַיִּצְחָקוּ בְנֵי** as it were - "My children are victorious" (Bava Metzia 59b) over the evidence before their eyes.

Manifestation versus faith is the central conflict of Psalm 92.

Let us now examine the variations on this theme in the ensuing images, syntax, and motifs of the psalm.

Stanza 1:

**92:4. *With a ten-stringed harp, with voice and lyre together.***

At first glance, Verse 4 seems inconsonant with the emerging meaning of Psalm 92. The verse refers to the long-lost era when the psalm was sung in the Temple to the accompaniment of certain instruments. Yet these instruments themselves symbolize manifestation and faith. S.R. Hirsch, for example, does not even mention the first two instruments in his translation; instead, he interprets them as "full sound" and "plaintive tone," respectively. In his notes, he contrasts **אָרְבַּע** the ten-stringed instrument capable of producing a full sound, with **עָנָן** "whose strains correspond to the 'fading away' that comes at the end of life". In our interpretation, then, the "full sound" is the "daytime" sound, while at night comes the "fading away," the "plaintive tone," the tone of faith.

**92:5. *You have gladdened me by Your deeds, O God; I shout for joy at Your handiwork.***

Verse 5 celebrates God's manifest labors, with the word *deeds* leading into the second stanza and its new perception.

Stanza 2:

**92:6. *How great are Your works, O God, how very subtle [or: profound] Your designs.***

In this brief encomium, the psalmist reprises the theme of manifestation versus hiddenness by extolling God's visible *works* while expressing profound awe at the depths of His invisible *designs*. These two opposites - observable deeds versus thoughts, which are a matter of faith - anticipate the thrust of the next stanza, which derides those who rely solely on what lies before their eyes.

Stanza 3:

**92:7. *A brutish man cannot know, a fool cannot understand this.***

**92:8. *Though the wicked sprout like grass, though all evildoers blossom, it is only that they may be destroyed forever.***

What is it that the boors and fools of Verse 7 and the wicked of Verse 8 (all of whom may be associated with the mundane days of the week) cannot understand? The pronoun *this* points in two directions: It harks back to the previous verse, indicating that these simpletons cannot grasp anything that is not manifest before them. Yet it also introduces the next verse, where we learn that these individuals see only their proliferation, never suspecting their implicit doom.<sup>11</sup>

Again, the imagery - derived from nature - is universal. The simile *like grass*, referring to the world's most common vegetation, emphasizes the omnipresence of the wicked. Nonetheless, faith insists that they will yet be destroyed forever.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the psalmist will recall this very ubiquitousness of grass when he analogizes the righteous.

Stanza 4:

**92:9. *But You are exalted, O God, for all time.***

Verse 9 comprises only four Hebrew words. This distinctive prosodic structure makes it visually, metrically, and thematically pivotal.

Unlike all the other verses of Psalm 92, this verse has but a single clause: There is no *ethnachta*, no caesura. Nor is there a main clause.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the verse itself acts as a caesura, a pause between the first and last three stanzas.

Introduced by the conjunction *but*, Verse 9 connects Verse 8's declaration that the wicked will dry up like grass, and Verse 10's promise that God's enemies will perish. Moreover, this transitional verse contrasts the doom of the evildoers with the eternity of God, preparing us for the form and theme of the second half of the psalm.

Stanza 5:

**92:10. *Surely, Your enemies, O God, surely, Your enemies perish; all evildoers are scattered.***

**92:11. *You raise my horn high like that of a wild ox; I am soaked in freshening oil.***

**92:12. *I shall see the defeat of my watchful foes, and the fall of the wicked who beset me I shall hear.***

The first seven verses of Psalm 92 descended from the heights of praising the Lord to the depths of un-Godly spiritual blindness. With Verse 9 as its axis, the last seven verses begin with the fate of the evildoers and rise again to the climax

of praising the Lord. This cycle is analogous to our existence from one Sabbath to the next.

Pivoting on the phrase *all evildoers*, the psalm finishes off the enemies of the Lord and then turns to the rewards accruing to those who have sung of the manifestations of God's world and demonstrated their faith in the future. This vindication of the faithful is depicted in terms of the *horn . . . of a wild ox*, a common biblical symbol of pride and strength. Furthermore, the victors are *soaked in freshening oil*, a process of revivification, beautification, and consecration. The imagery climaxes in Verse 12 in an exultant cry of complete and inevitable triumph.

Stanza 6:

**92:13. *The righteous one blooms like a date-palm; he thrives like a cedar in Lebanon.***

**92:14. *Planted in the house of God, they flourish in the courts of our Lord.***

**92:15. *In old age they still produce fruit; they are full of sap and freshness.***

Having dispensed with the boors, the fools, and the wicked of verses 7-8, who fairly teem with the dross of the six weekdays, our psalm focuses on their opposite, the *tzaddik*, who embodies the spirituality of Sabbath.

The psalmist is careful to maintain the symmetry of his poem. Just as the *brutish man* (V. 7) was generalized into the *wicked* (V. 8), the singular *righteous one* (V. 13) is pluralized in Verse 14. And just as the un-Godly were *like grass* (V. 8), the righteous are compared to date palms and cedars of Lebanon, classic biblical symbols of fructivity, power, and longevity. In the Talmud, R. Chiyya b. Luliani wonders why both types of trees need be mentioned. He concludes that they complement each other with symmetry of their own: The cedar produces no fruit, but, even after being cut down, it renews itself; the date-palm lacks this capacity for renewal, but it bears fruit. The righteous, then, encompass the best features of both trees.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the psalmist introduces an upbeat irony by reprising a verb used before: The unrighteous, we remember, sprouted פָּרַח like common grass (V. 8); now the righteous bloom פָּרַח like a date-palm (V. 13), and they grow not like lowly blades of grass, which wither within a season, but like the evergreen cedar of Lebanon, which will flourish פָּרַח in the house of God forever (V. 14), whereas the wicked will be "destroyed forever" (V. 7). In addition, to counterbalance this reference to old age (positive though it may be), Midrash

Tehillim reads  $\text{סִיְיָ שָׁמַר$  ("planted") (V. 14) as  $\text{סִיְיָ לִי$  ("sprouts") - youngsters in the classroom, who will grow up to be righteous.<sup>15</sup> And even as they approach the end of their days, which presages their eternal "Sabbath," they remain vital and productive.

This is the promise embedded in Psalm 92, recited each Sabbath "in the house of God" ( V. 13). This is manifestation fulfilled.

Stanza 7:

**92:16. *Attesting that God is upright, He is my Rock, in Whom there is no wrong.***

With the reprise of the infinitive *to proclaim* (V. 2), Psalm 92 comes full circle. One last familiar image attests to what is manifest: Says the psalmist, [God] *is my Rock*. Such is his granite-like belief in the Lord's perfection and justice, regardless of the prevalence of evil. This faith is renewed each Sabbath, suggesting a complete, never-ending cycle from Sabbath to Sabbath, from one recitation of Psalm 92 to the next. This geometric inevitability symbolizes the immeasurable faith that one day Creation will turn back upon itself and regain its original paradisaal state.

#### CONCLUSION

The literary approach of the psalmist is perhaps best placed in perspective by Robert Alter:

God manifests Himself in part through language, and necessarily His deeds are made known by any one man to others . . . chiefly through the mediation of language. . . . The psalmist's delight in the suppleness and serendipities of poetic form is not a distraction from [the] spiritual seriousness of the poems *but his chief means of realizing his spiritual vision* [italics mine], and it is one source of the power these poems continue to have not only to excite our imaginations but also to engage our lives.<sup>16</sup>

Through the mediation of word, image, prosody, and structure, we see how true this thesis is regarding the relationship of Psalm 92 both to the day to which it is eternally ascribed and to the people who recite it faithfully every week.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

1. This translation is based on *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), pp.1218-19.
2. For but two of the many essays devoted to the connection between Psalm 92 and Sabbath, see Yitzchak Ze'ev HaLevi Soloveitchik, *Chiddushei Maran Riz HaLevi Al HaTorah* (Jerusalem: 1981) p.6; and Chaggai Moshkovitz, "Mizmor Shir LeYom HaSabbath," *Shema'atin*, 60 (Teveth 1980), 13-16.
3. See *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, *Bereshit Rabba* 22:13, and *Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim* 843.
4. See *Bereshit Rabba* 22:13. Regarding the connection between Sabbath and repentance, see Moshch Ostrer, *Tehillim Al Pi Derash Mosheh* (Brooklyn: Mechon Segulah 1977), p.215.
5. See *Bereshit Rabba* 22:13 and Maharzu *ad loc.*
6. See Rosh HaShanah 31a and Sanhedrin 97a.
7. See *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, trans. and com. by Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn: Artscroll 1984), p. 162n.
8. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p.10. Cf. Amos Chacham, ed., *Tehillim* (Jerusalem: 1981), p. 180.
9. See *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, p. 96. This eschatological interpretation echoes Rashi's commentary on Berachoth 12a, and Radak's on Tehillim 36:6, where the psalmist again refers to both kindness and faith in a single line. Kindness, says Radak, refers to the tangible, to animal fodder (an image that may anticipate the grass that symbolizes the earthbound fools and evildoers of Psalm 92); faith signifies survival, the intangible promise of the future.
10. See *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, p. 320n. In contrast, according to *Midrash Tehillim*, morning represents the world to come, and night this world. This midrash implies that morning is the time of faith in a world to come, and darkness is the time of the manifestation of the existential world. Though interpretations of the images may differ, the theme of manifestation versus faith remains constant.
11. See Radak on Tehillim 92:7-8.
12. See *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 19.
13. One could argue that the verb here is implied, just as it is in Verse 4, which may be viewed as a continuation of verse 3.
14. See Ta'anith 25a-b.
15. See *Midrash Tehillim* 92:12.
16. See Alter, p.136.

# BIBLICAL METAPHOR AND THE DYNAMICS OF JEWISH DEMOGRAPHY: A MODERN MIDRASH

SHUBERT SPERO

The discovery that metaphor can enlighten as well as delight was made early in the development of human language. The delight, of course, stems from the evocation of concrete and familiar images such as the "sand" and the "stars" that we find in the following biblical texts:

*And He took him outside and said: 'Look now towards the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him: 'So shall be your offspring' (Gen. 15:5).*

*And the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea which can neither be counted nor measured (Hos. 2:1).*

One could have simply said "Your people shall be innumerable" and the basic conceptual content would have been conveyed. Whereas, asking someone to gaze into the star-filled heavens or to contemplate a stretch of sandy beach not only conveys the basic idea of infinite multiplicity but also affords the visual pleasure of the imagery.

However, the truly creative power of metaphor lies in what may be called its richness and complexity. That is to say, the referents of the nouns "star" and "sand" possess many more properties than numbers beyond counting. Most of them, however, would appear to be irrelevant for the purposes of the writer. The fact, for example, that sand is close at hand while the stars are far away, is of no consequence in the given context. Similarly, the fact that grains of sand will coagulate when wet may be ignored. For it seems that our texts, in speaking of sand and stars, are referring exclusively to their property of numbers beyond counting.

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In dealing with texts that are more open-ended or where we have reason to believe there is more than one level of meaning, there may be room for the exercise of one's literary imagination. Thus, it may be noticed that stars, unlike grains of sand, glow and twinkle. So that in promising Abraham, as he gazed at the stars, '*So shall be your offspring,*' God may have been blessing him with more than large numbers. He may have been suggesting that Abraham's descendants will be distinguishable by the illumination they will emit.

This inclination to mine the rich complexity of metaphor was one of the characteristic methods of the talmudic rabbis in their *midrash aggadah*. Thus, while Jeremiah compared Israel to an olive in terms of its prosperity (Jer. 11:16), the rabbis were quick to point to another set of interesting properties possessed by the olive which they would attribute to Israel:

Just as olives when pressed give forth a substance useful for illumination, so too Israel remains creative under pressure. Just as olive oil when mixed with other liquids rises to the top, so too Israel when living amidst different peoples remains distinct.

So much for the usages of metaphor to which we will return shortly. But first a word as to the importance of demography in Jewish history.

For the Israelite from the very beginning, the question of numbers was nothing less than the question of existence itself. When told at the age of 70 of his glorious future, Abraham was incredulous: '*Behold to me you have given no offspring!*' (Gen. 15:3). From then on the narrow road to peoplehood was fraught with the anxieties of barrenness that afflicted Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. The 12 sons of Jacob who became the 12 tribes of Israel were the offspring of four women. The entire drama of the descent into Egypt, the centuries of servitude and the Divinely-wrought Exodus, had as its main significance the growth of the "70 souls" who accompanied Jacob to Egypt, into the 600,000 men who left with Moses: *And as much as they would afflict them so they would increase and spread out* (Ex. 1:12).

The small number of Israelites is acknowledged by the Torah but is evidently deemed adequate for the people's historic task: *Not because you are more nu-*

*merous than all the peoples did God desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all peoples (Deut. 7:7).*

However, should Israel betray its national calling and incur the punishment of exile, then the Torah foresees its demographic diminution, a prophecy which tragically has been completely fulfilled: *God will scatter you among the peoples and you will be left few in numbers among the nations where God will lead you.* (Deut. 4:27).

And if, by some fortunate combination of factors, the Jews reached their highest number ever by the early '30s of this century (17 million), World War II and the Holocaust soon reduced that by one third!

In our own day, in which a Jewish State has been re-established, the question of demography has taken on a new urgency under the headings of aliyah and Ingathering of the Exiles. For the entire concept of a return to Zion rested on two questionable presuppositions: (1) That an adequate number of Jews have survived the horrors of the long exile and the temptations of assimilation; and (2) that, given the opportunity, a sufficient number of them will want to return to and live in Zion.

Miracle of miracles! At that decisive moment in 1948, when the Jews living in Palestine, on behalf of the Jewish people worldwide, declared themselves to be a sovereign Jewish State, there were 600,000 Jews resident in the Holy Land! This number proved sufficient to gain the recognition of the international community and to repel the invading Arab armies. How incredible, when you consider that in 1918, only 30 years before, there were only 50,000 Jews in all of Palestine.

But where did they come from? Actually, most of them arrived not out of a sense of Zionist idealism but because they were constrained to leave the lands where they lived by reason of pogroms, economic hardship and the rise of Nazism. Even after the establishment of the State, the successive waves of immigration consisted primarily of refugees from German fascism, Russian communism, and Moslem fanaticism. In other words, it was not so much the "pull" of Jewish nationalism as it was the "push" of xenophobic anti-Semitism, that populated the Land of Israel. Therefore, in considering to whom to give the "credit" for the satisfying number of five million Jews in the State of Israel to-

day, the Jew's love for his ancient homeland must share the stage with the violent forces of historic reality.

This may be reflected in the different metaphors used by the Prophet Isaiah in describing the manner in which the exiles will return: *Who are those that fly as a cloud, And as doves to their cotes* (Is. 60:8). As has been pointed out by A.I. Kuk, the direction which clouds move in the sky is governed solely by the fierce winds that blow in the upper atmosphere. Clouds do not choose their destination, nor do they have any inner compass by which to chart their direction. They go where the winds propel them. Doves, however, like the migrating birds, have some sort of natural, built-in navigational apparatus by which they are able to determine their destination and sense the direction which will take them home.

The prophet, therefore, by using two different metaphors draws our attention to the two different kinds of *olim* who will populate the restored Zion: The waves that will be brought there by political currents and winds of war, and the individuals who will hear the call of Providential history and will elect to go home and live among their people in their Land of Israel. Were history to have relied solely upon the latter, perhaps the State would never have come into existence.

Let us return to the metaphors of *sand* and *stars*. If we compare the two texts, we find their presentations to be quite different. In the case of God and Abraham, three distinct steps precede the actual metaphoric application: (1) Abraham is taken outside; (2) he is asked to contemplate the heavens; and (3) he is told to count the stars. Only after he has become experientially aware of the seemingly infinite numbers of stars is Abraham told: *'So shall be your offspring.'*

In the Hosea text, however, the metaphor is expected to work immediately upon mention of *sands of the sea* and *which cannot be counted or measured*. It is purely conceptual. Yet precisely because of that does the following question arise in the mind of the thoughtful readers of Hosea: Why should anyone even want to count the grains of sand of the sea? Sand is not the sort of thing whose individual grains you would think of counting. Sand's usefulness for man is mainly to be found in its aggregate bulk, in its ability to cohere and function en masse in large clumps.

Similarly, there are certain historical situations in the life of a nation when the significance of its number lies not so much in the distinctive qualities of its individual members as in its aggregate bulk. Thus, during those crucial years when a nation is being born or resurrected, there is a certain necessary critical mass, a certain minimal number which it must attain if it is to be viable from an economic, political and military perspective. Immediately before and after the establishment of the Third Jewish Commonwealth, it just so happened that the crucial requisite numbers of Jews were in place to insure the rebirth of the nation. Who they were, where they came from, and what was their motivation did not matter. The critical mass had been brought together!

Could this perhaps be an added nuance of meaning in the blessing of Hosea: *And the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea which can neither be counted nor measured.* A time will come in the process of nation-building when the Jewish population will be regarded and evaluated like the sand of the sea, in terms of its aggregate bulk, its collective mass and in that respect will be found plentiful.

On the other hand, once a nation has successfully passed through its formative stages, like Israel today after 50 years of growth, immigration is no longer thought of in terms of *waves* in the aggregate but in terms of individuals, each of whom has an identity and is valued as such.

Perhaps it is in the light of such a situation that the blessing of God to Abraham takes on an additional meaning. With eyes on the stars, Abraham is told: *'So shall be your offspring.'* A time will come when your people will appear not only in great numbers but of a quality, like the stars, where each one will stand out as an individual. Some will shine with their own light while others with reflected light. And as they return to Zion *as doves to their cotes*, they will bring new talent, new energies, new ideas to their nation. And perhaps, like the stars, they will prove helpful to the peoples of the world as they together navigate history's turbulent waters. *And in thee all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Gen. 12:4).

# STRIFE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF KING DAVID

MOSHE REISS

When the Book of II Samuel begins, King Saul and his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua have fallen in the lost battle against the Philistines. Thereafter, his cousin Abner, who had been his military commander, managed to install Saul's surviving son Ishbaal<sup>1</sup> as king over the northern half of Israel, with its capital east of the Jordan River at Mahanaim. David became king over his own tribe of Judah, with its capital at Hebron.

After years of civil warfare between the two parties, Abner negotiated an agreement with David, bringing the northern tribes to his side, thus reuniting all of Israel as a single kingdom. Soon after, first Abner and then Ishbaal were murdered, both crimes perpetrated without the prior knowledge of David and invoking his wrath upon the killers. He was then recognized by all as King of Israel. He soon proceeded to capture the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and make it the capital of his united kingdom -- a capital that came to be known as the City of David. There he established his royal household and his growing family of wives and children.

MICHAL

David's first marriage had been contracted in the long-past days when he was a young hero at the court of King Saul, and Michal, the King's younger daughter, fell in love him. This is a unique instance of the Tanakh telling of a woman in love with a man (I Sam. 18:20,28). It does not tell that David loved her, only that he was quite willing to wed the Princess, and be the King's son-in-law (18:26); this despite the King's setting a bride-price that required the would-be groom to risk his life -- the foreskins of 100 Philistines. (David in fact provided 200 of them.) When Saul later sought to slay his son-in-law, Michal braved her

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father's often violent wrath to help her husband escape (19:11-13). She herself, however, was left behind and the King gave her in a second marriage to Paltiel ben-Laish.

When David was first approached by Abner, he demanded the return of Michal as one of his terms for negotiation. He even sent the demand to Ishbaal, with a reminder of the perilous mission -- the bride-price of Philistine foreskins -- he had undertaken to win her. Ishbaal actually acceded to this demand, and had Michal sent back to David, with the forsaken Paltiel, wailing and lamenting, following her part way of the journey back to her first husband.

Perhaps David was so determined to regain her because he expected that his re-marriage with their Princess would consolidate the loyalty of the northern tribes. Perhaps he hoped that Michal would bear him a son who would found a dynasty that united the claims of the Houses of Saul and of David.

Nothing more is said of her relationship with David until the great day when the Ark was brought up to Jerusalem. In the past, it had been kept in Shiloh, then it had been captured by the Philistines, then it had been returned by them and had stood at Kiryat-Jearim, virtually neglected, for some 30 years. David, having made Jerusalem the royal and national capital of Israel, now made it the religious capital by bringing the Ark there. In celebration of this occasion, complete with sacrifices and blasts of the shofar, the King himself, girt in the linen ephod worn by priests, *whirled with all his might before the Lord* (II Sam. 6:14).

Michal, here specifically identified as the daughter of Saul, *looked out the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord, and she despised him for it* (6:20). She did not even wait for him to enter the palace, but went out to meet him, the sooner to pour out her rage and venom: *'Did not the king of Israel honor today -- exposing himself in the sight of the slave girls, as one of the riffraff might expose himself!'* (6:20). These are very strong words to describe the feelings of the woman who had once loved David and risked her life for him; remarkably scornful and sexually debasing language from a once devoted wife toward her husband and king. Did she, perhaps, sense that he demanded her back, tearing her away from a loving husband, because she was valuable dynastic property and a pawn in his political game?

To what did Michal allude when she said he "exposed" himself? He was wearing an ephod, the priestly robe. Did she mean he was not wearing a royal robe? That, unlike her father, he was not a king with legitimate, sovereign status? Saul had let the Ark languish at Kiryat-Jearim and had not linked the sacral past to the monarchic future. Conversely, David directly connected the past to the future and appointed two high priests; Abiathar, who was from the House of Eli in Shiloh in the north, and Zadok, who was from Judah. David understood how to join the northern tribes and Judah together, a task Saul had been unable to accomplish. He also established the monarch as a vassal of God, with both Divine and secular legitimacy, an issue Saul had ignored.

David responded by telling her that the Lord had chosen him over her father and over her father's house, and made him prince over all Israel. He added that he would find honor among those she had scorned (21-22). The passage concludes with the remark that Michal remained childless all her life. If there is a connection between the incident and this final statement, it may be an implication that she was barren as a punishment for her insolence. In any case, it thwarted any plan David may have had for an heir who would link his house to Saul's.

Perhaps Michal thought that her husband David was an opportunist, and that he had taken over Saul's kingdom after her father and her beloved brother Jonathan had died heroically. She may have thought that David was responsible for the murder of her brother Ishbaal and cousin Abner, even though David punished Ishbaal's killer and rejected Joab's murder of Abner.

#### AMNON AND TAMAR

We are told that Amnon, the first-born son of David, "loved" his half-sister Tamar. He pined for her to the point of making himself sick. His cousin Jonadab suggested a plan: When David visited his sick son, Amnon asked to have Tamar sent to prepare food for him. Tamar came at her father's request, and Amnon revealed his love for her. She implored him to ask David to permit them to marry. That they had different mothers might have made such a union possible. (Whether that was a ploy by Tamar or a serious suggestion is irrelevant.) Amnon rejected this proposal and *overpowered her and forced her* (13:15). He raped his

virgin half-sister. At once, he began to hate her as much as had once loved her and literally threw her out of his house. Was his "love" for her merely a pretense for a physical lust for his half-sister?

Amnon manipulated King David with premeditation, using his father to facilitate his purpose of raping his father's daughter. This rape and incest can only be viewed as pathological behavior by the eldest and favored son, the heir to the kingdom. We are told that David *became very angry*, but we read of no punishment.<sup>2</sup> David failed either to avenge the honor of his daughter or teach his son the consequences of his despicable action.<sup>3</sup> David should not merely have been angry; he should have acted to punish Amnon.

Tamar fled to Absalom, her full brother, for refuge. Absalom, now driven by hatred of Amnon, took two years to plan his revenge. Finally, he arranged a celebration to which he invited David. David declined, but agreed to Absalom's request that Amnon and his other brothers should attend. It is not reasonable to suppose that David was unaware that Tamar had taken refuge with Absalom, or of Absalom's feelings about his sister's fate.<sup>4</sup> Why, then, did he agree that Amnon should be a guest at Absalom's feast? Did Amnon himself not know of his half-brother's rage against him for his crime?

As Absalom planned, he used the occasion to have Amnon killed, thus avenging Tamar. For the second time, a son of David manipulated his father in order to facilitate a fraternal crime. David had played his assigned role as unwitting accomplice, first in the rape of Tamar and then in the murder of Amnon.

David, distressed at Amnon's death, *mourned his son all the days* (13:37). Absalom, knowing of his father's anger, fled to his maternal grandfather, the King of Geshur. Perhaps, had David not reacted so passively to the rape of his daughter, Absalom might not have perceived his father as weak and taken the law into his own hands. After three years, Absalom came back to Jerusalem with his father's permission, where he later gathered a force and rebelled against his father.

#### DAVID AND JACOB

The narrator takes care to note that when Tamar visited the house of Amnon she wore a tunic of many colors, the apparel worn by virgin daughters of the king. When she was driven from Amnon's house, she rent this tunic (13:18). She



was no longer a virgin, and hence not marriageable. The exact term *tunic of many colors* [*ketonet passim*] appears in only one other place in the Tanakh -- to describe the tunic that Jacob gave to Joseph (Gen. 37:3). After Joseph shared his dreams with his brothers, his father, Jacob was well aware of the anger and jealousy between Joseph and his brothers yet he sent the boy off to a journey alone to join them.

How can one reconcile Jacob's decision to send his favorite son on a journey to Shechem to inquire about the well-being of the other sons? How could he overlook the very real danger for Joseph? Joseph, naive and narcissistic, may not have realized he was in peril from the anger of his brothers, but could Jacob not have anticipated some untoward outcome? Was he not, in a way, also unwittingly facilitating a fraternal crime?

There are other parallels in the story of the sons of Jacob and the sons of David. In both cases there is a woman named Tamar, who is involved in a sexual scandal. The story of the first Tamar, who is an ancestress of David, is interpolated into the midst of the Joseph story. Judah recognized that he had wronged Tamar and made amends. This is in contrast to David, who did not make amends. Joseph's brothers tear his tunic, as Tamar tore her own. The words Amnon used to have everyone leave his room when he meant to assault Tamar are: *'Take everyone out from before me'* (II Sam. 13:16) -- the exact words Joseph used to clear the room when he meant to reveal himself to his brothers (Gen. 45:1).<sup>5</sup>

Most salient is the parallel of the two fathers who failed in their paternal responsibilities. Both Joseph and Amnon took advantage of paternal favoritism to gratify their own whims. Jacob let Joseph antagonize his brothers, and virtually put him in their power. Jacob did nothing when his daughter Dinah was violated, and it was her brothers who took vengeance for the crime. David did nothing when his daughter Tamar was the victim, and it was her brother who took the vengeance for the crime. Jacob resents his sons Simeon and Levi for the deadly justice they wreak on the people of Shechem. David mourns Absalom's execution of the guilty Amnon.

Two of the Tanakh's most heroic Men of Faith through passivity within their own households let discord grow within their own families.

## NOTES

1. He is also called Ishbosheth. The word *baal* has two meanings: lord or master and the idol *baal*. At some point in Jewish history, *baal* names were no longer acceptable and Ishbaal became Ishbosheth.
2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) p. 118.
3. According to the Septuagint the text continues 'But he did not trouble his son, Amnon, because he loved him'. This is not inconsistent with the Masoretic text.
4. David's illicit and illegal affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah may have been seen by given Amnon as a right to any action he chose.
5. We are told later that Absalom named a daughter Tamar (14:27). Did his sister Tamar die as a result of the rape or commit suicide?

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## DECALOGUE OR DODECALOGUE?

ARON PINKER

The Decalogue is etched in our minds as five commandments on one Tablet and five on the other. Having ten commandments and two Tablets, mere symmetry would dictate an equal division into five and five. This may have prompted Philo to say:

Now God divided them, being ten, as they are, into two tables of five each, which he engraved as two pillars. And the first five have the precedence and pre-eminence in honor; but the second five have an inferior place assigned to them.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is no biblical evidence for such a division and grouping of the commandments and the disparity of length advises against it.

Ibn Ezra observes that the first five commandments deal with the relation between man and God and the other five commandments deal with the relation between man and man. That is why God's name is mentioned in the first five commandments but not in the last five. We can also add, though Ibn Ezra may just be hinting it, that the first five start with a positive commandment and end with a positive commandment, but the last five are all phrased in the negative.

Furthermore, Ibn Ezra suggests that there is an important distinction between the first five and the second five in terms of their severity: "The least of the things in the belief between man and his Creator is more severe than anything between him and anyone likewise created." He rationalizes that the first five present something lasting and fundamental, the last five relate to the transient and casual. We can add here, keeping in mind Ibn Ezra's observation, that the very inclusion of the last five as a block of the Ten Commandments elevates them to an almost God-like awe and similar status as the first five.<sup>2</sup>

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Abarbanel adds an interesting perspective to the five-and-five division that expresses the special relation between God and Israel. He suggests that the first five commandments were on the first Tablet because they are commandments specifically directed to Israel. The remaining five, on the second Tablet, were directed to humanity in general. These commandments, or most of them, obligated Adam and the Noahites.<sup>3</sup>

While the division of the Ten Commandments into five and five is uniformly accepted by traditional commentators, it is also possible to discern traces of other divisions. For instance, Ibn Ezra also has a division into one and nine. He views the First Commandment as the root, and the remaining nine as the logical derivatives of the First, in decreasing order of importance. Sforno implies a division that is based on the categories Thought, Word, and Deed.

The subdivision into five and five was usually justified on thematic grounds, but more probably it was a simple reflex to symmetry; it clearly caused problems in a thematic categorization of the Decalogue. In this paper, we discuss these and then suggest a division into three categories that center on God, Family, and World. We will show that substantial elements of a finer subdivision, having the same categories, can be identified. Completion of this structure for the Family category leads to some thought-provoking possibilities on the number of commandments given on Mount Sinai.

#### THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

The Fifth Commandment plays a critical role in the structure and subdivision of the Ten Commandments. In the linear order in which they are presented, it is positioned between the God stratum and the man stratum. It deals with a unique and very special category of people -- parents -- and by extension with God.<sup>4</sup> It deals with honoring parents and with honoring God who is a partner with them in man's creation.<sup>5</sup> To which group does it belong? God's or man's?

We have seen that Philo views the Fifth Commandment as belonging to the honored group of the first five. It is, however, on the border of the first five. He says that God gives the Fifth Commandment . . . a position on the confines of the two tables of five commandments each; for being the concluding one of the first table, in which the most sacred duties to the Deity are enjoined, it has also some

connection with the second table which comprehends the obligations toward our fellow creatures."

The Fifth Commandment seems like a bridging commandment; it belongs to both groups or does not belong to either group.

Ramban considers the Fifth Commandment to be the beginning of the commandments that relate to man. He says on Exodus 20:11: "Here He finished with our obligations to the Creator Himself and His honor, and returns to command us with respect to those created." Yet, despite this clear opening statement, Ramban is pulled by tradition and custom to the five-and-five division. He concludes by saying:

The Ten Commandments consist of five dealing with God's honor and five about the advantage to man. Because "Honor your father" (Ex. 20:11) is the same as honor of God, because for God's honor did He command to honor the father who partakes in man's creation.

Ramban is not unique in this approach (see Abarbanel). What prompted the Midrash and commentators to adhere to the forced five-and-five division is not clear. The critical commandment is obviously the fifth. It depends how it is interpreted. If we take it to refer to God, using human natural love and respect of parents as a vehicle for the love and respect of God, then we can divide the Ten Commandments into two parts as do most of the commentators.

Such an approach, however, is not without problems. It requires a certain amount of talmudic reasoning to make the transference from parents to God, and we may question why a more direct approach was not taken as it was in all the other commandments.

Could it be that more than one parental commandment was originally in the Decalogue, but they were later omitted ?

#### GOD FAMILY AND WORLD.

Because the Fifth Commandment is neither in the category "between man and God" nor in the category "between man and man" it forms its own category of "between man and parent." An abstraction of these categories would be God, Family, and World.

The "God" category consists of the four commandments:

*I the Lord am your God . . . .*  
*You shall have no other gods besides me. . . .*  
*You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God . . . .*  
*Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy . . . .*

The "Family" category consists of the single commandment:

*Honor your father and your mother . . . .*

The "World" category consists of the five commandments:

*You shall not murder.*  
*You shall not commit adultery.*  
*You shall not steal.*  
*You shall not bear false witness . . . .*  
*You shall not covet your neighbor's . . . .*

Two of these categories have an infrastructure of the same categories. We can form the hierarchy of categories as in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Decalogue Structure**

<b>GOD</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>I the Lord am your God .</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>You shall have no other gods besides me</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy</i>
<b>FAMILY</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>Honor your father and your mother</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<b>WORLD</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>You shall not murder</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>You shall not commit adultery You shall not steal</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>You shall not bear false witness You shall not covet your neighbor's</i>

The rationale for this subdivision follows.

The First Commandment identifies God by association with the dramatic and recent event of the Exodus from Egypt. In our view, the intent of *Who brought you out of Egypt, the house of bondage* is not to demonstrate God's might but to affirm His identity.<sup>7</sup> The Second Commandment deals with the prohibition of having a family of gods, as was the custom in the religions of the nations in the region. The Third and Fourth Commandments deal with God's might in the world, with His ability to mete out retribution and creation of the world in a short span of time.

In the last five commandments, the abstracted concept "World" has to be taken in the meaning of "Society," rather than in the meaning of "Creator of the World" that was more appropriate with respect to God. Though these two meanings may appear to be worlds apart, they have a common element: the interaction of an entity with a medium. In the first case, God (Entity) interacts with the world (medium) by shaping it (Creation) and controlling human behavior (retribution). In the second case man (entity) interacts with his world -- society (medium).

In the finer subdivision, the Sixth Commandment, *You shall not murder*, is a God-like commandment in the sense that man takes what only God can give -- life. Philo suggests an additional reason for considering this commandment to be a God-like commandment:

. . . the most excellent of all animals, in respect of that predominant part that is in him, namely his soul, is also most closely related to the heaven, which is the purest of all things in its essence, and as the common language of the multitude affirms, to the Father of the world, inasmuch as he has received mind.<sup>8</sup>

Murder would be an act of aggression against a God-like entity.

The Seventh Commandment, *You shall not commit adultery*, is a familial commandment. Philo brings out the familial nature of this commandment by stressing that:

Adultery exhibits the destruction of three houses by its means; that of the house of the man who sustains the violation of all the vows which were made to him at his marriage, and the loss of all the hopes of legitimate

children, of which he is now deprived; and two others, namely, the house of the adulterer, and that of his wife. And if their connections and families are very numerous, then by reason of their intermarriages and the mutual connections formed with different houses, the iniquity and injury will proceed and infect the whole city all around. Moreover, the doubt as to the legitimacy of the children is the most terrible evil.<sup>9</sup>

We view the Eighth Commandment, *You shall not steal*, as a familial one, assuming that it deals with stealing of people and selling them into bondage. This practice, well established at that time, wracked families emotionally and financially. There are commentators that give this commandment a broader validity, addressing the unlawful taking from a person of any of his belongings or even luring him with words [*g'nevat ha'daat*]. As Philo says: "He who keeps continually gaping after the property of others is the common enemy of the city, since, as far as his inclination goes, he would deprive all men of their property."<sup>10</sup>

We take the Ninth Commandment, *You shall not bear false witness*, to be of a societal nature, pertaining to the World category, because it deals essentially with societal justice. Philo points to the judicial fact that in the case when any physical evidence is not available the judges are bound to rely on witnesses. False witnesses cause a twofold corruption of justice: "Those who are borne down by evidence in this way meet with injustice when they might have won their cause, and that those who attend to the false witnesses are recorded as unjust and illegal judges, instead of just and legal ones."<sup>11</sup>

The Tenth Commandment can also be viewed to be in the World/Society category. Coveting what belongs to others is a major cause of societal unrest. The sages have said: "Who is rich? He who is satisfied with what he has." One who covets what others have feels deficient, poor, and unsatisfied. He is a troubled societal element.

If our concept of the structure of the Ten Commandments is correct, then we miss at least two commandments in the Family category to make it complete. Were there more than Ten Commandments? If there were more than Ten Commandments, what were the additional ones? If there were more than Ten Commandments, why do we now have only ten?



## SPECULATIONS

How many commandments were there? Cassuto says that the number ten is specifically stated and should not be doubted.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the term "Ten Commandments" (or, more precisely, "The Ten Things") occurs three times in the Bible: Exodus 34:28, and Deuteronomy 4:13 and 10:4. Moreover, they were implanted twice in the text, implicitly to impress the reader with the mysterious occurrence. The root דבר [thing, word] is repeated 10 times in the story of Jethro's visit (Ex. 18) and in the story of the Revelation on Mount Sinai (19:1-20:1). This was not accidental.

Also, in the Exodus version of the Decalogue, the number of words is  $120=3*40$ , a multiple of a complete number,<sup>13</sup> and the number of characters is  $620=613+7$ =number of precepts plus number of sounds heard. These kinds of findings must be viewed as intentional, designed to convey a message that is shrouded in some mystery.

We see that the text goes to great lengths to make the point that there were Ten Commandments. There are repeated direct statements and a couple of indirect allusions. We may well ask why was this effort necessary? The text in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, and Deuteronomy 10:4 certainly does not necessitate the use of the term Ten Commandments. Why did Moses use this term, but not use the term "Ten Plagues"? The ten plagues were certainly a long-lasting and awesome event, yet nowhere in the Bible is the term Ten Plagues mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

There is an interesting case of stating a number that may have some bearing on our case. When Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Jacob found out about it, we read *Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number* (Gen. 35:21). Here the number twelve is mentioned because it was in doubt, it was questioned. It was not clear whether Reuben's despicable act did not warrant his banishment from the clan, reducing the number of Jacob's inheritors to eleven. We do not hear of a debate among the brothers nor of the turmoil of Jacob's soul. We are given just the verdict, and nothing of the proceedings of the jury. The verdict, however, implies that there was a case and a jury.

In the case of the Ten Commandments, the unnecessary repetition of the number ten is probably an attempt to announce a decision, as in Reuben's case. We

do not know the details of the dispute nor the specific disputants, but the subject was the number of commandments.

If the number of commandments was questioned during the wandering in the desert, then Moses resolved the matter by stating their total number. If the dispute arose much later, then we have here textual additions that put words into Moses' mouth to give them greater authority. We may ask: Why were not The Tablets produced and checked to resolve any dispute concerning the number of commandments? There were probably two important circumstances that precluded a look at the Tablets. They were written by God's own finger -- enough to make them absolutely taboo. Also, they were a solemn contract between God and His people. Their production would have indicated that there was some doubt with respect to the terms of the contract or its obligations. Only in such cases could a contract be produced and contested; otherwise it was supposed to reside in the Temple at God's feet.<sup>15</sup>

What could have been the arguments against the number ten? If there were ten commandments, five on each Tablet, then each Tablet would have a number of commandments (five) that has no special significance in the Bible. If, however, the number of commandments was twelve or fourteen, then each Tablet could have six or seven commandments, respectively. Both six and seven are special numbers in the Bible. Is it possible that there was a group of Israelites that continued to adhere to the Babylonian counting system with a base of twelve and resisted acceptance of the Egyptian system with base of ten?<sup>16</sup> The first group may have heard twelve commandments on Mount Sinai instead of ten. Perhaps, they viewed the number twelve as more traditional, and corresponding to the number of tribes that were present at Mount Sinai. (As the controversies between the commentaries indicate, this is not unimaginable.) Moses then had to decide on the number of commandments and he then repeatedly stated it to implant their number firmly for future generations. It is, however, also possible that there were originally twelve commandments, but Moses ruled two of them not to be part of the Decalogue, in order to make their number conform with the Egyptian perception of ten as a full measure.

## THE MISSING COMMANDMENTS

We have seen that the insistence that the commandments numbered ten raises the possibility that this number was disputed. We have also seen that a structural analysis of the Ten Commandments leaves a gap. At least two commandments are missing. What could they be? It appears that they should belong to the Family group and complete its infrastructure. In addition to *Honor your father and your mother* (Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16), there are essentially three commandments, dealing with the reverence of parents, and prohibition of cursing or striking them. The commandment *You shall each revere his mother and his father* (Lev. 19:3) is clearly a repetition of *Honor your father and your mother*. However, *He who strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death* (Ex. 21:15) and *He who insults his mother or his father shall be put to death* (Ex. 21:17 and similarly Lev. 20:9) are two distinct commandments. These two, notably the only two commandments about parents in the Torah, perfectly complement our structural decomposition of the (ten) commandments.

Because none of the commandments given on Mount Sinai has a punishment associated with it, we could conjecture that this was probably also the case with the two additional commandments. They were probably originally stated thus: "You shall not insult your father or mother" and "You shall not strike your father or mother." To which subcategories do these "commandments" belong? Abarbanel provides some guidance through an analysis of the punishments. He says:

And indeed, why is the insulter stoned and the striker strangled? Because the striker does his crime covertly, because he is ashamed to strike his father or mother overtly, in front of all. Indeed the insulter, in his anger would raise his voice and advertise the vileness of his insult.

Thus, the striking is done where no one can see it or within the protective shield of a family. On the other hand, insults are more likely to be cast in public, where the publicity adds to the insult. Societal degeneration is characterized by a generation that curses its parents: *A generation that curses its fathers and does not greet its mothers* (Prov. 30:11, my translation).<sup>17</sup>

Assuming this to be the case, we have in Table 2 a complete structure of the commandments that is doubly based on the three components: God, Family, and World.

TABLE II

## Dodecalogue Structure

<b>GOD</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>I the Lord am your God</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>You shall have no other gods besides me</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy</i>
<b>FAMILY</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>Honor your father and your mother</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>You shall not strike your father or mother</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>You shall not insult your father or mother</i>
<b>WORLD</b>	<i>God</i>	<i>You shall not murder</i>
	<i>Family</i>	<i>You shall not commit adultery You shall not steal</i>
	<i>World</i>	<i>You shall not bear false witness You shall not covet your neighbor's</i>

There may have been more than twelve commandments, though twelve is a very appealing number in itself and because on halving it we get the perfect number six. Perhaps, an echo of this number can be found in the talmudic tradition that each Tablet measured six-by-three handbreadths; the two Tablets forming a six-by-six square.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Our suspicions with respect to the number of commandments given on Mount Sinai are aroused by the unusual emphasis on their specific number. A structural

analysis of the Decalogue shows an almost complete macro- and microstructure. Two parental commandments are missing to complete this structure and just two such commandments are found in the Torah. And, a Dodecalogue would be numerically far more appealing than a Decalogue. These circumstances are too complementary to be dismissed as accidental.

I therefore conclude that there is a substantial amount of evidence, albeit circumstantial evidence, that points to a Dodecalogue rather than Decalogue.

## NOTES

1. Philo, "The Decalogue," in C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995) p. 522.
2. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987) p.166.
3. While Abarbanel's position can be accepted with respect to the first four commandments being directed specifically to Israel, it is hard to see why the fifth commandment should not be addressed to humanity in general.
4. Cassuto, p. 170.
5. "Three are the partners in man, God, his father and mother. When man honors his father and mother God says that He considers it as if He dwelt among them and the honored Him" (Trac. Kidushin 30:2).
6. Philo, p. 527
7. This approach is in line with that taken by Saadia in *Emunot veDeirot* and Yehuda HaLevi in *Kuzari*. For Yehuda HaLevi, the creation of the world is a philosophical issue that can be debated. Not so the events that occurred during the Exodus; those were witnessed by many and transmitted reliably to future generations.
8. Philo, p.529.
9. Philo, p. 529.
10. Philo, p. 530
11. Philo, p. 530.
12. Cassuto, p. 174
13. Aron Pinker, "The Number 40 in the Bible," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, XXII:3 (July-September 1994) p.163.
14. The Torah clearly distinguishes among the plagues so that there can be no doubt of their number. Yet, in Psalms 78 and 105 we can find only seven plagues.
15. M. Weinfeld, "The Ten Commandments -- Their Singularity and Place in Jewish Tradition," (Hebrew) in Ben-Zion Segal (ed.) *The Ten Commandments* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985) p. 22. Weinfeld says that "the Tablets served as evidence of the Israelites' obligation to follow the commandments that were inscribed on them. These Tablets were placed in the Ark of the Pact, which

together with the cherubim symbolized the temple of the Lord. The cherubim were considered as the Lord's seat and the Ark of the Pact under as his footstool."

16. Donald Smeltzer, *Man and Number. An Account of the development of Man's use of Number through the Ages* (New York: Emcerson Books, 1970) p.35.

17. The Jewish Publication Society gives the beautiful translation: *There is a breed of men that brings a curse on its fathers and brings no blessing to its mothers.* However, our translation is more in line with Exodus 21 and Proverbs 30:13.

18. Tractate Men. 99a.

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# A THEOLOGICAL REASON FOR AMBIGUITY

HARVEY MINKOFF

Anyone who has compared different translations of the Bible knows that numerous passages have more than one valid interpretation.

Sometimes, the same spelling and pronunciation can represent two different words. Thus, without changes in the traditional text, Genesis 1:2 has been translated:

- ... *the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters* (1917 JPS)
- ... *the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters*  
(Artscroll Chumash)
- ... *a wind from God sweeping over the water* (NJPS)
- ... *a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters*  
(New English Bible)

Sometimes, a single spelling can have different pronunciations. For example, the word נָסַתָּ in Zechariah 14:5 is read "*nastem*" in the JPS (1917): *and ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains*. It is read "*nistam*" in the NJPS: *and the Valley in the Hills shall be stopped up*.

Sometimes, editors provide differing punctuation. In Genesis 23:14-15, the Artscroll Chumash reads לָךְ as "*lo*" and makes it the last word in Verse 14: *Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him: 'My Lord, heed me!'* The New English Bible reads לָךְ as "*lu*" and makes it the first word of Verse 15: *Ephron answered, 'Do listen to me, sir.'*

Such ambiguity in everyday conversation is usually unintended; the speaker means to say either one thing or the other. However, Paul R. Raabe argues that in Psalms "maybe more than we think, a word, phrase, or sentence could be understood in two (or more) ways because both were intended."<sup>1</sup> Such "deliberate ambiguity," he says, represents "the psalmists' sense of humor and their delight in the creative use of language" and causes the reader "to recognize the truth of the various possible interpretations."<sup>2</sup>

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His point is well taken, but perhaps we can go a step further. Perhaps deliberate ambiguity may contain theological significance. If "either/or" is the way of this world, then ambiguity that is simultaneously "this and that" may convey a message about a higher level of existence. In several groundbreaking studies of metaphor, Samuel Levin proposes that poetry is implicitly introduced with the formula: I imagine [myself in] and invite you to conceive a world in which . . .<sup>3</sup> In other words, the world of the poem is not a distorted version of our world, but an imagined world with its own natural laws, which are both created and illustrated by the poem. This insight carries useful implications for approaching the Bible as well.

The crux of Levin's argument is that innovative, even bizarre, metaphors may be taken at face value. Rather than trying to fit the metaphor into the actual world, he suggests that readers "conceive a world such that the construed sense has 'literal' applicability. This would be a world different from the actual world."<sup>4</sup> If the reader accepts the invitation to conceive such a world, "the truth conditions are . . . those that would obtain given a world of the imagination."<sup>5</sup>

Now, most discussions of, for example, the historicity of the Bible presuppose that facts are either/or -- as in the world as we know it. Levin's theory suggests that this is not necessarily the case with poetry. It may also not have been the case with the Bible. The biblical authors sifted, chose and reworked their material carefully and purposefully. Their goal was not simply to write royal records or a national history with truth value.<sup>6</sup> Given their religious purpose, perhaps they imagined a world different from the one they knew, and invited readers to join them.

As Abraham Heschel wrote of the prophetic books in the Bible:

The mind of the prophet . . . seems to live in a realm different from the world which most of us inhabit . . . . The prophet claims to sense, to hear, and to see in a way totally removed from a normal perception, to pass from the actual world into a mysterious realm . . . . [T]he ideas he brings back to reality become sources of illumination of supreme significance to all other human beings.<sup>7</sup>



The multiple senses of the very word נָבִי are instructive in this regard. Though translated "prophet," נָבִי has been connected to roots meaning "voice" (Mandelkern), "call" (Heschel) and "burst forth" (Jastrow). Thus, the prophet hears voices, is called, bursts forth with a message.<sup>8</sup>

According to Heschel, the world of the prophet is one suffused with Divinity. For the prophet, he says,

... there is a certainty of having experienced the impingement of a personal Being, of another I; not an idea coming from nowhere or from a nameless source, but always a communication reaching him from the most powerful Subject of all.<sup>9</sup>

And, therefore, the goal of prophetic writing is not to describe or understand God, but rather "to present Him, to make Him present."<sup>10</sup>

How is the Divinity made present? One way is by saying that the people were seized by a *terror from God* (Gen. 35:5),<sup>11</sup> or that *an evil spirit from the Lord* came over Saul (I Sam. 16:14, 18:10). If the authors of the Bible lacked other words for fear or madness, then one might say they were groping to explain mental states they did not understand. However, because there were other words to describe these states,<sup>12</sup> it is possible that the authors imagined and invited us to conceive a world in which Divinity is a presence, a world in which evil spirits from the Lord and terror from God are literally true.

Divine presence is also manifested through the emphasis on reward and punishment. For example, II Samuel 13:1 is often translated: *And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her* (1917 JPS). But this phrasing is misleading, because Absalom's having a sister did not occur after the previous incident of David, Bathsheba and Uriah. Rather, the verse should be understood as: "This is what happened afterward. Absalom David's son had (= happened to have) a sister, and Amnon David's son loved her" (following the Artscroll Tanach). That is, because of David's sin, he was punished by the rape of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, and the rebellion of Absalom. Likewise, if the Book of Kings is (only) history, it would be hard to explain why the 55-year reign of Manasseh gets only 18 sentences (II Kings 21:1-18), while the 29-year reign of his father Hezekiah gets the preceding three chapters. If it is an imagined world,

however, filled with God-presence, the space given to the righteous father and denied the evil son suits the purpose.

Perhaps this world has other dimensions as well; among them, multiple meanings. Rashi, noting that בַּקִּרְבָּה can mean either "to herself" or "at herself," explains Genesis 18:12 this way: Sarah looked at her body and laughed to/at herself. "Can this old body bear children?" And this same double sense is echoed at the end of the story (21:6), where צָחַק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כֹּל הַשְּׁמֹעַ יִצְחָק לִי can mean both '*God has made laughter for me; all who hear will laugh for me*' and '*God has made me a laughingstock; all who hear will laugh at me.*'

Another example of creative ambiguity may be found in the well-known semantic transparency of Hebrew names. Rather than choosing between noun and name for each occurrence of אָדָם in Genesis 2-3, recognizing multivalence allows for reading the story as not necessarily or only about two people named Adam and Eve, but also about "Everyman" and "Life-Mother." Other times such multivalence creates an extended conceit, as with the saga of the Hebrew founder אֲבִי-רָם [Lofty Father] and his wife שָׂרָה [Princess].

Multivalence permeates the story of Jacob, through the root עָקַב, the basis of the noun "heel," the verb "trip [viz. "grab by the heel"], trick, supplant" and the name "Jacob." The essence of Genesis 25 and 27 is that Jacob, the younger twin, tricks Esau, the elder, and supplants him as heir to their father's Divinely appointed destiny. The root עָקַב occurs in the description of Jacob's birth (25:26): *And then his brother emerged, with his hand gripping Esau's heel* [עָקַב], *and he called him Jacob* [יַעֲקֹב]. It recurs in the denouement, when, after Jacob has tricked his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. Esau plays on a double-meaning when he cries '*Is he called יַעֲקֹב for nothing? He has tricked/supplanted me*' [יַעֲקֹבֵנִי] (27:36). Moreover, trickery and supplanting dominate Jacob's life, whether he is the perpetrator, as with Laban's flocks, and Manasseh and Ephraim, or victim, as with the switched bride and Joseph's bloodstained coat.

It is thus possible that the biblical author is imagining and inviting us to conceive a world in which Adam/Everyman, Abram/Lofty Father, and Jacob/He-grabs-tricks-supplants, exist not as either/or choices but as this-and-that simultaneously. There are similar wordplays in later historical contexts. Samuel several times emphasizes that the people were wrong to request [שָׁאֲלוּ] the ap-

pointment of Saul [שׂאול] as king (I Sam.12:17,19). After Nabal the Carmelite rejects David's request for assistance, his wife Abigail makes a play on words: '*Don't pay attention to Nabal. He is what his name is: His name is נבל [villain] and his ways are נבלה [villainy]*' (I Sam. 25:25).

Biblical Hebrew seems to have a surprising number of words that include multiple senses that are contradictory. For example the phrase [אשׁא עון] means both "incur guilt" and "forgive guilt." Thus:

אם לוא יגיד ונשא עונו

*if he does not testify, he will incur guilt* (Lev. 5:1)

but: נשא עון ופשע וחטאה

*Forgiver of guilt, sin and error* (Ex. 34:7)

In I Samuel 15:32, ויאמר אגג אכן סר מר המות has been translated as both:

*Agag said: 'Surely the bitterness of death has passed'* (NEB and KJV)

and *Agag said: 'Ah, bitter death is at hand'* (NJPS).

Lest we think that the biblical authors did not understand about puns, Jeremiah 23:33 explicitly plays on the two meanings of מִשָּׂא ["oracle" and "burden"]:

וכי ישאלך . . . מה מִשָּׂא ה' ואמרת אליהם את מה מִשָּׂא

*If [someone] asks you, 'What is God's מִשָּׂא [oracle]?' You should tell them, 'You are the מִשָּׂא [burden].'*<sup>13</sup>

The kind of otherworldiness which Heschel ascribes to the prophets and Levin to poetry may inform the whole Bible. To the extent that the Bible is a unity, rather than merely an accidental collection of books, its message would seem to be of a different/better world for the believer, perhaps one where the laws of physics are suspended, where two (semantic) objects can occupy the same (verbal) space; where multivalent this-and-that replaces this-worldly limits like either/or.

#### NOTES

1. Paul R. Raabe. "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110:2 (1991), p. 213. The co-existence of meaning arising from ambiguous statements is long known in literary theory (e.g. W. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which Raabe cites). One of Raabe's purposes is to provide guidelines for determining when ambiguity in the Bible is deliberate.

2. Raabe, p. 227.

3. Samuel R. Levin. *The Semantics of Metaphor* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) p. 116; and *Metaphoric Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) p. 91.

4. Levin, *op. cit.* p. 104.

5. Levin, *op. cit.* p. 119.
6. Such documents already existed and are, in fact, cited in the Bible as sources. See Shimon Bakon, "Biblical Historiosophy," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 27:3 (July - September 1999) pp. 159-160.
7. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), p. 408.
8. Heschel, pp. 405-406; Solomon Mandelkern, *Concordance on the Bible* (New York: Shulsinger Brothers, 1955) p. 711 (originally published 1896); Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1971), p. 868 (originally published 1903).
9. Heschel, p. 389.
10. Heschel, p. 275.
11. The NIPS translation "terror from God" mirrors the Hebrew. In contrast, Geoffrey Hunt, *About the New English Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 22, says the translators of the NEB strove for a text "as intelligible to contemporary readers as the original was to its first readers." The NEB therefore has "panic-stricken," apparently an attempt to make the meaning transparent to a modern reader. This obviously loses the import of the Hebrew.
12. E.g. Exodus 15:14-16: *Nations heard, they were vexed* [יָרְגוּזוּ], *agony* [חַיָּבָה] *seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were afraid* [נִבְהַלְלוּ]; *as for the heroes of Moab, trembling* [רָעַד] *seized them. The inhabitants of Canaan were in turmoil* [נִמְגַּגוּ]; *terror* [אִי־מַחָה] *and dread* [דָּרָא] *fell upon them.*
13. The translation "You are the burden," found in the Septuagint, seems to presuppose a reading of אַתְּ מְשָׁא הָאֶתְּמָה instead of אַתְּ מְשָׂא מִהָאֶתְּמָה. However, Rashi gives the same interpretation without suggesting that it is an emendation.

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LIPPMAN BODOFF

The Hebrew Bible has remained fresh and relevant over the centuries, while the Oral Law interpreted, applied and expanded the written law of the Torah, and the Midrash explained, in ever new ways, Jewish theology and history, and Jewish ideas and values as embodied in the sacred texts.

An excellent illustration of this can be found in a comparison of the story of Jephthah in the text and its treatment in the Midrash. Jephthah, a "mighty man of valor," was called upon by the elders of Gilead<sup>1</sup> to defend Israel against the Ammonites. Jephthah tried to make peace with Ammon through diplomacy, and sent emissaries to plead Israel's cause, not once but twice. Each time, his peace overtures were rebuffed. Facing the need to do battle as a last resort, he swore an oath to God that, if he should be victorious, then *whatever . . . will emerge from the doors of my house . . . shall belong to God, and I shall offer it up as an olah, an elevation offering* [sacrifice] (Jud. 11:31).

To his chagrin, when he returned home from the battle the first to emerge from his house after his victory was his daughter, his only child. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried out: *'I have opened my mouth [with an oath] to God, and I cannot recant'* (v. 35). His daughter's response was to affirm her father's duty to make good on his vow, since he had returned victorious. She only requested a two-month respite in which she and her friends *could go and wail upon the mountains and weep over my virginity* (v. 37). He agreed, and two months later, upon her return, *he carried out the vow that he had vowed, and she never knew a man* (v. 39).

The rabbis of the talmudic era clearly could not let this text go without clarifying comment: Jephthah was not permitted to sacrifice his daughter, nor could he obligate her to participate in such a sacrifice. Yet, from as much as appears in

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the text, the sacrifice was not condemned, and presumably found Divine acceptance. Indeed, at least one modern scholar cites Jephthah in support of the argument that sacrifice of the firstborn remained a religious ideal long after the binding of Isaac. While noting the later rabbinic criticism of Jephthah, he emphasizes that ". . . the Bible seems not to fault him."<sup>2</sup>

The Midrash<sup>3</sup> condemns everyone associated with this tragedy. First, Jephthah, who made such a heedless, open-ended vow; who carried out the vow though he was not obliged to, since it required him to perform a sinful act; who, out of pride, did not go to Phinehas, the High Priest, to have the vow annulled. Second, Phinehas, who, out of pride, did not go to Jephthah to annul the vow. Third, the sages of that time, who failed to annul the vow because they had forgotten the law. Fourth, the Israelites of the time who, knowing what was about to happen, made no effort to stop the sacrifice because they were ignorant of the law.

The midrashic treatment of Jephthah's daughter (which gives her the name Shielah<sup>4</sup>) is in five parts. At first, she encourages her father to go through with the sacrifice so they can emulate the model of Abraham and Isaac; the father "who offered his son as a burnt offering," and the son who "consented gladly, and the offerer and the offered were both full of joy [over the sacrifice]."<sup>5</sup>

The Midrash goes out of its way to insert a reference to Abraham, eagerly preparing to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah, on at least two occasions when it is critical of others who choose to kill their children in ostensible conformance with God's will: in this case of Jephthah, and in the case of Mesha, King of Moab. Indeed, the Talmud cites Jeremiah for the view that God condemned child-sacrifice in these two instances and in the case of Abraham at the *Akedah*.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that, in their view, there is something wrong with any assumption that Abraham was willing and even eager to sacrifice his son, and in fact, the Talmud rejects this idea.<sup>7</sup>

The Midrash next portrays Shielah as grieving at having to die for no good reason. She was not the intended sacrifice of Jephthah but the mere victim of chance: such a sacrifice surely can have no religious significance. Indeed, "I fear, therefore, that I may not be an acceptable sacrifice."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that Abraham sacrificing Isaac continues to serve for her as a paradigm of piety, even though it is now unattainable.

In the third part of the midrashic treatment of Jephthah's daughter, God appears to her in a vision to disabuse her of the idea that her sacrifice by her father's hand could have any redeeming religious significance, condemning her father and the sages of his generation for failing to summon the wisdom and courage to nullify her father's vow and abort the sacrificial murder about to take place. Consoling, however, God assures Shielah that He will accept her soul at her request, as an innocent victim, "and your death shall be precious before My face all the time." For the Midrash, it appears, even a mystical dwelling with God's presence in heaven is but a consolation to an innocent victim, that cannot compare to avoiding the sacrifice of innocents to God, even as demonstrations of religious piety and conformance to God's will.

In the fourth part of the Midrash on Shielah, we read about her final thoughts and feelings as she wanders during the last two months of her life. She longs for the true joys to which she should aspire, not death and abiding with God, but the joys of life that she will be denied: a wreath of betrothal, a wedding, being outfitted in her wedding ornaments, scented with aromatic perfumes, and anointed with oils prepared just for her. She visualizes what she will experience instead: a grave as a bridal chamber, her garments eaten by moths and destroyed by worms.<sup>10</sup>

In the final part, she prays that she be killed by the beasts of the forest, clearly to prevent her father from carrying out his vow to sacrifice her, which she now realizes is a terrible obscenity.<sup>11</sup> But this prayer is not answered, and she goes to her death at her father's hand.

Is the midrashic condemnation of Jephthah completely without textual foundation? I do not think so. I believe that if we read carefully what the text of Judges tells us about Jephthah's remaining life after he sacrificed his daughter, we will find hints at his condemnation that are both awesome and enlightening.

Judges 12 tells of how Jephthah, previously so slow to go to war against Israel's foreign enemy, the Ammonites, rushes after his victory over them to initiate a civil war among the Israelites, in which Jephthah and his fellow Gileadites kill 40,000 from the tribe of Ephraim. It would appear that the sacrifice of just one innocent human, his own daughter, quickly hardened and desensitized Jephthah to the precipitate slaying of tens of thousands of his own people.

Soon thereafter, he died, and, the text tells us, he was buried in *cities of Gilead* (12:7). This odd reference to a number of cities, the Midrash tells us, is not a scribal error of some sort, but signifies that he died a horrible death -- his limbs atrophied and fell off one by one from his body, and were buried separately where each loss of limb occurred, as required by Jewish law.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the text and the Midrash together are telling us of classic manifestations of leprosy, the Divine punishment throughout the Bible for moral transgressions committed through improper speech and its destructive consequences.<sup>13</sup>

There was a tragic arc to Jephthah's life. He moved first from an ability to overcome a troubled early home life,<sup>14</sup> to become the leader of the tribes of Gilead. He then demonstrated patience and diplomacy with their enemies in attempting to reach a peaceful resolution of their dispute. This is followed by the gradual dissolution of his moral character, as he moved from irresponsible speech to overly zealous, inhuman dedication to fulfill a heedless vow that should not have been made and could have been nullified or even ignored.<sup>15</sup> Finally, he rushed to kill tens of thousands of his fellow Israelites without making any attempt to reach a peaceful solution with them.

Jephthah's tragedy thus comes full circle; from rejection and expulsion from his home, land and family, that would not accept him because of his problematic lineage, to rejection and expulsion in death -- a death in which, because of his strange, scattered burial, no part of his people or the land would have to acknowledge and accept him as their own.

A complex man, Jephthah had the opportunity to be a noble, pious, and wise savior and leader of his people. He ended as a tragic lesson for them, and all of us, to which not only Jephthah, but his family, the community, and its leaders all contributed.

#### NOTES

1. The region in Transjordan settled by the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Menasheh (Num. 32; Josh. 22:9, 15). Quotations are from the *Artscroll Tanakh*, Stone Edition (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996).

2. Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 16.

3. The Midrash consists of the exegesis of talmudic and other religious scholars of problematic language and silences in Scripture that seem inconsistent with Jewish tradition. It is found in the



Talmud, in separate midrashic compilations and other literature which grew over a period of a 1,000 years. In this article, I have relied primarily on the material in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vols. IV, pp. 43-47, VI, pp. 202-204 (Phila.: Jewish Publication Society, 1938-67). See also, Shalom Spiegel, "Introduction to *Legends of the Bible* by Louis Ginzberg," in *The Jewish Expression*, Judah Goldin, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) pp. 134-142.

4. She was so named by her father because she is the one who is demanded by God to be given to Him (from the Hebrew verb root שאל -- *sha'ol*). The Midrash recounts, in *Genesis R.* 60:3; *Tanhuma Behukotai*, sec. 5; *Tanhuma B. Behukotai*, sec. 7, that God condemns her father's obstinate refusal to even attempt to avoid her sacrifice, using the triple-phrased condemnation by Jeremiah of child sacrifice: *which I never commanded, never decreed, and which never came to My mind* (Jer. 19:5-6).

5. Ginzberg, Vol. IV, p. 44.

6. Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1967-93) pp. 78-9. The story of Mesha is in II Kings 3. See *B. Ta'anit* 4a, where the Talmud cites Jeremiah 19:5-6.

7. See *B. Ta'anit* 15a and *J. Ta'anit* 2:4 and the commentaries thereon in standard editions of the Talmud. See also, Radbaz (Rabbi David ibn Zimra), *Responsa*, No. 652 and my article, "The Message of the Prophet Elisha," *Midstream* (Feb./ March 1999) p. 10.

8. See reference in Note 5.

9. Ginzberg, Vol. IV, p. 45 and Vol. VI, pp. 203-204.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Genesis R.* 60:3. See also Ginzberg, Vol. VI, p. 46. Although some translators amend the text by inserting "one of the" before "cities" rather than using the literal translation followed by Artscroll, the latter – which I follow (see Note 1) – is backed by the Midrash and most of the classical commentators; see, e.g., Abarbanel (on 11:10); *Me'am Lo'ez* (on 12:7), and others that could be cited. See also Ralbag (on 12:7) and *Metzudat David* (in *Mikra'ot Gedolot* on 12:7), who also agree that Jephthah's limbs were scattered among various cities in Gilead, but after his death to honor him for saving them from Ammon! Radak (12:7) does not amend the text; he agrees with the Midrash but says that the "simple meaning" (*peshat*) is "in one of the cities". I don't see how one can accept his simple meaning without reading the text differently.

13. Numbers 12:10 and Deuteronomy 24:9.

14. Because his mother was a concubine, he was forced by his half-brothers to leave home and settle in a heathen district. This may explain his later willingness to engage in the heathen practice of child sacrifice. See Judges 11:1-3. See also Ginzberg, Vol. IV, p. 43, and Vol. VI, notes 106-107.

15. See discussion above. Similar cases of heedless vows to demonstrate righteousness are found in Genesis 31:25-35 and 44. The first, involving a rash oath by Jacob, had tragic consequences, resulting, according to the Midrash, in the death of his wife, Rachel, and the second, a similarly rash oath made by Joseph's brothers on the way home from Egypt, might well have had similar consequences, but for the sensible response of an Egyptian army leader. On Rachel's death, see *Artscroll Bereshit*, Vol. IV (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah Publications, 1979) pp. 1358-60.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSEPH'S AGRARIAN POLICY

ZVI RON

The biblical narrative of Joseph and his brothers has attracted much attention and commentary. Through many exciting situations, the Torah portrays Joseph as a person who rose from adversity to greatness, who retained his moral sense and belief in God in a strange environment, who was able to come to a reconciliation with his brothers and who ultimately became the savior and provider for his entire family.

There is one aspect of the narrative that is often overlooked; namely, the long description of the sale of the stored food to the Egyptians under the supervision of Joseph (Gen. 47:13-27). The Torah relates how Joseph first gathered in all the money of Egypt in exchange for food (v. 14). Once the money was depleted, Joseph sold the Egyptians food in exchange for their livestock (vv. 16-17) and their land (vv. 19-20). By the end of the process, Joseph had turned Egypt into a state where the king owned all the land, and the Egyptian farmers merely tenants who worked the land and turned over one-fifth of their crops to him (vv. 25-26). Pharaoh was then the absolute power in Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

It is not clear what this episode adds to the Joseph story and why it was considered important enough to be in the Torah. In the Talmud, Rabbi Shimon Ben-Lakish included this episode in his statement: "There are many verses which to all appearances ought to be burnt."<sup>2</sup> In other words, it does not have any obvious significance to us. If anything, this part of the Joseph story seems to the modern reader to detract from the positive aspects of Joseph's character, and instead portrays him in a negative way. He acts as a ruthless and insensitive ruler, cynically using the famine to increase the power of the Pharaoh at the expense of the people. I hope to show what the significance of this section is, as Rabbi Shimon Ben-Lakish concluded that these verses "are really essential elements in the Torah."

The traditional commentaries see this narrative as either demonstrating Joseph's compassion for his brothers or his administrative brilliance as a governor

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of Egypt. Rabbi Shimon Ben-Lakish's own opinion, quoted by Rashi (on Genesis 47:21), is that this was all done by Joseph as a pretext for moving the Egyptians from place to place, once their land was owned by Pharaoh, thus making them all strangers and not locals. In this way, Joseph made sure that his brothers could not be taunted by Egyptians who would call them strangers, for now everyone in Egypt was a stranger. This story demonstrates Joseph's brotherly concern.

In a similar view, the *Or Hachaim*, a commentary by Rabbi Chaim Ben-Attar, maintains that Joseph did all this so that his brothers would not be seen as poor by the wealthy Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> Joseph depleted the wealth of Egypt so that his brothers would not be seen as being on a lower level than the Egyptians. The *Or Hachaim* thus explains why Joseph insisted on taking livestock as payment only once all the money was gone. By having the Egyptians hold on to their animals longer, they had to spend more on food for their animals, thus reaching abject poverty that much faster.

Obviously, it is difficult to imagine that Joseph turned Egypt upside down just so that his brothers would not be teased or shamed by the Egyptians. The commentaries attempt to fit this narrative in with the theme of Joseph caring for his brothers and family, but, interestingly, the Torah itself makes no comment to that effect. The narrative does not connect Joseph's policies on the famine to his brothers at all. Rather, it seems to be an objective reporting of Joseph's style of government during the famine years.

The Ramban writes that this narrative was included in the Torah to demonstrate Joseph's great wisdom and loyalty to Pharaoh. It shows how Joseph cunningly came up with a way to give Pharaoh increased power over his subjects, at the same time demonstrating that Joseph did not keep any money or additional privilege for himself. He served Pharaoh honestly and wisely.<sup>4</sup> The Seforno also notes that this narrative demonstrates Joseph's loyalty and honesty.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to suggest another way of looking at this story, seeing it as the next step in the destiny of the people of Israel as revealed to Abraham at the Covenant of the Parts. God there told Abraham:

*'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance' (15:13-14).*

Joseph repeatedly referred to himself as simply an agent bringing about the will of God, specifically, that his family be saved from the famine and continue

to exist (45:7-9; 50:20). Joseph did not realize that he was also God's agent in bringing about the affliction of the people of Israel, as well as their eventual salvation.

The textual hint that links Joseph's policies to the oppression of the Israelites is in the concluding verse to this section: *And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they got their possessions therein, and were fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly* [ויפררו וירבו מאד] (47:27).

This verse foreshadows Exodus 1:7: *And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty* [פרו ורבו ויעצמו במאד מאד] *and the land was filled with them.*

This verse immediately precedes the rise of the new king over Egypt who was concerned that the children of Israel *Are too many and too mighty for us* (Ex. 1:9), motivating him to begin oppression of the Israelites.

This plan of the new Pharaoh could only have been carried out in an environment where the king had a tremendous amount of unchecked power. In fact, it was due to Joseph's clever manipulation of the famine resources and economy that the Pharaoh had just this kind of absolute power, giving a more ominous tone to the description of the new Pharaoh as one *who knew not Joseph* (1:8). This Pharaoh disregarded the crucial fact that it was only because of an Israelite that he now had the political power needed to carry out his scheme against the children of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

This view of Genesis 47:13-27, seeing it as describing how Joseph unknowingly laid the groundwork for fulfilling the destiny of the Israelites as revealed to Abraham, also explains Verse 22. Here we are told that the Egyptian priests were exempt from giving up their real estate and the consequent virtual slavery to Pharaoh. The Midrash notes that the Levites, the "Jewish priests," were similarly never enslaved.<sup>7</sup> Although the biblical text does not indicate that the Levites had a special sacerdotal status at this point in time, the Midrash takes for granted that the Levites did have a special role, even during the time of Jewish slavery in Egypt. According to Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky:

. . . Joseph prophetically established precedent that would later benefit Israel while it was in Egypt. By giving a privileged status to the clergy, Joseph established a precedent that made it possible for the Tribe of Levi – the Jewish "clerics" – to be exempt from the servitude to which the Egyptians later subjected the other tribes. This would ensure that there

would be a strong nucleus of people who kept alive the teachings of the Patriarchs.<sup>8</sup>

Equally as important, this precedent would allow Moses and Aaron, both Levites, the freedom to come and go at Pharaoh's court and petition him to free their brethren.<sup>9</sup> Joseph prepared the way for the future salvation of the Israelites as well as for their oppression.

The Talmud connects Joseph to yet another aspect of God's promise to Abraham at the Covenant of Parts, the promise that *Afterward shall they come out with great substance* (Gen. 15:14). Commenting on Genesis 47:14 *And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan*, the Talmud states that it was this money that the Israelites took out with them from Egypt during the Exodus.<sup>10</sup> While we need not accept this aggadic statement as the simple meaning of the text, it does indicate that the rabbis of the Talmud sensed that Joseph's actions in Genesis 47:13-27 would have far-reaching ramifications for the Israelites and their destiny in Egypt.

We have seen that far from being irrelevant, Genesis 47:13-27 actually describes an important step in the realization God's words to Abraham at the Covenant of Parts, and the future of the children of Israel. Joseph was acting as the agent of God in more ways than even he was able to fathom.

#### NOTES

1. The narrative of Joseph's agrarian policy has been treated from an historical perspective in Jonathan Steinberg's article "Joseph and Revolutionary Egypt" *JBQ*, XXVI (April-June 1998). My aim is to show how the episode is significant as part of the biblical narrative, the aim of which is not necessarily to record historical events but rather to detail God's special relationship to the patriarchs and God's plan for the Jewish people.

2. Chullin 60b

3. Or Hachaim 47:15

4. Ramban 47:14

5. Seforno 47:14

6. Or Hachaim (47:26) similarly relates the future oppression of the Israelites to Joseph's policies, in that the Egyptians complained that the Israelites were multiplying and becoming great because they were not enslaved to Pharaoh as the Egyptians were.

7. Midrash Shemot Rabbah 1:16.

8. Artscroll Stone Chumash, p. 267.

9. See Rashi Ex. 5:4.

10. Pesachim 119a.

# ECOLOGY IN THE BIBLE

BETH UVAL

There is no equivalent for the word “ecology” in the Bible. But the biblical tradition is rich in ideas on the relation between human beings and the natural world. This paper will be devoted to a biblical text that bears upon the complexities of this relation.

*When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are the trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced (Deut. 20:19-20).*

This regulation forbidding the destruction of trees near besieged cities appears among other laws relating to warfare in Deuteronomy 20. Deforestation was a common practice in ancient warfare. The attacking army would destroy the enemy's fruit trees and fields (which were planted outside the city walls and thus unprotected) in order to weaken their economic potential and hamper their ability to fight again in the near future. This tactic was probably used to pressure besieged cities into surrendering before they suffered such long-term damage.<sup>1</sup> An attacking army would not necessarily resort to destroying the trees that could help sustain its own soldiers unless the siege was protracted and additional pressure was necessary to force a surrender. The words “a long time” in the text suggest such a lengthy siege, and the law forbids destroying trees even in such a situation.

Rabbinic exegesis extended this law to a whole concept prohibiting wastefulness, called *bal tashhit* [do not destroy]. This is a variant of the phrase *לֹא-תַשְׁחִית* [*lo tashhit* -- you must not destroy] in Verse 19. Diverting the flow of a river to cause distress to a besieged city was also forbidden. If such tactics

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were prohibited even in war, then, by extrapolation, destroying anything that could be useful to others was forbidden during normal times. According to Maimonides, whoever burns a garment, breaks a vessel, destroys a building, stops up a spring, or destroys food violates *bal tashhit*. According to the Talmud, dropping a bottle on the street and leaving the pieces there breaks the law of *bal tashhit*.

One phrase in the Hebrew text of this biblical law stands out of its context: כִּי הָאָדָם עַץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבוֹא מִפְּנֵיךְ בַּמָּצוֹר -- in the above translation, *Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?* The law that defoliation is forbidden is clear without these intriguing words. The Hebrew syntax of this phrase, moreover, is difficult and ambiguous, and has given rise to differing interpretations.

Two of these interpretations were proposed by the classic medieval commentators Ibn Ezra and Rashi. According to Ibn Ezra, the Hebrew means "human life is the tree of the field" -- that is, human life is sustained by trees. This interpretation is reflected in the King James translation: "Thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege."

Rashi, on the other hand, interprets the same phrase not as a declarative statement but as a rhetorical question: "Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?" The New Jewish Publication Society translation above and most other modern translations reflect this interpretation. The trees are innocent bystanders and should not be involved in human wars. Anything else -- sheep, goats, cows, donkeys -- can be brought inside the city walls and shielded from attack. Grain can be cut and stored. But fruit trees cannot be moved and are thus unprotected.

This short Hebrew phrase, in its ambiguity and differing interpretations, encapsulates two poles of current environmental thinking on issues of preservation and development: the anthropocentric and the biocentric.<sup>2</sup> According to the former view -- reflected in the Ibn Ezra/King James interpretation, "the tree of the field is man's life" -- nature should be preserved because of its utility to human beings: Sustain the trees so that they will sustain us. According to the biocentric view -- reflected in the Rashi/NJPS interpretation, *Are the trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?* -- we should preserve nature because of its intrinsic value, whether it is useful to us or not. (Both biocentric

and anthropocentric elements appear in the Creation story. On the third day of Creation, all kinds of plants are created and are called good, regardless of their usefulness to humans. On the sixth day, when humans and animals are created, they are given the plants for food.)

The distinction in Deuteronomic law between fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing trees seems to point in the anthropocentric direction. It is the trees that are useful to people that must be preserved. Verse 19 states that *You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down*, indicating that the trees in question are fruit trees. And Verse 20 allows the cutting of trees that *do not yield food* for constructing siegeworks. (Siegeworks probably refers to fortifications built to prevent the besieged city from being resupplied with food, weapons, and soldiers; or equipment used by the attacking army such as ladders, ramps, and battering rams).

Both the biocentric and the anthropocentric aspects resonate within this text. The law seeks to limit destruction in wartime, the ultimate destructive situation. It is precisely in this context, when the most violent human impulses can explode (all too familiar in war), that savagery and vandalism need to be bounded and restrained. This ban on wanton destruction in wartime has particular force according to the biocentric interpretation: Even in your fervor to defeat the enemy, do not wield your ax against the trees; respect their right to live, regardless of human needs.

The anthropocentric view also bears important implications. The bond between people and trees is a reciprocal life-sustaining relationship: People plant and nurture the tree; the tree provides people with food. (Here, too, the Creation story comes to mind, in expressing this mutuality: The first human is put into the Garden of Eden *to till it and tend it* -- to care for the trees -- and, at the same time, is given every tree of the garden from which to eat [Gen. 2:15-16]). It is precisely in war, the ultimate life-destroying situation, that this life-sustaining and life-affirming relationship is to be preserved. There is always hope that the war will end, and future generations will eat from the tree.

Significantly, the law relates to fruit trees and not to grain fields. Wheat and barley are annual crops; they are sown and harvested every year. If a grain field is destroyed, it can be replanted the following year. But fruit trees represent the future. Fruit trees can produce for decades, and, in the case of the olive, even



centuries. Fruit contains the seeds that will produce tomorrow's trees. Destroying a fruit tree means destroying sustenance for many yet-unborn generations, and cutting off the potential for a long chain of life.

The Bible sees war as a necessary evil. Universal peace belongs to the redemption at the end of days. Read broadly, this wartime rule from Deuteronomy seeks to keep intact the Divine qualities given to human beings at Creation under the conditions that most threaten these qualities. Preserving the potential for life within the ultimate life-destroying context may bring us a tiny step closer to the time when every person will sit *under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid* (Mic. 4:4).

NOTES

- 1 Jeffrey H. Tigay, commentary on *Deuteronomy* (Phila., Jewish Publication Society, 1996).
  - 2 Jeremy Benstein, "Leave Nature Out of the War," *Jerusalem Report*, September 7, 1995, p. 32.
- The above article was reprinted from the Fall 1999 *Neot Kedumim News*, the quarterly newsletter of Neot Kedumim -- The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel. Located on 625 acres in central Israel's Modi'in region, Neot Kedumim is dedicated to exploring and demonstrating the ecological roots of the biblical heritage. Neot Kedumim welcomes individual and group tours (see visiting information below). Please contact Neot Kedumim for information on newsletter subscriptions (free of charge) and other Neot Kedumim publications.

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# IMPERATIVE VERBS FOLLOWED BY THE PREPOSITION *LAMED*: COMPULSORY OR PRECATORY?

HERBERT RAND

Translators are constantly wrestling with the task of interpreting a word or a phrase so as to arrive at a corresponding English word or phrase. One such problem is the two-word combination consisting of the preposition *lamed* (inflected for gender and number) preceded by an imperative verb. This article will consider several examples of such combinations to illustrate the problem.

## THE IMPLICATION OF URGENCY

לָךְ עֲשֵׂה (Gen. 6:14):

Translated literally, the command directed to Noah was '*make for thyself an ark*'. God was about to destroy the world and had determined to save Noah and his family to repopulate the earth. Here, the use of *lekha* in the expression does not convey the notion that Noah was being given a choice of whether or not to build the ark. He understood the urgency of the situation, so he did all that God had demanded of him (Gen. 6:22). Any option to disobey would have been the equivalent of the opportunity for suicide. A literal translation of that command would have meant that Noah was to build the ark for himself and not for his family, a contradiction of the rest of the text.

לֵךְ-לֵךְ (Gen. 12:1):

The verb *lekh* is not used here in the future tense nor in the infinitive mode nor is it softened in any other way so as to leave any doubt as to its urgency and imperative force.

God's plan for the inception and history of the People of Israel was about to unfold and Abraham had been chosen as His agent. He was ordered to begin the process by quitting Haran and moving to the land of Canaan.

In modern Hebrew usage, that two-word command (hereinafter "the phrase") is an idiomatic expression having the meaning of "Go away!" or "Scram." The ad-

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dition of *lekha* does not soften the mandatory character of the phrase but in fact serves to intensify the command. A literal word-for-word translation (such as "go for yourself from your country") ignores the meaning of the expression as a whole. Hamlet's words to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery," suggest a possible translation for the phrase such as "get thee out of thy country."

לך-לך . . . וּנְ-קַח (Gen. 22:2):

Here, we find three commands in a single verse. The first of them is couched in softer language: וּנְ-קַח [please take], immediately followed by the intense and harsh order, "Get ye hence," and the third command, given in the impersonal form of the infinitive, to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham understood the phrase לך-לך as a command and not as an option. He had heard the same phrase at an earlier stage of his life. Therefore, he made all preparations and rose early in the morning to start out with Isaac and two of his servants.

On sighting his destination, Abraham ordered his two servants to שְׁבוּ-לַכֶּם [stay], and remain there with the ass until his return with Isaac (Gen. 22:5). The preposition לַכֶּם following the imperative verb gave his servants no discretion as to whether or not to stay put, just as the command to Abraham from his Master called for absolute compliance.

The sense of the idiom לך-לך has an affinity to the expression in modern Scottish dialogue; "Haste ye back [or to] . . ."

לך-לך פִּטְסָה (Ex. 34:1):

After the original tablets had been smashed, God commanded Moses: *'Hew thee two tables of stone . . . and I will write upon the tables the words that were on the first tables . . . and be ready by the morning . . . to present yourself to Me on the top of the mount'.*

Here too, the two words were the expression of absolute command requiring prompt compliance. If pidgin English were the language of translation, the phrase could be expressed as: "Cut two tablets, chop-chop."

לך-כָּתַב (Ex. 34:27):

Here, Moses is commanded to write the words of the Covenant. The phrase is generally translated as *'Write thou...'*, a command and not an option.

Moses had already been commanded to hew two new tablets. The task of giving permanence to the record was urgent. The scene is prefaced with the words *'observe that which I am commanding you this day'* (Ex. 34:11). To facilitate observance, a written Torah was needed.

לך-לךש (Num. 13:2):

This phrase constituted the command to Moses to send spies to view the fortifications and to describe the opportunities for forage in the land of Canaan, in anticipation of imminent invasion. That phrase is intensive and urgent as required by the situation.

The Hertz Commentary to that verse in the Soncino Edition of The Pentateuch says: "The Rabbis stress the word *lekha* (for thyself) and make it 'if thou wishest to send spies, do so.'" This would have turned the command into a diffident suggestion.

As the basis for their comment, the rabbis may have relied on Deuteronomy 1:22, wherein the people are said to have originated the plan to reconnoiter the land. The rabbis gave little or no weight to Verse 26, wherein Moses upbraided the people for rebelling against the commandment. Notwithstanding its note, the Soncino text translates that phrase as a positive command.

#### WHEN THE PHRASE IS NOT IDIOMATIC

Rabban Gamliel (Second Century C.E.) used to say: לך עשה [make for yourself] a teacher. Here, the phrase keeps the literal meaning in translation because there is no doubt as to its meaning (Pirke Avot: Perek 1: Mishna 16).

#### KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU STAND

Polite forms of command in the Bible often take into account the sensibilities of the addressee or the superior status of the person(s) being commanded.

When Moses petitioned God, he said: לך נא רפא נא [please cure her], when interceding on behalf of Miriam (Num. 12:13).

When the daughters of Zelophehad presented their petition for inheritance rights to a tribunal consisting of Moses, Eleazar the priest, the princes, and others attending, they said: תנה-לנו [give us our inheritance]. The grammatical form of that imperative verb, the second person masculine plural, would ordinarily be

the three-letter word *tenu*. The petitioners changed the final letter of the verb to the paragogic "ה" which served no grammatical function, but which gave elegance and grace to their request. (Num. 27:4).

In his entreaty, in the imperative form, to God (the Ultimate Authority), Moses added a paragogic "ה" to the verb rendering it קוּמָה [*arise*]; the verb in the next verse became שׁוּבָה [*return*], and the command as a whole became respectful (Num. 10:35, 36). Those verses have been included in the Siddur in the Torah service.

#### CONCLUSION

Traditional syntax has a limited place in the search for the meaning of the imperative phrase. The sentence level within its broad context, as well as any relevant, idiomatic Hebrew expressions, and the relations between the parties, must be taken into account in determining what the text is trying to communicate.

This article is not exhaustive. It is intended to point the direction for further study.

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## **BREAD ON WATER**

**LARRY MAGARIK**

Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) advises:

*Send your bread on the surface of the water so that you will find it in many days. Apportion it in seven and also in eight because you do not know what evil will be on the land (Eccl. 11:1-2).*

Consider three interpretations.

According to Saadya Gaon, Kohelet advises a farmer to seed on wet ground to produce a successful crop. Verse 2 alludes to the seventh and eighth months, a planting season; sowing twice is suggested as a reasonable precaution.

The modern scholar Robert Gordis<sup>1</sup> interpreted Kohelet as advising his urban students to ship goods at sea for profit. Verse 2 suggests dividing merchandise among ships to reduce risk of loss.

In the midrashic reading, *sending bread on water* is a metaphor for kindness for which one will later be rewarded – i.e., a moral investment. Verse 2 stresses generosity.

Saadya and Gordis sought to determine the "original intent" of the text, and their readings appear to be in the realm of *peshat*. However, there is no bright

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line of distinction between *peshat* and *drash*. In this case, no strictly literal reading is even possible. Why would anyone throw bread on water? After many days, one could at best retrieve soggy refuse. Saadya's "seed" is actually a figurative translation of bread. Gordis reads the passage as a metaphor for diversified investment, since bread itself is not a suitable commodity for maritime trade.

The midrashic reading (Kohélet Rabbah 11:1) is elaborated by tales of sages who acted kindly and were later rewarded in various ways: Bar Kappara helps a shipwrecked Roman and later is able to appeal to the Roman, who has become governor, to free imprisoned Jews. Before boarding ship, R. Akiba buys a loaf for a beggar. When the ship is wrecked at sea, the waves toss him to safety on shore.

And so on. These stories have great charm. Some reflect a fatalism, as if to say: You never know what luck may bring. Do they suggest that "what goes around comes around" in line with the general "existentialism" of Kohélet?<sup>2</sup>

A modern midrash by Hugh Nissenson is instructive.<sup>3</sup> The narrator's father had a custom of inviting a homeless beggar for Shabbat dinner. In the winter of 1912, when the boy was 12, his mother became severely ill and was hospitalized. His father nevertheless invited a ragged, emaciated man for Shabbat. As the pauper snored, snug and warm, neither father nor son could sleep out of worry for the mother. The boy said:

"...I feel much better now."

"Do you? Why?" [asked the father]

"Because Mama will get well."

"How can you be so sure?" [asked the father]

"You said so yourself."

"Did I? When?"

"You said charity saves from death."

"What's that got to do with Mama?"

"Everything" [the boy replied]

[The father] suddenly raised his voice. "Is that what you think a *mitzvah* is? A bribe offered the Almighty?"

"But you said so. You said that charity saves from death."

[The beggar] groaned in his sleep.

"No, not Mama," my father said in hoarse voice, "Him."

The sages, too, were puzzled by the dilemma expressed in this father-son interchange. The Pharisees posited a system of merit yet challenged reward as the appropriate motivation.<sup>4</sup> Rabban Gamliel enjoined us to do God's will so that God will do our will, and R. Tarfon held that the work is vast but the reward great. Yet Antigonus of Socho said we should serve without expectation of reward, and Ben Azai held that the reward of a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*. (Avot 2:4, 2:20, 1:3 and 4:2).

If Kohelet advocates kindness to secure a subsequent benefit, he is hardly moral. The unexpected nature of the rewards in the midrashic examples suggests that generosity yields advantage, but not one sought. Kindness may thus be its own benefit.

#### NOTES

1. R. Gordis, *Kohelet: The Man and His World* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951) p. 333.
2. Life as a "revolving wheel" also appears elsewhere in midrashic literature, see e.g., Ruth Rabbah 5:9.
3. H. Nissenson, "Charity," in H. Nissenson, *The Elephant and My Jewish Problem: Selected Stories and Journal 1957-1987* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988) p. 75.
4. Travers Herford, *The Pharisees* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924) pp. 123-135.



## THE 37th INTERNATIONAL BIBLE CONTEST FOR JEWISH YOUTH

JOSHUA J. ADLER

The *Hidon Hatanakh* is held every year in Jerusalem on Independence Day, and is sponsored by a number of organizations, including the Jewish Agency and the Jewish Bible Association. This year, 60 young people came from 32 countries to participate in the Contest. They also spent two weeks touring the country, and meeting with religious and government leaders.

As usual, the Contest was broadcast on television and radio. The news media - also as usual - overlooked the real values reflected in the event and focused extra attention on the fact that there were two contestants from Zimbabwe, a country which at the time was in the news because of attacks on white farmers. (Last year, during the Kosovo war, the press gave similar special attention to a girl from Serbia.)

It should be noted that the Education Corps of the Israel Defense Forces is in charge of the contest. That a nation's military should devote attention and resources for such a purpose is surely unique to Israel. This year, the new commander of the Education Corps is Brigadier-General Eliezer Stern, a graduate of the Netiv Meir religious high school in Jerusalem.

For some 30 years, the chief judge had been Dr. Yosef Burg, who passed away in the fall of 1999. This year, the Contest was dedicated to his memory, pictures recalling the life of this special person were displayed for the audience at the Jerusalem Theater and television viewers. Dr. Burg's place as chief judge was taken by his son Avraham Burg, former head of the Jewish Agency and present Speaker of the Knesset. His father would have been proud of the way he filled the role.

In the preliminary contest for Diaspora students, held in Netanya, first place was shared by Bracha Bienenfeld of the United States (NJ) and Jacob Sinko of Mexico. In the finals in Jerusalem, the winner was Sarah Rachel Mahalo of

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Beersheba. A trend of recent years was continued this year: There were more girls than boys, and girls took five out of the six top places. The female contingent included girls from high schools in both Israel and the Diaspora that are not Zionest oriented. Perhaps, the reason for this may be that in such schools the girls study Bible while the boys study Talmud.

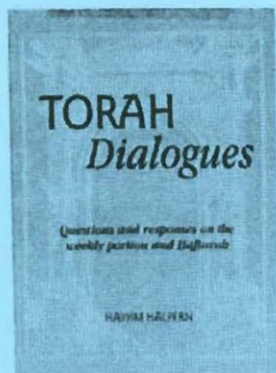
All communities in the Diaspora would do well to give their students the opportunity to be represented in the International Bible Contest for Jewish Youth.

For further information, inquire of a local representative of the Jewish Agency, or write to Yitzhak Ben-Ari, Department of Jewish Zionist Education, POB 92, Jerusalem, Israel.

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