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דפוס רפאל חיים הכהן בע"מ, ירושלים

# LADY ASENATH

BY SOL LIPTZIN

Asenath is mentioned only three times in the Bible. Yet many are the legends that posterity wove about her.

Genesis 41: 45 records that when Pharaoh elevated Joseph to be viceroy over all the land of Egypt, he changed Joseph's name to Zaphenath-paneah and gave him as wife Asenath, daughter of Poti-phera, who was priest of On.

The name Asenath has been interpreted as meaning one who belonged to Neith, an Egyptian goddess. Poti-phera, who was a priest, is not to be confused with Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain, at whose home Joseph served before his imprisonment and whose wife sought to seduce him. However, because of the similarity of names, legends and literary versions later found ingenious ways of combining Potiphar and Poti-phera into a single character. On was later known as Heliopolis, the city of Sun-worship.

A second reference to Asenath, Genesis 41:50, records that unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phera, Priest of On, bore unto him.

The third and final reference appears in Genesis 46:20. In listing the descendants of Jacob, we are again told that unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phera, Priest of On, bore unto him.

Although the life of Joseph is narrated in far greater detail than that of any other character in the Book of Genesis, these three meager references are the only ones that refer to his wife and the mother of his children. Of the two Egyptian women who had the greatest influence upon the Hebrew slave who ended up as Viceroy in Egypt, much space is given only to the temptress, the wife of his master, whose charms he so strenuously resisted. Though nameless in the Bible, she surfaces in literature and folklore under many appellations. On these, the most popular were Zuleika and Sephira.

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#### MORE THAN A SHADOWY FIGURE

The apocryphal *Testament of Joseph*, the historian Josephus, Talmudic sages, early Church Fathers, Arabian and Persian poets, medieval chroniclers, renaissance painters and playwrights, Baroque novelists, modern lyricists, and contemporary writers and musical composers have vied in glamorizing the fierce passion of the alluring woman so tragically involved with the noble, implacably chaste Joseph. In comparison with her vivid, strong-willed, resourceful personality, Asenath in the biblical narrative is but a shadowy figure, apparently without a will of her own, a mere chattel handed over by the ruler of Egypt to his Hebraic favorite as an additional reward for correctly interpreting the two dreams of the fat and lean cows and the plump and lean ears of corn. Popular imagination, however, refused to reconcile itself to such an unromantic, self-effacing role for the mother of the two powerful tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Hence, when Asenath emerges from obscurity at the beginning of the common era, she too is invested with a vivid personality, as tall as Sarah, as charming as Rebecca, as beautiful as Rachel, and even more strong-willed than her earlier rival for Joseph's affection.

It was in Jewish-Hellenistic circles that legends of Asenath were most widespread and were taken over by the earliest Christian writers. It is true that the *Testament of Joseph*, which probably dates back to Maccabean times and which is the most fascinating of the twelve testaments of the sons of Jacob, goes into great detail in narrating the many unsuccessful efforts of Potiphar's wife to break down the resolute resistance of the chaste Joseph, and that Asenath is there mentioned only as the woman he married and whose body he enjoins his sons to bury near the grave of Rachel, their grandmother. However, by the beginning of the Common Era, Asenath stories must have circulated among the Jews, especially in the large Egyptian diaspora. There are records of eighty-four medieval manuscripts on the marriage of Joseph and Asenath. Not all of them have survived but those that did survive in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Old Slavonic and other languages apparently all go back to a common source, a *Joseph and Asenath* romance of the early centuries of our era.

#### ASENATH LEGENDS DOWN THE AGES

Christoph Burchard, in his *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Asenath*, 1965, analyzed these manuscripts and proved that the European vogue of this romance

before the invention of printing and during the centuries soon thereafter was in largest measure due to the Latin version of Vicenz of Beauvais (1190–ca.1264), included in his *Speculum Historiale*, ca.1260, a history of the world from creation until the mid-thirteenth century. This history was the principal source for translations and adaptations of Asenath stories in French, English, German, Dutch, Norse, Danish, Czech, and Polish manuscripts and the earliest printed versions in fifteenth century France and sixteenth century Germany.

The original romance, stripped of its later Christian accretions, may be summarized as follows:

In the ancient city of Heliopolis there lived a priest named Pentephres, who was the chief of Pharaoh's satraps and who presided over the worship of the Sun-God. He was exceedingly rich and wise and gentle, and he had a daughter Asenath, who was more beautiful than any maiden on earth. On attaining to the age of eighteen, she was wooed by many lords and princes, including the firstborn son of Pharaoh. She, however, scorned all men and disdained even to look upon them. She dwelt in a tower overlooking the priestly dwelling. This tower contained ten chambers, of which seven housed seven virgins, playmates of her own age, and the other three her precious belongings and her idols. Her innermost chamber had three windows that looked out toward the east, the south and the north.

#### JOSEPH – A FITTING BRIDEGROOM

Now it came to pass in the first of the seven years of plenty that Pharaoh sent Joseph to go round all the land of Egypt in order to gather the corn for the royal granary. And when Joseph came to Heliopolis, Pentephres prepared a great feast for him and suggested to his daughter that this wise and influential favorite of Pharaoh would be a fine bridegroom for her. When she heard this, she was greatly angered that an alien, the son of a shepherd, a former slave who lay with his mistress and was cast into the prison of darkness, should now, after his turn of fortune, be considered as a fitting mate for her. She fled to her chamber in the tower when Joseph's chariot neared the gate of her father's house and she alone failed to welcome him. However, when she looked out of her tower-window and beheld his great beauty, she regretted her hasty, evil words about him. Surely, she thought, he must be a son of God, for who among men could ever beget such beauty and what womb of woman give birth to such radiance. When Joseph es-

pied her peeping out of her lofty window, he at first thought of her as another siren out to lure him. But Pentephres assured him that the maiden was his daughter, a virgin who hated every man. In that case, said Joseph, let her descend and I will look upon her as my sister. Asenath was fetched by her mother, who told her to kiss him as a brother. But Joseph said that it was improper for him to kiss or be kissed by a strange woman who was an idol-worshiper. When the eyes of the maiden were filled with tears at these words, Joseph pitied her and blessed her in the name of the Lord, the God of his father Israel.

#### A FACE AS RADIANT AS LIGHTNING

On the following day Joseph left Heliopolis but promised to return on the eighth day after completing his collection of corn for Pharaoh. Asenath retreated to her chambers, put off her magnificent robes, girded her loins with sackcloth, sprinkled ashes over her head, broke into fragments all her gods of gold and silver, and fasted for seven days. On the eighth day of her abasing herself, she prayed to the God of the Hebrews, the Lord of mighty Joseph. And when the Lord God heard her confession and saw her penitent humility, he sent to her his Archangel Michael, who resembled Joseph save that his face was as lightning. Michael made known to her that God was giving her to Joseph for a bride. From her tower, the Archangel vanished and appeared to Joseph with the same message.

Before the eighth day came to an end, Joseph was back in Heliopolis. And now he kissed Asenath for the first time and gave her the spirit of life, then a second time and gave her the spirit of wisdom, and a third time tenderly and gave her the spirit of truth. Then he left to ask the consent of Pharaoh, who was like a father to him. And Pharaoh made a wedding for Joseph and Asenath and a feast that lasted seven days.

When the seven years of plenty passed and the second year of famine came, Jacob and his kindred settled in Goshen and the aging patriarch blessed his daughter-in-law. But when Pharaoh's firstborn son saw Asenath, his love flared up and he plotted to kill Joseph and to take her to wife. Unable to induce Simeon and Levi to ally themselves to him, he conspired with Dan and Gad, who envied the good fortune of their younger brother. Besides, Pharaoh's son convinced them that Joseph intended to slay them after Jacob's death. He gave them two thousand men to ambush Asenath. These fell upon the six hundred

men who were with Asenath and cut them down but Asenath, with Benjamin at her side, succeeded in fleeing in her chariot. When Pharaoh's son sought to attack the chariot, Benjamin wounded him with a round stone and killed fifty men who were with him. The alerted sons of Leah slew the rest. Dan and Gad were spared when Asenath interceded for them, but Pharaoh's son died of his wound. Soon thereafter Pharaoh also died after bequeathing the throne to Joseph, who reigned as regent until Pharaoh's suckling son came of age.

#### ASENATH – DAUGHTER OF DINAH

Lovely as was this tale of Jacob's favorite son and the glamorous Asenath, it did not satisfy Jewish religious circles who could not grasp why the hero God chose to be the savior of Jacob and Jacob's descendants had to marry the daughter of a heathen priest, an idol-worshipping Egyptian maiden unrelated to the clan of Nachor, Terach, Abraham and Isaac. It is true that, like Ruth of Moab, she was converted to the God of Israel. Besides, her uprightness and sincere piety might compensate for her alien origin. And yet, how much more worthy of Joseph would she be if, like the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, she were somehow related from birth to the extended family! And so the legend arose that Asenath was indeed closely related, that she was the daughter of Dinah, the offspring of Shechem's deed of violence. This interpretation was taken over by *Targum Jonathan*, an Aramaic translation and commentary on *Genesis* completed no later than the seventh or eighth century and with greater elaboration by *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, an aggadic work of the eighth century.

#### SAVED BY THE INTERCESSION OF AN ANGEL

If Asenath was the daughter of Dinah, the question then arose as to how she got to Egypt and to the house of Poti-phera or Pentephres, priest of On. The answer arrived at was that her brothers wanted to kill Dinah for blemishing the family's honor but that the compassionate Jacob sent her away when her pregnancy was discovered or after she gave birth to a daughter. However, just as the son of Hagar was saved by the intercession of an angel, so too was the daughter of Dinah. According to one version, it was the Archangel Michael who carried the infant to Egypt and placed her where Potiphra would find her. The childless priest then brought her up as his daughter. Jacob had suspended an amulet around the infant's neck by which she was afterwards recognized. Ac-

cording to another version, Jacob did not send Dinah away into the wilderness, but she herself fled in fear of her life when she found herself pregnant. After giving birth to a girl, she exposed the infant and an eagle carried it off to Egypt, where Potiphera found it and adopted it as his own child. When Dinah, who had been restored to the family, later descended to Egypt with her father and her brothers, she recognized the swaddling clothes in which Asenath wrapped her child as those of her own exposed daughter.

In those versions in which Potiphera, priest of On, and Potiphar, chamberlain of Pharaoh's court, were combined into one person, this ancestry of Asenath could not be maintained. Another reason had to be found for God's designating her as a suitable mate for Joseph. The reason arrived at was that she was the person who saved Joseph from death again and again. As a relative of Potiphar, as a princess raised in his home, she became aware of the efforts of Potiphar's wife to entice Joseph. When Potiphar, in the first flush of wrath after hearing his wife's accusation, wanted to have Joseph killed, Asenath related to him a conversation she had overheard which aroused doubt as to the Hebrew servant's guilt. She succeeded in delaying Joseph's trial and she alleviated his lot during his imprisonment. Potiphar's wife continued to pursue Joseph with her advances, offering him release from prison. On being rejected by him, she tried to poison him, but Asenath again saved him and was, therefore, ultimately rewarded by becoming his wife.

#### MEDIEVAL NARRATIVES ABOUT JOSEPH

The chaste Joseph was a favorite character in the emerging European drama of the Middle Ages, especially in the sixteenth century. In these plays, the temptation scenes received the main attention and Asenath is only rarely mentioned.

The first long narrative about Joseph in Egypt, Grimmelshausen's *Keuscher Joseph*, was not published until 1667 and the first novel with Joseph's wife Asenath rather than Potiphar's wife Sefira as the principal womanly figure was the far longer narrative *Assenat* by the more elegant and more sentimental Philip von Zesen, which appeared three years later.

Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen (1610-1676) is today remembered primarily as the author of *Simplicissimus*, 1668, the finest German novel of his century. His tales of the adventures during the Thirty Years' War of the amoral, canteen-woman Courasche were dramatized by Berthold Brecht and



were a box-office success in the post-World War II era, especially in Eastern Europe. Far less known is Grimmelshausen's novel of the chaste Joseph, which appeared under the pseudonym of Samuel Greifnson and which experienced a second edition in 1671, a third edition in 1675, and the most recent edition in 1968. In 1670, there also appeared the supplementary narrative *Musai*, which dealt with the adventures of Joseph's faithful servant, an Elamite with a perfect knowledge of Hebrew, who acted as the Viceroy's Hebrew translator during the various audiences with Jacob's sons before Joseph revealed himself as their long lost brother. Asenath's questioning of this aged servant, who had been present at the sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites, about his own past life and about the customs and history of the various Asiatic peoples he encountered, as well as her revelations about the heathen gods she worshipped before her marriage to Joseph, were meant both to entertain and to edify readers.

#### JOSEPH'S BEAUTY IRRESISTIBLE

Grimmelshausen's main sources for his Joseph narrative included the Bible, aggadic commentaries on Genesis, Josephus, the *Koran*, and *Sepher Hayashar*. Asenath is introduced as the daughter of Potiphar, High Priest of Heliopolis, and a cousin of Selicha, wife of Potiphar, the third most influential person in the royal capital of Thebes, and the master of the slave Joseph. Asenath overhears Selicha luring Joseph and his dignified but resolute rejection of the temptress. When Selicha catches Asenath eavesdropping and cannot convince her that no woman can resist Joseph's beauty, she invites her to a party to which other gossiping women are also invited. In an elaboration and variation of a scene recorded in the twelfth Sura of the *Koran*, Selicha places a sharp knife near each plate and, at the end of the meal, she has a lemon served to each of her guests, promising a beautiful ring to the one who would be the first to complete peeling the fruit. While the women are busy with the peeling, she has Joseph enter dressed in a silk summer robe that half reveals and half conceals his lovely figure, and holding in his hands a water-pitcher and a basin. The women can not take their eyes off the fair slave. They cut their fingers with the peeling-knives, and Asenath most of all. She is wounded not only in her hand but also in her heart of hearts. Selicha thus proves that Joseph's beauty was indeed irresistible.

When Joseph was afterwards imprisoned, Asenath was the only one convinced of his innocence. She saved him from death, watched over him during his

imprisonment until the death of the frustrated Selicha, and then married him after his liberation and elevation. And the chaste Joseph satisfied himself with her as his only wife, although other great men of his time had an entire assortment of wives and concubines.

#### FROM EGYPTIAN IDOLATRESS TO HEBREW MATRIARCH

Philip von Zesen did not scruple to take over from Grimmelshausen many innovative interpretations and additions to the Joseph theme. To prove the greater accuracy of his own version, however, he gave a detailed account of his own sources and added 186 pages of explanatory notes. His sources ranged far wider than those of Grimmelshausen. He elaborated on *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and reproduced the greater part of the medieval adaptation of the pseudoepigraphic romance of *Joseph and Asenath*. As an aristocrat, Zesen was writing for a more elegant audience than the commoner Grimmelshausen. He characterized his novel as a tale of love, heroism, and statesmanship. He aimed to educate and enlighten his readers and hence included historical, mythological, political and religious material.

While Grimmelshausen stressed the unsuccessful efforts of the demonic Selicha to drag Joseph down into the swamp of sensuality, Zesen stressed the elevation of Asenath to the spiritual level of her noble Hebraic husband. Zesen stated, in his introduction, that he did not want to write merely another worldly love romance. Of such romances, there were more than enough, including the many translated from Greek, Spanish, Italian, French, and English. His book was rather designed as a moral tale based on Holy Writ, the story of an Egyptian idolatress who became a Hebrew matriarch, the biography of a maiden of noble birth, priestly upbringing, and chaste character. He lavished upon Asenath all the ideal attributes that harked back to the Age of Chivalry. At Asenath's birth, kings and priests blessed her. After the infant was brought to the sanctuary of Heliopolis, the Archbishop of the Sun-God suggested that she be kept apart from the ordinary ways of the world, that she be raised by her nurse and attendants in an isolated castle, that she be given only girl playments of her own age but no male companions.

#### ASENATH'S CHARITABLE ROLE

The years pass. Joseph is brought as a slave to Egypt, is sold to Potiphar, is

tempted by Potiphar's wife Sefira, whom he resists. He is imprisoned and then restored to grace after the death of Sefira and the correct interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Heliopolis passes away and Potiphar is chosen to replace him, thus bringing him from Memphis, the royal capital, to the Heliopolis shrine adjoining Asenath's tower. When the Viceroy Joseph comes on a mission to Heliopolis, Archbishop Potiphar receives him as befits Pharaoh's favorite and the story continues as in the medieval romance of *Joseph and Asenath* until the death of Pharaoh and the assumption of the regency by Joseph. The concluding Book VII spins the story further. It recounts Asenath's charitable role during the years of famine, her great love for the oppressed and the needy, her nursing the sick, her interceding with her husband in behalf of the poor. Her fame spreads throughout all Egypt. Everyone praises her wisdom and, after her death, she is worshipped as Isse or Isis, the Goddess of Wisdom.

Joseph lived on until the news reached him in his one hundred and tenth year about the misfortunes that overtook his relative, the mighty, prosperous and upright Job of Uz. This affected him to such an extent that he fell ill and failed to recover. After his death, the Egyptians also added him to their pantheon. Reversing the letters of his name, they worshipped him as the deity Apis. The fame of Joseph and Asenath survived long after the destruction of the Egyptian and the Hebrew states. They are still renowned and they will be remembered until everything will meet its ultimate end.

#### YIDDISH VERSIONS

The tales of Joseph, appealing to the romantic imagination, were less in vogue and of a poorer quality in the rationalistic eighteenth century than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even the dramas of Klopstock's talented Swiss disciple Johann Jacob Bodmer in 1754 and of the English religious lyricist and playwright Hannah More in 1782 are mediocre. The Joseph-tales evoked a greater interest in the nineteenth century. Throughout Eastern Europe Joseph-plays were performed by amateur, Yiddish-speaking actors and were exceeded in popularity only by the Purim plays centering about Queen Esther, the biblical character that was elevated to greater heights even than Joseph. Most nineteenth century Yiddish versions were based on Eliezer Favir's translation in 1801 of the Hebrew drama by the Maggid Hayim Abraham ben Arye Leib Hacoheh of Mohilev. The

Hebrew original, first published in 1797 and avidly read by the pioneers of Haskalah, experienced eight editions but the Yiddish version, which retained the Hebrew title *Gdolas Yosef* and which could be read by the less learned masses, especially women, experienced forty editions and adaptations. All forty are listed by the Yivo scholar Jacob Shatzky in Yivo's *Archiv far der geshikhte fun yidishen teater un drama* (I, 151-158), 1930.

*Gdolas Yosef* is also the principal source for *Mekhiras Yosef* by the folk poet Eliakum Zunser, published in 1874 and performed before large audiences throughout the Russian Pale by guilds of artisans in the manner of medieval morality plays, just before Abraham Goldfaden ushered in the Yiddish professional theater. In Zunser's version, Asenath is raised as the immaculate daughter of Potiphar and Suleika and only on the deathbed of the sinful temptress of Joseph does the pure maiden learn of her own true origin. That she is in reality the daughter of Dinah is confirmed by the amulet which Jacob bestowed upon her when he was forced to expose her.

#### THOMAS MANN'S JOSEPH

The most important twentieth century narrative about Joseph, a truly fictional classic, the four-volume *Joseph und seine Brüder*, by Thomas Mann, is disappointing in its recording of the Asenath-episode. Mann devotes an entire volume to the temptress, the wife of Potiphar. He goes into great detail in tracing her many wily efforts extending over three years to break down the resistance of the chaste Joseph. He is most meticulous in portraying the gradual deterioration of her character under the influence of her overwhelming passion. To Asenath, however, Mann devotes only a few pages and these describe her physical appearance as a typical Egyptian beauty and dismiss with hardly a comment her placid, mirrorlike personality untouched by searing passion, fierce hatred, or other powerful emotions.

Mann puts no credence in the legend of Asenath as the daughter of Dinah. The requirement that the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim had to be of pure Hebrew stock in order to satisfy the vanity of the biblical people, the doctrine that the marriage of Jacob's son to the daughter of an Egyptian priest constituted racial defilement, reminded Mann of the current Nazi myths that he detested. Besides, even if such a legend had a basis in truth, then Asenath would still be only half-Hebraic, the offspring of a Baal-worshipping father and of Jacob's daughter, even

as Mann's own children stemmed from a father who was the son of a Lübeck patrician and a mother who was the daughter of a Jewish professor. Such unions of so-called Aryans and non-Aryans, or Egyptians and Hebrews, were not, in Mann's opinion, misalliances.

Mann, therefore, prefers to accept the biblical statement that Joseph's wife was of Egyptian parentage, the true daughter of the priest of On, whose name, Potiphar, resembled accidentally that of Joseph's early master.

#### THOMAS MANN'S ASENATH

Mann's Asenath is a gentle, kind, obedient child, submissive to the will of her parents and of Pharaoh. Growing up in the vicinity of her father's temple and surrounded by priestly and aristocratic maidens as her playmates, she retains her virginal, immaculate traits until in her seventeenth year the messenger of Pharaoh comes to her father and demands that she be handed over to Joseph. The Egyptian marriage customs are recorded by Mann as a sumptuous festival but he loses interest in Asenath after her wedding. She will undoubtedly remain a faithful, pliant, self-effacing wife, accepting her lot as God-ordained and causing no problems for her husband or the seventy members of her father-in-law's family when these descend to Egypt.

Down the centuries the temptation by Potiphar's wife has been depicted as the central test of Joseph's character and indeed as the central experience of his life, leading to his downfall and imprisonment but also to his elevation to power and to his glorious role as the savior of his Hebraic clan. Potiphar's wife, in her ever changing wiles and ever more adroit seductive efforts, has been the favorite heroine and villainess in the many narratives and dramas on the Joseph theme. Immaculate Asenath, on the other hand, pales beside her. Apparently, her goodness of character, her nobility of soul, her impeccable moral behavior, her unquestioning submission to the authority of father, husband, and king fail to inspire the biblical chronicler and most later writers. The romantic fairy princess may be the most desirable mate for which a mere mortal longs but she does not possess any of the human frailties upon which the literary imagination longs to dwell. □

## THE HAND AT THE DOOR

Songs of Songs 5:4 – שלח ידו מן החור

BY CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

The Song of Songs has a beautiful description of the emotional plight of two lovers whose deep love and longing for each other are in conflict with their moral standards.

She: I sleep, but my heart waketh, Hark! my beloved knocketh.

He: Open to me, my sister my love . . .

She: I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?

I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?

My beloved put in his hand *by the hole in the door* – שלח ידו מן החור

And my heart was moved for him.

I rose up to open to my beloved, I opened to my beloved,

But my beloved had turned away and was gone.

My soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought him but could not find him,

I called him but he gave me no answer.

Song of Songs 5:2-6

### SHE SLEEPS BUT HER HEART WAKETH

She sleeps, but not the deep sleep of one who is totally relaxed. She sleeps, but her "heart waketh." Her emotions keep her in a state of semi-sleep so that she is aware of outside stimuli. She hears a sound and she becomes fully awake because it is her beloved calling. He begs her to let him in but she, thinking it improper, or perhaps just to tease him, finds an excuse for not opening the door.

At this point the action, as seen through the eyes of almost all commentators and translators, becomes confused and incomprehensible. "He puts his hand in at the door" – Why? To open the door himself despite her excuse? Then he would have opened it, since she raised no objections. No. The commentators have a dif-

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ferent answer. He shows her his hand and as she sees it, strong emotions of love are aroused in her (see Rashi and particularly the Metsudot). Overcome with emotion, she opens the door for him, but he, an outraged lover, refuses to enter (Rashi on v.6).

Levinger in "Shir Hashirim" attributes his leaving before she opened the door to the slowness of her decision to open it and to her fumbling because of that indecision. This is not the idyllic picture of two lovers deeply in love with each other, and certainly not the one intended by the author if we are to judge by the descriptive phrases surrounding the actions.

Let us have a closer look at the crucial verse 4. He puts his hand in by the aperture in the door. What kind of opening was it? Since the Hebrew text nowhere mentions a door, it is assumed to be a) a vent in the wall (Rashi), b) a hatch between two doors (Ibn Ezra), c) a bore through which a woman can look out without being seen (Lehrman in Soncino Bible), d) a puncture through which one may put his hand in to lift the latch from the inside (H. Graetz, i.e. Salomonisches Hohelied), or e) an indentation in the door which served as a knocker. Either of the last two guesses is probably correct since the reference to "the hole" seems to refer to something common and well known, and not something out of the ordinary.

#### MEANING OF שלח ידו

*He sent his hand* — שלח ידו — is explained: "he stretched out" — הושיט. The ordinary word for "stretching" or "putting out one's hand" is נטה (Exodus 9:14) or, in later Hebrew, הושיט (Esther 4:11). Whenever שלח יד is used there is always a follow-up action. "And Israel stretched out his hand" (Genesis 48:14) — וישלח ידו — is followed by "and he laid it on Ephraim's head." Otherwise שלח יד is used with a preposition. When followed by ב it means: to affect someone or something adversely; e.g. שלח ידו במשיח ה' — "he put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed" (Isaiah 29:9), or "on the spoil they laid not their hand" לבזו לא בבוז (Esther 9:16). When used with אל a definite object is mentioned or implied: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad" — אל תשלח ידך אל — (Genesis 22:12) — הנער. In either case there is an object to the action of the outstretched arm.

The combination — שלח ידו מן — "he put out his hand *from*" (5:4) is found nowhere else in the Bible, neither do we find the word מן ever used as "through" as interpreted by the commentator. Ibn Ezra tries to explain it by saying that

from her point of view she saw the hand coming from the vent inside.\* שלח ידו מן must mean: "he took his hand away *from*." Lehrman hints at it in his comment in the Soncino Bible: "withdrew his hand." Jastrow in his "Song of Songs" arrives at the same conclusion but claims that a slight emendation is necessary.

#### TO PLEASE THE OTHER

In the light of the above, let us take another look at the selection, going back to the first paragraph: The lover knocks and simultaneously puts his hand through the opening, ready to go in as soon as she will permit it. When she modestly or coyly refuses, he takes her "no" for a final answer, and respecting her modesty, removes his hand and leaves. In her great love for him and knowing of his love for her, she has second thoughts. Her "heart was moved for him;" she knows how he felt when he reluctantly left since she felt the same. She "opened the door for her beloved . . . but he was gone." She remembered his pleading and she wants very much to hear his voice again, but alas, he is gone. She "called but he did not answer." Her love does not let her relax, but she must go in search for him.

By changing the outstretched hand to a withdrawing hand, we obviate the need of explaining it at the vagaries of a dream, or by portraying an outraged lover ready to hurt his beloved for refusing him. We have, instead, the tribulations of two lovers each of whom wants to do what would please the other most. It is a phase of ideal and idyllic love that is in keeping with the spirit of the rest of the book.

\* The use of מן — *from* — in מצריך מן and משגיח מן (Song of Songs 2:9) poses no problem. Where the major point of interest is on the subject, the preposition *from* is used, and *through* or a similar preposition is used when it is on the object. Therefore one always "watches *from*" a vantage point. However one "peers *from*" if our interest is on the one who does the peering as in "Eve the scout from her cabin's loophole peep" (Milton). When the focus is on what one sees, then "peers *through*" is used. "Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish" (Kipling). Since the emphasis in our verse is on the lover, as the Revised Version seemed to feel by the translation, "he showeth himself through the lattice," the J.P.S. version should have read "he peereth *from* (instead of *through*) the lattice."







# SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

BY MAX PUSIN

This presentation is an attempt to apply the techniques of modern psychological analysis to the events of Abraham's life as they are recorded in Chapters 11 to 25 in Genesis. I believe that a complete psychological analysis of Abraham is not possible and I will not attempt it. I will limit myself to an analysis of Abraham in the role of a father. All I hope to accomplish is to provide a few, fresh insights into Abraham's character, a little deeper appreciation of the motivations behind his actions, and, perhaps, some new understanding of the recorded events of his life.

In our great tradition, Abraham gave us our God; he gave us our first stake in and our abiding love for the land of Israel. In a real sense he was the first Zionist; he handed down to us our covenant with God, which has bound us one to another for nearly 4,000 years. He fathered our people, he is אברהם אבינו, our father Abraham. And he gave us the rite of circumcision. Nor can we ever forget that he is the hero of what many feel to be the supreme story of the entire Tanakh, — the Akedah. Considering these vast contributions, the smallest new insight into this figure of towering importance would be achievement enough.

In preparation, I first reread the Abraham account in the original Hebrew, unencumbered by the layer upon layer of translations and commentaries that now envelop and muffle them. I wanted the wonderful chapters to speak to me directly; I sought to recapture the old charm, to regain the original feelings that these stories were able to evoke when I was a child.

## ABRAHAM A MAN OF EXTREME SENSITIVITIES

Having done so, I came away with a few, definitive, overall impressions. First of all, Abraham seemed to me a man capable of the intensest of feelings and of

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extreme sensitivities. To have left the highly civilized, comfortable urban life of Haran and to have broken family ties in order to wander through a less civilized area where he was an alien, where he had no relatives and where he had to lead a semi-nomadic life, took the greatest courage and deepest devotion to a mission. Others in the Bible left home, but only when driven by famine, by fear of death, by being sold as slaves or when taken captive. Abraham, as far as we know, was driven by none of these dire necessities; he was driven only by some inner compulsion.

To have the audacity — in those believing times — to correct and argue with his God took the greatest daring on the one hand and the deepest feelings for justice on the other. To have nearly sacrificed his one and only child was a display of extraordinary religious zeal that still has the ability to send chills up and down my spine.

Another realization that I came away with was that he was a dreamer and a visionary. Thus, he hears the voice of God “in a vision” — במחזה (15:1); he falls into a state of trance — תרדמה (15:12), and a deep dark dread — אימה חשכה גדולה — falls upon him (ibid). All this suggests to me a man of such intense emotions that these can at times overwhelm him, can replace his regular, ordinary thinking, feeling, and action with special visions, divine messages, altered states of consciousness, and lead him to acts that seem to us to be extraordinary. Whatever else we shall discuss in this paper, we should remember this heightened intensity, sensitivity and depth of feeling which must have colored every thought, feeling and action of Abraham. In fact, his trances and deep passions reminded me of the ones described in the case of the early prophets, to so-called ecstatic prophets. In 20:7, Abraham is actually called a נביא — a prophet.

Another thing I noticed was the extraordinary preoccupation of the text with children. If frequency of reference were the only criterion, then this theme outweighed by far every other theme, even such important ones as inheriting the land and the covenant with God. Clearly we are dealing with a theme that is a central one to the whole life of Abraham.

#### TO HAVE A CHILD

The first reference to Abraham's fatherhood occurs immediately, in a terse passage in Chapter 11:30 — ותהי שרי עקרה אין לה ולד — *Sarai was barren, she had no children.*

In our day, of course, there are plenty of couples who are indifferent to having children, some who plan not to have any, and even some who would be dismayed if the wife were to conceive.

What was Abraham's reaction to his lack of children? In Chapter 15:1 one reads as follows: *After these events* (probably referring to the preceding war with the kings), *the Lord's word came to Abram in a vision, saying: Fear not, Abram,* (probably referring to fear of retaliation from the kings he helped to drive out – fear based on fewness in numbers), *I shall be a shield unto you, Your reward shall be very great.* But Abram replied: “*My Lord God, what can you give me, when I go about childless?*” – מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך ערירי.

He is saying to God: You tell me that my reward shall be very great. What reward, no matter *how* great, can you give me that can compensate for my continuing childlessness? Surely these are not the words of a man indifferent to his lack of children; this is certainly the cry of a tormented man to whom nothing in the world mattered more than having children.

In the following passages, some of the bitter practical consequences are spelled out: The one in charge now of his household was no kin; and, without children, an unrelated man will inherit everything. In God's opening words we see a third disability: living in fear of attack by more numerous enemies that is the lot of the few.

There is an irony in this matter. Just think of it: the man whose very name *Avram* means “Exalted Father,” whom we all call *Avraham Avinu*, “our father Abraham,” was unable to become a father!

In the agricultural and underpopulated times of antiquity, to have many children was the greatest blessing, and to have none was the greatest curse. Thus in Deut. 28:4, among the first of the blessings to be proclaimed on Mt. Gerizim was *ברוך פרי בטןך*, “Blessed will be the fruit of your womb,” while among the dread curses shouted on Mt. Ebal was *ארור פרי בטןך* (v.18), “Cursed will be the fruit of your womb.” The dreadful catalogue of curses in the *Tokhakha* end with the terrible threat, “and you shall be left few in number.” It was no accident, it seems to me, that the first of the 613 commandments given to man was *פרו ורבו*, “Bear ye fruit and multiply” (Gen. 1:28).

When the prophets needed a symbol for their despoiled city and land, they chose the symbol of the barren woman. Significantly, the Haftorah to the Torah portion wherein Sarai's barrenness is first mentioned begins with this very symbol:

לדה "Sing, O barren one, (referring to destroyed Jerusalem) who has not given birth." And God promises her that "כי רבים בני שוממה", "the children of the ruined one shall be more numerous" (Isaiah 54:1).

And when the Psalmist wants to sing of God's loving concern for man, he chooses God's concern for the impoverished and for the barren: "He raises the poor man up from the dust", מושיבי עקרה הבית אם הבנים שמחה, "He transforms the barren wife into a happy mother of children" (Ps. 113:9). Thus poverty and barrenness are considered equal scourges of mankind.

The very words עקרה and ערירי carry with them the connotations of ruin. עקרה is related to the root עקר whose meaning can be seen most clearly in Eccl. 3:2 where לעטע, "a time to plant" is followed by לעקור נטוע, "a time to root out (or, to uproot) what is planted." About ערירי, Rashi says: וערירי לשון חורבן, "and ערירי has the meaning of destruction." He gives as an example the shout of the bitter enemies who surrounded Jerusalem, in Ps.137: ערו ערו עד היסוד, "Raze her, raze her, to her very foundations." These two words, then, show the attitude of our forefathers toward childlessness. Now, this general attitude of horror and pity toward childlessness in ancient times, I am sure, made it psychologically difficult for the childless husband. It was a severe blow to his self esteem and his masculinity, and he thus became a subject of pity and derision.

#### VISIONS OF MANY CHILDREN

Men who long for children of their own but cannot beget them often have fantasies and dreams of having many children and grandchildren. The story of Abraham contains striking parallels to this phenomenon. For instance, Abraham receives repeated messages of having numerous offspring in visions and in trances such as in 15:5 where he is told: *Gaze into the skies and count the stars . . . if you can . . . so numerous will your offspring be.* And he believes (והאמין) in these messages firmly (15:6). In 13:16 he is told that his children will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. In 22:17 they are visualized as numerous *as the sands along the shore of the sea.* Furthermore, he hears repeated messages in which he will father whole nations. In 17:6 for instance, he hears the words: *And I shall make you exceedingly fruitful, and make you into nations, and kings shall emerge from you.* This message is repeated at least four more times. In fact, the obsession can also be seen in the change of his name to Abraham, which is explained in 17:5 in a

sort of folk-etymology as *כי אב המון גוים נחתיך*, *for I shall make of you a father of a host of nations*. It should be noted that he heard this idea of having innumerable descendants in a *מחזה*, a vision (15:1) and while in a trance, *תרדמה* (15:12), at a time when he did not even have one child!

#### THE LORD HAS PREVENTED ME FROM BEARING

Let us consider possible causes for Abraham's childlessness. In biblical times, there seems to have been one main cause considered for childlessness: God. This is clearly expressed by Sarai in 16:2: *הנה נא עצרני ה' מלדת* — *Look, the Lord has prevented me from bearing*. And when she finally conceives, it is because *the Lord remembered what He said and did . . . what He promised* (21:1). In the preceding chapter, 20:7, we read: *And Abraham prayed to God and God healed Avimelech, his wife and his maidservants and they gave birth, for the Lord had closed tight every womb in Avimelech's household on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife*. Throughout the Bible, God is the closer and the opener of the womb; the passages to prove this are numerous and well known.

Granted that God was the cause, what were the sins that made Him so angry that He punished people in this dread manner? In the case of Avimelech the sin is given as *על דבר שרה אשת אברהם*, *because of the matter of Sarah, Abraham's wife* (20:18). In other words, he had taken another man's wife adulterously. Another clue comes from exploration of the word *עירי* which occurs twice more in the Torah. In Lev. 20:20 it is stated: *A man who sleeps with his aunt . . . their sin shall they bear; they shall die childless*. And in the next verse: *ואיש אשר יקח את אחיו נדה היא ערות אחיו גלה עיריים יהיו* *And if a man marries his brother's wife, it is an indecent act . . . they shall remain childless*. This punishment, it should be noted, was not to be meted out by man, according to the rabbis, but by God. Indeed, *karet* — *כרת* — the punishment for all incest, was also left to God.

Thus, in the instances I have cited, sterility was God's dread punishment for serious sexual sins. That a sexual sin would bring on a divine sexual punishment made good sense to people in ancient civilizations. The idea that childlessness was a sign of sexual sinfulness, added to the shame one felt about it, as Rachel referred to it: *חרפתי* — *my disgrace* (30:23).

#### ABRAHAM'S PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN RELATIONSHIP TO SARAH

The sexual evidence, indeed, favor first of all, a reversible cause for the

barrenness, and, secondly, favors the notion that it was a psychological problem of Abraham in his relationship to Sarah. For it must be remembered, Abraham had no trouble impregnating Hagar and later on had six more children with Keturah (25:2).

In Breshith Rabbah (4:1), Rabbi Judah came to the same conclusion by interpreting the passage of 16:1, ושרי אשה אברם לא ילדה לו — *And Sarah, the wife of Abram, did not bear children to him: To him, said R. Yehuda, לאברהם לא ילדה* — “To Abraham she did not bear children, but had she been married to another, she would have borne children.”

There is further evidence — indirect, to be sure — that the fault lay with him and that he knew it did.

Such awareness that it was his fault may well account for his strange inability to stand up to Sarah but to acquiesce supinely in her cruel and life-endangering treatment of Hagar and his son Ishmael — even when, as in 20:11, we are told directly that Abraham was deeply opposed in feeling to Sarah’s banishment of Hagar and his son, Ishmael.

With most people, when it is known that the fault for the sterility lies with the husband, there is a definite shift of authority in the home to the wife. Feeling unmanly and weak and guilty that they have failed their wives, most men submit to them; and the wives, often against their better selves, become shrewish, domineering and bitter.

Again, we must credit the rabbis for detecting this. Thus in Breshith Rabbah 47:1, they said: מרחא לבעלה, בכל מקום האיש גוזר, ברם הכא “כל אשר חאמר אליך” שרה שמה שמה בקולה — *She was her husband’s boss. Usually the man gives orders, but here we read (21:12), “In all that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice.”*

Perhaps, too, her angry outburst at Abraham in 16:5: חמסי עליך . . . ישפט ה’ — *The injustice done me is your fault . . . may the Lord judge between me and you*, should be interpreted as Sarah’s blaming her barrenness on him, in addition to the usual interpretation that she was blaming him for not scolding Hagar and setting her right as to who remains the rightful wife and mistress in the house.

#### IN TRUTH SHE IS MY SISTER

Is it possible to explain psychologically why Abraham could be potent with another woman but not with his wife?

Yes, we can. It is a fact of life, unfortunately all too frequently observed, that



husbands are often impotent with their wives and yet fully potent with other women. Freud explained it this way: If the wife is in the unconscious part of the mind a mother-substitute, then having relations with her may be seriously or totally inhibited by the deep-seated taboo of incest; with other women, who are unlike the mother, this taboo is absent and sex can be uninhibited and successful.

Can this Freudian explanation be applied to Abraham and Sarah? What was the relationship between Abraham and Sarah? Let us turn to 20:12. Abraham explains to Avimelech, *וְגַם אִמְנָה אַחֻותִי בֵּת אָבִי הִיא אֲךָ לֹא בֵּת אִמִּי וַחֲתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה* — *And, in truth she is my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife*. Taken according to its פֶּשֶׁט, its literal meaning, Sarah was Abraham's half sister — אִמְנָה — in truth. Such marriages, according to Torah legislation after Mount Sinai, are clearly prohibited and are considered incestuous, as we can see from Leviticus 20:17: *וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקַּח אֶת אַחֻתוֹ בֵּת אָבִיו אוֹ בֵּת* . . . *And a man who marries his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother . . . it is an unholy act (חסד) . . . they shall be cut off in the sight of their people . . . he shall bear his sin*. According to Freud's observations (almost universally accepted now), the wife does not have to be a blood relative at all. She need only have significant resemblances physically or mentally to his mother — and only in his mind — to become an incestuous figure with whom sex is hindered or totally impossible. And if we should take only the literal meaning, she was indeed his half sister, a relationship which might have been anticipated as an incestuous situation even before Matan Torah, revelation at Mount Sinai.

Toward a wife like that, too, the husband may tend to be blind and unresponsive to her beauty, whereas he can be only too responsive to another woman's — to his wife's great annoyance. This may lend deeper significance to the words Abraham says to Sarai when he anticipates danger from Pharaoh (12:11): *הִנֵּה נָא* . . . *Behold, now I know that you are a fair woman to look upon*. There is a hint here that he had not noticed her beauty before — though married to her many years! Rashi's interpretation of this line perceives this very fact: *“Until now he did not recognize (her beauty) because of the modesty of both of them.”* It is exactly such excessive modesty, the source of which is not clearly understood by either of the partners, nor overcome by them, that cripples the sexual life of the couple.

## OVERCOMING HIS DISABILITY

We know, of course, that Abraham finally did overcome his disability. What was it that made Abraham sexually whole again and converted his long lasting sorrow into joy?

A man of deep faith like Abraham, living in a pre-scientific age, attributed his childlessness to God's action as we have seen in Abraham's reaction to Avimelech. There were, in the main, four ways of expiating one's sin and assuaging God's anger; namely, by prayer, animal sacrifice, vows and by afflicting one's soul. Prayer as a way of overcoming barrenness is movingly described in the story of Hannah's prayer (I Sam. 1:19). Abraham, too, prays to end sterility inflicted upon Avimelech and his household by God (20:17), and he is successful; but there is no record of Abraham's praying for himself and Sarah.

Making a sacred vow in which one pledges some act and proof of unusual devotion to God was considered effective. Hannah vowed that if God would grant her a boy, she would give him over to the service of God all of his life and *a razor shall not pass over his head* (I Sam. 1:11) — a mark of personal consecration. In the case of Abraham, we do not have such a clear-cut example. The covenant-between-the-pieces, however, may represent a combination of vow and animal sacrifice. In the mystical rite described in 15:21, which is still able to evoke feelings of mystery and awe, Abraham, while in a state of trance and "deep dark dread," bound himself (as Samuel was bound) in a pact of eternal devotion and fealty to the Lord. During this ritual, it should be noted, Abraham is promised for the first time not just the vague "seed" as before but an heir, *אשר יצא ממעיך*, *that shall issue from your body* (15:4). Neither Sarah nor a son is yet mentioned. That this awesome convenantal vow may have had a partial beneficial effect on his sex life, is suggested by the fact that in the very next chapter he is able to impregnate Hagar. The many years of barrenness allowed to pass before Abraham takes Hagar, and the juxta-position of the covenant-between-pieces to Hagar's impregnation, suggest the possibility that Abraham was impotent to all women prior to the covenant, and thereafter only to Sarah.

## SELF MUTILATION AN ACT OF FAITH

The most awesome method of winning God's mercy was through self-mutilation and self-affliction. This method was severely condemned by the Torah, except for the mild *ענוי נפש* of Yom Kippur. But Abraham lived long before Mattan

Torah and among barbaric peoples where self-mutilation and even sacrifice of human beings were common practices. Is it not possible that, in despair over his barrenness, Abraham substituted circumcision — a token castration for the actual castrations practiced by contemporary pagans — in the hope of getting God to restore his fertility? In P.R.E. 29, a rabbi seems to imply this in these words: For Abraham was circumcised on Yom Kippur and each year the Holy One, blessed be He, recalls the blood of Abraham's circumcision and forgives our sins.

Archeologists tell us that as circumcision was not practiced in Mesopotamia, Abraham could not have brought the rite with him from Haran. But the Egyptians, Moabites, and other nations round-about Canaan did, and he could very well have borrowed the procedure from them. Needless to say, for an adult, circumcision is a dramatic, a painful and bloody procedure, only too suitable for the religious purpose of self-affliction.

One might ask, out of all the mutilations affecting other parts of the body performed for religious purposes in the cults about him, why did Abraham pick the one that affects the genitals? Psychologically speaking, the answer is simple: If Abraham shared the widespread belief that childlessness was due to God's anger over a sexual sin, then what would be more suitable than to inflict pain and mutilation on the offending organ?

Some of the rabbis sensed the reason for the choice of organ. In Breshith Rab-bah 46:4 it is written: *א"ר הונא בשם בר קפרא ישב אברהם ודן גזירה שוה, נאמרה ערלה באיין ונאמרה ערלה באדם, מה ערלה שנאמרה כאילן מקום שהוא עושה פירות אף ערלה באיין ונאמרה ערלה באדם, מה ערלה שנאמרה כאילן מקום שהוא עושה פירות* "R. Huna in Bar Kappara's name, said: Abraham pondered and drew an inference: In Lev. 19:23 it says, "orlah" (uncircumcised) with reference to a tree, and it says "orlah" with reference to man in Gen. 17:11. Just as the tree "orlah" refers to the place where it yields fruits, (ערלתו את פריה) Lev. 19:23 — which means literally, "consider it uncircumcised, its fruit," so "orlah" in reference to man (in Gen. 17:11) must refer to the place where fruit (children) are produced."

Again, R. Levi translated the passage that opens the chapter on circumcision, (17:1) *כך אמר הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו: אין לך פסולת* as follows: *"You have no other defect but this foreskin; remove it and the defect will be gone (and you will then be whole)" (B.R. 46:4).*

There is evidence from the record on Abraham that God indeed showed him lovingkindness as a result of his act of circumcision; or, in psychologic terms,

that dramatic, painful, religious experience, rich in sexual symbolism, was sufficient to overcome his powerful, incest-based inhibition of sexual function. For according to 17:24, Abraham was 99 years old when he circumcised himself, and, according to 21:5, it was just a year later, when he was 100 years old, that Isaac was born. Allowing for nine months of pregnancy, it can be seen that Abraham's potency was restored within days or weeks — at the most three months — of his circumcision. This time sequence is suggestive that the circumcision may have led to the possibility of impregnation.

One last quote saved for the last because it is the most elegant and most amusing, is a confirmation of our speculations. It is taken from the Talmud, Nedarim 32b: ואמר ר' אממי וכתב אברהם וכתיב אברהם "And R. Ammi b. Abba also said: בחילה המליכו הקב"ה על מאתים וארבעים" "First Abram is written, then Abraham;" "ושלשה איברים ולכסוף המליכו על מאתים וארבעים ושמונה" "At first the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him mastery over 243 parts of the body (*Abram* by "gematria" totals 243); "and later on he made him master over all 248 parts of the body" (*Abraham* by gematria totals 248) – five more. שתי עינים ושתי אזניים ואזניים ראש הגויה "And these (additional five) are: the two eyes, the two ears, and the membrum." Thus, according to R. Ammi, when his name was changed to Abraham, — and the change occurred at his circumcision (chap. 17) — Abraham gained control over his sexual organ.

In this way, then, – through circumcision – did Abraham regain his ability to have a child. He lived to see his life-long yearning for a child finally gratified.

# ADAM'S RIB

BY ELLIOT B. GERTEL

Few narratives have inspired more attempts to interpret the thoughts and motivations of the biblical writers than the account of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-4). James Frazer offers a typical "gut" reaction when he observes, comparing the narratives in Genesis 1:26,27 and 2:21-24: "The charming naivety, almost the gaiety, of the earlier narrative contrasts with the high seriousness of the latter . . . Above all, he [the biblical writer] hardly attempts to hide his deep contempt for woman. The lateness of her creation, and the irregular and undignified manner of it — made out of a piece of her lord and master, after all, the lower animals had been created in a regular and decent manner — sufficiently mark the low opinion he held of her nature."<sup>1</sup>

Morris Jastrow was the first scholar to elaborate at length upon what he regarded as sexual overtones common to both the Gilgamesh epic and to the later biblical creation-story. Ebanai, the primal naked man who dwells with the beasts, is seduced by the sacred prostitute Ukhat, with whom he makes love for six days (!). When she leaves him, the animals "turn away" from him. Jastrow concludes that Adam's "assigning of names" to the creatures is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup>

In his study, *The Creation of Woman: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into the Myth of Eve*, Theodor Reik finds the Jastrow hypothesis more helpful than that of Skinner or of Von Rad who, respectfully, found the narrative to be an explanation of marriage or of sexual attraction in general.<sup>3</sup> Reik is interested in reconstructing the "primal tradition" beyond the narrative.

1. James Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, vol. I (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1918), p. 5.

2. M. Jastrow, "Adam and Eve in Babylonian Literature," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, vol. XV, no. 4, July 1899.

3. Theodor Reik, *The Creation of Woman* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 56-7.

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The first aspect of the narrative that Reik, as psychoanalyst, finds intriguing is the nature of the *tardemah* that fell over Adam (2:21). Rabbi Gamliel's daughter said that God made Adam sleep so that he would not be repulsed by a woman created through surgery on him.<sup>4</sup> Skinner<sup>5</sup> concludes that woman could not be created from anything but her future mate. Benno Jacob<sup>6</sup> and Von Rad<sup>7</sup> believe that the sleep was intended to prevent man from seeing Divine power.

The second aspect which intrigues Reik is Adam's greeting of Eve as "flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone." Biblical scholars of diverse methodologies have, of course, offered varied explanations of this verse. Robinson Smith finds here an expression of the "fluid personality," where all the members of a group are regarded as part of the same substance (cf. Gen. 29:14, 37:27; Judges 9:2; II Sam. 5:1, 19:3). Skinner, who cites this view,<sup>8</sup> is more inclined to believe that "one flesh" is a specific term for members of the same clan, as in Leviticus 25:9. The Rabbis, in a somewhat similar vein, interpreted "bone of my bone" as indication that Eve married a blood relative.

Reik offers an entirely different methodology. He cites a letter of Freud to C. Jung, dated December 7, 1911: "The creation of Eve has something about it that is quite peculiar and singular. Rank recently suggested to me that the reversal could have easily been brought about in the myth. That would make the tale clear. Eve would be the mother from whom Adam was born, and we should then encounter the mother-incest, so familiar to us . . ."<sup>9</sup> Reik dismisses this suggestion altogether.<sup>10</sup> He proposes a methodology of Bible-interpretation which combines psychoanalysis with anthropology, and he yields the story of Eve's birth, but a distorted tradition of Adam's rebirth."<sup>11</sup> Building upon Frazer's view that initiation rites are the "central mystery of primitive society,"<sup>12</sup> he concludes that "behind the account of the creation of Eve a distorted tale of Adam's initiation is concealed."<sup>13</sup>

4. B. *Sanhedrin* 39a.

5. *The International Critical Commentary* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's, 1925), p. 68.

6. Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible* (N.Y.: Ktav, 1974), p. 21.

7. G. Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, tr. J. H. Marks (Phil.: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 84.

8. Cited by Skinner, *International Critical Commentary*, p. 69.

9. Cited by Reik, p. 74.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

12. *The Golden Bough*, vol. III, third ed. (London, 1913), p. 278.

13. Reik, p. 94.

The *tardemah* (Adam's deep sleep) is interpreted by Reik as referring to an initiatory death, which would have to have occurred after the first human being reached puberty. He notes that the Bible intends this sleep to be of the miraculous kind (as in Job 4:13-17 and Daniel 10:9), and links the reference to removal of the rib to accounts of dismemberment and rebirth found in the puberty rites of ancient tribes.<sup>14</sup> He then attempts to discredit the rib-motif altogether, by citing Edward Stucken who maintains that it is but a vague remnant of an older creation-myth.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, however, Reik ignores the fact that in the Arabic language, the word for *rib* is used to denote a *bosom companion*, with no sexual overtones, as such.

Reik notes how, in the puberty rites of ancient societies, some organ of the young novices is removed and restored. In the Genesis narrative, he argues, Adam is circumcised in the "puberty operation" of rib-removal, and *then* his spouse emerges. This parallels ancient rites when an operation on a body organ precedes marriage. Just as in the Bible the rib is made into a woman, so do the mythologies of ancient tribes depict the novice apprentice as falling into death-sleep and as being revived through his bones or skeleton. Reik interprets in this light biblical references to bones (Job 4:4; Jeremiah 23:9; Psalm 35:10 and especially Ezekiel 37:1-10). As Reik summarizes his position: "We found a logical connection between the rib operation and the emergence of Eve; the first event is the condition of the second. Only after Adam is circumcised could he obtain a wife. For Adam, Eve is 'bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh' in the same sense as Moses is for Zipporah a 'bloody husband.' This means acquired only through circumcision."<sup>16</sup>

As for the matter of woman being created from the rib of man, Reik shows how ancient puberty rites entailed separation of the men from the women. To Reik, the biblical story says: "We men can give birth, too, we can even give birth to female children."<sup>17</sup>

So much for Reik's professed endeavor to "discover some essential facts of the unknown life of prehistorical Israel, its scrupulously concealed and carefully guarded tribal mysteries."<sup>18</sup>

14. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Of what value is his research to those interested in the Bible and in the comparative literature of the ancient Near East?

Various facts would seem to point to the weakness of the anthropological-psychoanalytic approach as delineated by Reik. Theodor Gaster, in a modern commentary on Frazer's work, observes that Frazer's parallels to the Genesis narrative may be augmented with California and Pacific Indian legends. In Greenland, there is a legend about woman being created from man's thumb!<sup>19</sup> Yet Gaster dismisses most, if not all of these parallels as mere "playbacks," adapted and distorted from biblical accounts heard from missionaries.<sup>20</sup> Gaster points out that according to the natives of St. Cristoval in the Pacifics, woman is made out of red clay — an obvious corruption of the biblical *adamah* (earth) with *adom* (red).<sup>21</sup>

The dismissal of most "parallels" to the Bible certainly challenges Reik's claim that "universal" anthropological rites betray, in rituals, underlying needs and fantasies which are not only common to all peoples, but assume common forms. Now the woman-from-rib motif may not be a universal need, but it is certainly to be found within the literature of the ancient Near East. In ancient Sumerian mythology, Enki, the primordial man, finds that his rib is one of his sick members. The goddess created for the healing of his rib is called *nin-ti*, "the lady of the rib." Yet, as Rudolph Anthers elaborates, "the very same Sumerian word *ti* also means 'to make live.' . . . In Sumerian literature, therefore, the 'lady of the rib' came to be identified with 'the lady who makes live' through what may be termed a play of words. It was this, one of the most ancient of literary puns [with no "sexist" connotations], which was carried over and perpetuated in the Biblical paradise story, although here, of course, it loses its validity, since the Hebrew word for 'rib' and that for 'who makes live' have nothing in common."<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that ancient Iranian mythology has no reference to the woman-from-man's-rib motif, but to that of simultaneous creation.<sup>23</sup>

19. Theodor Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 21.

20. Gaster cites J. A. Mason and A. L. Kroeber, p. 22.

21. See Gaster, p. 21, and p. 330, Part II, note 9.

22. In Kramer, Samuel, ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1961), pp. 102 f.

23. See M. J. Dresden, "Mythology of Ancient Iran," in *ibid*, pp. 343-4.



Finally, Reik cannot adduce support for his puberty rite theory from the difficult passage in Exodus 4:25 which he cites so facilely. The account of the *hatan damim* is at best "obscure," though circumcision is, in the ancient Near East, more closely associated with marriage than with puberty.<sup>24</sup> Cassuto, who offers these observations, says in the same place that if anything is emphasized by this narrative, it is the centrality of circumcision to the covenant.

Thus, it would seem that the psychological and anthropological overtones "discovered" by Reik and by a host of others may well reflect a failure to understand an ancient pun appropriated by biblical literature. The theory of Sumerian influence is, of course, by no means certain, but it does point to the importance of comparison of the Bible with the literature of the ancient Near East. The account of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib will remain incomprehensible, but a viable solution may be found only when we look into the Biblical text, and not into the human psyche.

\* \* \*

*FROM THE ZOHAR: THIS IS NOW BONE OF MY BONE AND FLESH OF MY FLESH. SHE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN*

(Genesis 2:22)

It is interesting to note what the Zohar does to this verse. And Adam said "this time." These are pleasant words which Adam used to awaken her love. See how pleasing these words are. "Bone of my bone" — to show her that they are really one — that there is absolutely no division between them. Now he begins to praise her "This one may be called *woman*!" This one — and there is none like her. This one is the glory of her household. Only she may be called "woman." She is perfection. She and no one else. All of these are words of love.

Ch. A.

# TORAH DIALOGUES

BY HAROLD D. HALPERN

*This new series of questions and responses on the weekly sedra is designed to encourage closer study of the text, especially parallel passages, and to promote discussion. The dialogues are especially appropriate for the Shabbat table between parents and children or in the synagogue between rabbi and congregation.*

*The responses given are necessarily brief and should be regarded merely as starting points for fuller discussion.*

*We recommend that these dialogues be kept for future reference. Following issues will continue with questions and answers on all books of the Pentateuch.*

## QUESTIONS

### BERESHIT

1. Which phrases are reiterated in the creation chapter (ch. 1)?
2. What teachings may be derived from those refrains?
3. What difference is there between the Torah's report of God's blessing of the fowl and fish (1:22) on one hand and His blessing of the humans (1:28) on the other?
4. Which day is blessed by God? What does that day commemorate?

### NOAH

1. What reasons does the Torah suggest for the flood? What reason does God mention to Noah?
2. Compare and contrast the blessing of Adam (1:28) to that of Noah (ch. 9).
3. Which are the seven commandments given to all humankind (ch. 9)?
4. What significance do you draw from the fact that seven commandments are given to all but 613 are given to Israel?

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## RESPONSES

### BERESHIT

1. (a) God said; (b) God saw that it was good; (c) there was evening and there was morning a second (third, etc.) day.
2. The Torah emphasizes in the first chapter that God is the sole creator and that all that He created is essentially good. The last repeated phrase may be taken to underline the orderliness and systematic procedure of the creation.
3. When blessing the lower creatures the phrase "God said to them" is omitted, for obvious reasons. The blessing for man and woman is also much more extensive.
4. The Seventh day, Shabbat, is a weekly commemoration of the creation of the world by God.

### NOAH

1. The steps in the degeneration of humankind are hinted at in the first sidra as a prelude to the deluge: Cain's act of fratricide (4:8), Lamech's glorification of vengeance (4:23f.), the acts of the b'nai Elohim (622) and culminating with 6:5. God, however, only mentions "hamas" (violent crime) as the reason for the flood (6:11, 13).
2. The outstanding difference in the two very similar blessings is the instruction regarding other creatures. Adam is to share vegetation with the beasts and fowl. Noah is told of antipathy between humans and other creatures. Permission to use animals for food is granted (9:3).
3. Our sages derived seven universal commandments from ch. 7:
  - a. The establishment of a system of justice.Prohibitions:
  - b. Blasphemy
  - c. Idolatry
  - d. Incest
  - e. Murder
  - f. Robbery
  - g. Eating part of a living animal.
4. Israel bears a much heavier responsibility as a "kingdom of Kohanim, a holy people."

## QUESTIONS

### LECH LECHA

1. *Abraham is often held up as an example of the ideal Hebrew. Trace the virtues and values in this sedra that led to this idealization of the first patriarch.*
2. *Why does the Torah introduce the episode of Abraham and Melchizedek in the midst of the King of Sodom's approach to Abraham (14:18ff.)?*
3. *To what fear does God refer when He says "fear not, Abram . . ." (15:1)?*
4. *Abraham is given the commandment of circumcision. How does the Torah emphasize the importance of this mitzvah?*

### VAYERA

1. *Rashi calls attention to a number of Jewish values in the opening verses of this sedra. Can you detect at least three?*
2. *Abraham questions God's decision to destroy Sodom. Cite any other famous instances in the Torah and in Jewish history where a man argues with God, challenging His justice.*
3. *The author Elie Wiesel notes that the Akedah episode (ch. 22) encompasses many themes of Jewish destiny. Can you detect some?*
4. *Why was the Akedah chapter chosen for reading on Rosh Hashanah?*

\* \* \*

### FROM THE ZOHAR ON GENESIS 8:18

#### TOO LATE

When Noah left the ark and beheld the desolate world about him, he weepingly turned heavenward and said: "Master of the World, you should have had compassion for the works of your hands." The Holy One answered him: "Foolish Shepherd. *Now* you say it. Why didn't you speak when I said to you: — *for you I have seen righteous . . .* or afterwards when I said: *Make for yourself an ark . . .* or after that, when I said: *I will bring a flood . . .* I deliberately kept stalling to give you the opportunity to pray for the safety of the world. However, when you heard that you will be saved in the ark, it never entered your mind to pray for the world; but now, when the world is destroyed you open your mouth!" When Noah realized it, he offered sacrifices (in repentance).

Ch. A.

## RESPONSES

### LECH LECHA

1. (a) Faith in God (12:4) (b) Pursuit of peace (13:8-9)  
(c) Family loyalty (14:14) (d) Idealism (14:22-24)  
More may be found in the next sedra.
2. (a) Perhaps to explain the King of Sodom's audacity in requesting what rightfully belonged to Abraham, the victor. He saw that Abraham was magnanimous with King Melchizedek (Abarbanel).  
(b) To contrast the two kings' behavior. Melchizedek presents bread and wine while Sodom begins: "give me . . ." (Lebovitz)
3. Possibly retaliation by the defeated tribes of chapter 14. Midrash suggests that Abraham was troubled because righteous people may have been killed in the battle (cf. 18:24ff.). From Abram's response in the following verse, perhaps the fear was that he had no heir.
4. "The uncircumcized male . . . shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." (17:14)

### VAYERA

1. (a) Bikur Holim—visiting the sick. God appears to Abraham as he is recovering from brit milah (18:1).  
(b) Hachnasat Orhim—hospitality. Abraham sits in the sun in the heat of day in order to welcome and host wayfarers (18:1).  
(c) Say little and do much (18:5, 8).  
(d) He sent Ishmael to prepare the feast in order to train him in mitzvot (18:7)  
(e) Pursuit of justice, even defying God if necessary (18:23ff.).
2. (a) In Exodus 32, Moses argues with God after the golden calf incident.  
(b) Ibn Verga in Shevet Yehudah relates a challenge by a Jew escaping the Inquisition.  
(c) The Berdichever's "Din-Torah mit Gott" and other Hasidic soliloquies.  
(d) Leonard Bernstein: Kaddish Symphony.  
(e) Holocaust Literature such as Rakover's diary in "Tiger at the Gates."
3. Wiesel lists these: Man's anguish, the quest for purity, conflict in choosing, faith, justice, the need to obey and rebel against God, and yearnings for freedom and sacrifice.
4. In Jewish tradition, mainly to recall "Zechut Avot"—the merit of our Fathers and the ram's horn (shofar).

# THE WESTERN WALL

BY B.Z. LURIA

## PART VI

*This is the sixth in a series of articles commemorating the tenth anniversary of the unification of the city of Jerusalem. The present account continues the history of the Western Wall.*

### PROVOCATIONS AT THE WALL

The Jewish right to pray at the Western Wall was of very old standing, and despite the fact that the Moslems sought ways and means of restricting the Jews' rights of approach to the Wall, they were unable to find any cogent pretext to prevent them from doing so. Throughout the entire period, however, they resorted to various means to annoy and harass the worshippers. Instead of being allowed to visit the remnant of the Holy Temple and pray at the Wall in a respectable manner, the worshippers were subjected to all kinds of harassment.

The old and feeble who came to pray at the Wall had no place to sit. One of the rabbis of Jerusalem who had applied to the authorities for permission to place benches along the wall of the Moroccan Quarter had his application turned down, but was allowed to fix a number of large stones on which the old people could rest from time to time. This was in some measure an accommodation, but within a short time these stones disappeared one after another.

### A SHELTER AGAINST THE RAIN

In 1866, when Sir Moses Montefiore came to Jerusalem on his sixth visit, he asked the Turkish Governor for permission to erect a shelter against the rain for the worshippers at the Western Wall. The Governor promised to comply with this request, and immediately Sir Moses contacted workmen to carry out the work. Several days later, however, the Governor reneged his promise. In this, as in other instances, when the authorities seemed prepared to acquiesce to the re-

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quests made by the Jews, there was always some behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to thwart any improvements, important or insignificant.

In the 1870's one of the rabbis of Jerusalem introduced the custom of kindling small olive-oil lamps at the Western Wall every Sabbath eve. Each Friday afternoon a small table with a lamp consisting of about ten wicks in olive oil would be brought to the Western Wall. It was thus possible to conduct the Sabbath evening services by their light. After the service an Arab in the neighbourhood would return the lamp to the rabbi's home and receive a small fee for his services.

On Yom Kippur they would erect a canvas awning over part of the area facing the Wall, in order to protect the worshippers from the burning sun during the fast day. On Sabbaths and festivals they would bring a Scroll of the Law to the Wall to read from during the service. Poor and aged scholars used to sit at a portable table near the Wall, and would provide prayer books and books of psalms to pilgrims visiting the Wall. Some old people would bring small stools and benches with them and one of the rabbis used to bring a folding partition to separate the men from the women at the Wall.

These facilities for the worshippers aroused the ire of the Moslem clergy, who drew up a memorandum of protest.

#### INFRINGEMENT OF WAQF RIGHTS

In October 1911, the Custodian of the Moslem Waqf (Moslem Charitable Endowment) wrote to the Kadi of Jerusalem complaining about the infringement of Waqf rights on the part of the Jewish worshippers who brought stools and boards on which to sit at prayer. Fearing that such a practice might become their right, he asked him to take steps in order to prevent them from doing so.

The Kadi passed on this complaint from the Custodian to the Mufti of Jerusalem for his ruling. The Mufti ruled that the lane running along the Western side of the Temple Mount was the property of the Moroccan Waqf, and so it was forbidden to bring benches, chairs, and partitions which might in some way establish a Jewish claim to the place. He also ruled that no one had the right to grant permission or do such things in or around the Temple Mount. On November 14, 1911, this ruling was transmitted by the Kadi to the Governor, who in turn submitted it to the District Council which confirmed the judgement. After the Governor's confirmation of the Council's decision, the matter was transmitted to the Commissioner of Police for implementation.

The Governor had only heard the claims of one side and had not taken the trouble of inviting the Chief Rabbi to submit the claims of the Jews of Jerusalem in the matter. This gave rise to great consternation within the Jewish community and it was decided to appeal to the Governor.

#### AN APPEAL BY THE CHIEF RABBI

In the appeal submitted by the Chief Rabbi, Judah Franco, to the Governor on December 11, 1912 he wrote *inter alia*:

"Your Honour is aware that the greater majority of those who come to Jerusalem are old people who wish to spend their last years here. Many of them are frail and sick people who are not able to pray at all at the Western Wall unless they have a place to sit. In accordance with our holy law, such people are permitted to pray while seated. This, in fact, has been in practice for upwards of 300 years. The fact that we are now prevented from placing benches there gives rise to serious complaints from the public, for how is it at all possible to abolish this ancient custom? In accordance with your human sentiments you, too, feel that it is not proper to prevent such people from praying there. Furthermore, if we look deeply into the matter . . . this concerns Waqf property and the complainants must present their case to the Sharia (Religious) Courts, and I, as representative of the official Jewish community, should have been invited to present our case to the court, because the claims of both sides to a dispute must be heard there.

I would, therefore, ask you to give permission for the benches to be placed there as previously, in order to allay the tempers that arose in the Jewish community, until a ruling is given by the Sharia Court."

#### CHIEF RABBI'S APPEAL REJECTED

The Chief Rabbi's appeal was rejected. The Governor advised the Jewish Community to appeal before the Religious Court, but the heads of the Jewish community in Jerusalem realizing that their efforts were being thwarted by false evidence, decided to turn to the Chief Rabbi in Constantinople, Rabbi Hayim Bahum, to seek abrogation of the judgement issued in Jerusalem, and perhaps also to obtain a royal edict concerning Jewish rights in that place. He was also asked to try and redeem the Western Wall by effecting an exchange of the Moroccan Quarter for some other quarter for its residents, and the demolition of the houses near the Western Wall.



At the time, however, things moved very slowly at the Porte. Turkey had become involved in war with Italy and the Chief Rabbi could not bring up the matter of the Western Wall before the heads of Government. Before long World War I broke out, with the result that Palestine was cut off from Turkey and handed over to Great Britain's mandated territory.

#### DURING THE MANDATORY PERIOD

When the British Government took over the Palestine Mandate from the League of Nations on July 14, 1922, it shouldered responsibility for the preservation of religious rights ensuring free entrance into the holy places and religious buildings and areas, and freedom of worship in accordance with the requirements of good order and decorum. But Britain failed to guard the rights of Jews to worship at the Western Wall.

The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, who headed the Arab nationalist movement, fought with every means at his disposal against the Jewish Yishuv in the country. And since he enjoyed the support, albeit covert, of the majority of the British officials in the country, he did everything in his power to restrict Jewish rights at the Western Wall.

#### AN APPEAL TO THE MOSLEM COMMUNITY

The Vaad Leumi (Jewish National Council) found it necessary to address the following letter to the Moslem community:

"We hereby declare in all sincerity that no one in Jewry has the least intention of infringing on the rights of the Moslems to their holy places. But our Arab brethren must also recognize the rights of the Jews of this country to their own holy places.

"The Western Wall is a remnant of the wall surrounding the Temple Mount which has remained holy to them, and from which the Divine Presence has not departed. The Western Wall always served as a place of prayer and visit by Jewish pilgrims, whether resident in the holy land or living abroad. This right was recognized through the many centuries by the first Caliphs and by the Kings of the Umayyad Dynasty, by Salah a-Din el-Ayubi, the Mamelukes and the Ottoman Kings, even in those days when approach to the Western Wall was forbidden by the Moslems to men of other religions.

"Arab, Jewish and Christian historians distinctly speak of the assistance ex-

tended by the Jews to the Moslem conquerors, whether actively through participation in the War of Conquest, or by showing the Caliph Omar the site of the Temple. The only condition they stipulated with the Caliphs and the Kings of the Umayya Dynasty was to confirm the rights of the Jews, particularly in regard to freedom of worship at their holy places, a condition which was observed in its time by the Islamic regime.

“Throughout the period of the Arab regime in the country the Jews made use of these rights, which were confirmed at the time of the conquest of the country by the Sultan Suliman in the 16th century. In actual fact, the Western Wall, which has been venerated by the Jews throughout the generations, has served as a place of prayer and pilgrimage without any let or hindrance. It goes without saying that the Jewish people are not prepared to make any concessions in regard to this right, which has been hallowed for generations, and any attempt to annul or reduce this right and to interfere in the accepted customs for prayer will be regarded as a serious insult and offence to the Jewish people.

“It is also obvious that any attempt to describe the desire of the Jews to pray at this holy place peacefully, reverentially and without hindrance as the establishment of a strategic basis for attack against the Moslems mosques is but a figment of the imagination or a wilful and malicious accusation. It is the purpose of such false libel to introduce bewilderment into the hearts of the Moslems people and to arouse strife and hatred between kindred people. Such an attempt can only bring disaster to both sides. The true and sincere desire to build up this country and revive it through labour and peace with our Arab brethren behooves us to publish the truth, that there is here no civil strife nor any attack on Moslem sanctities, but only a natural demand to respect the rights of the Jews.

“We call upon our Arab brethren in general, and in particular upon their responsible leaders, to dispel the poisonous fumes of the falsehoods that have recently been spread, and instead of strife, to create possibilities for positive collaboration for the welfare and well-being of this country and its inhabitants.”

# HAMMURABI AND BIBLICAL LAWS COMPARED

BY MIRIAM Y. SHRAGER

What is law and what is its purpose?

Webster's Dictionary<sup>1</sup> defines law as "... all the rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority, legislation, or custom of a given community..." This definition applies to the Laws of Eshunna, the Code of Hammurabi Laws, the Hittite Middle Assyrian Laws, to the Covenant Code of Israel dating from the first half of the 19th century to the 13th century BCE. This applies equally to the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, declared in force December 15, 1791. All these collections of laws represent statute law, i.e., established, written law. All but one of these collections developed from earlier oral common law.

I believe that the purpose of all law, regardless of the time of its origin and of whatever development may have occurred later, has not changed but remains fixed in its primary intent: to establish rules to protect those persons or things which a society values. In the singular case of biblical law rules are designed to protect values which a society must be taught to cherish. Herein lies my understanding of the uniqueness of biblical law. The society for which this law was formulated had to be created and developed by means of it. The society had to learn to accept and enforce new values which the law established. And it had to reject many familiar values which were a part of its earlier cultural inheritance and environment.

Moshe Greenberg, formerly Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and currently Professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, writing on "Crimes and Punishments — Ancient Near Eastern Law",<sup>2</sup> states:

1 Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged Second Edition, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1971, page 1028.

2. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible," Abington Press, N.Y., 1962, In Four Volumes, Vol. 1, page 737

Mrs. Miriam Y. Shrager, a member of the Sisterhood of Temple Beth El, St. Petersburg, Fla., organized in 1973 a Torah Study group. Beginning with eleven participants this group has been meeting weekly since that time and has grown to seventy. Mrs. Shrager, a Jewishly interested layman, has been teaching the class. Here we present one of her lessons.

"Indispensable for the understanding of biblical law are the other law collections of the ancient Near East. In contrast to the laws of the Bible, the latter are the product of a secular jurisprudence which recognized the state and the king as the promulgators and ultimate sanction of law. To make just laws was considered by the king a divinely imposed duty but the religious motive rarely entered the laws themselves."

Likewise, James B. Pritchard, Editor of "The Ancient Near East, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures", states in his introduction to "The Code of Hammurabi":

"Our copy was written on a diorite stela, topped by a bas relief showing Hammurabi in the act of receiving the commission to write the lawbook from the god of justice, the sun-god Shamash."<sup>3</sup>

It is on this point that we can begin our comparison of the legal systems of the ancient Near East and of the Bible. For it is here, it seems to me, that we come into basic and immediate conflict between a worldly and a religious philosophy of law. This occurs as soon as we ask ourselves the first questions: Who initiates the laws? In the Code of Hammurabi it is, Shammash, the sun-god and the god of justice. In the religion of Babylonia, Shammash is but one god in a quarrelsome pantheon which emphasizes fertility cults. In the Bible, the One Ethical God initiates the laws. What is the relationship between those who initiate the laws and those who must obey them? Professor H. W. F. Saggs of London University, author of "The Greatness that was Babylon", states:<sup>4</sup>

"Man was created for the service of the gods and the gods had themselves prescribe the rites, ceremonies and services which were due from man."

In the Bible the Initiator of law is the Sole Creator of the universe and all therein, including man. He revealed Himself to and made a covenant with a group of people, whom He redeemed from human slavery so that they might live in human freedom.

Who writes the laws? Hammurabi, the King of Babylon, has been delegated by Shammash to write a lawbook. In the Bible, it is the Initiator of the law Who proclaims and writes it. Moses transmits it; he is not its author.

3. Princeton University Press, Fifth Princeton Paperback Printing 1971, Vol. 1, pages 138-165

4. A Mentor Book from New American Library, Times Mirror, New York and Scarborough, Ontario. First printing, August 1968 (authorized reprint of a hardcover edition published by Hawthorn Books, Inc.), page 338

Who sanctions the laws by enforcing penalties for breaking them, or by offering rewards for observing them? In the Code of Hammurabi it is the King. In the Bible it is the Lawgiver God. Thus a man's violation of the Code of Hammurabi is an affront to his king; an Israelite's violation of the Covenant Code is rebellion against his Gracious Loving God.

"The next point which Greenberg makes in reference to the law collections of the ancient Near East is: "The primary concern of penal law is economic: to safeguard property and make losses good. In the case of murder this may involve a money compensation, or the replacement of the slain by another person. Life may be sacrificed to protect property."

A confrontation of related laws in the Codes of Hammurabi and of the Bible will clarify the basic differences in their philosophies and approaches. I am utilizing the "Code of Hammurabi", translated by Theophile J. Meek, found in the "Ancient Near East, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures".<sup>5</sup>

#### CODE OF HAMMURABI

Law 6: "If a seignior stole the property of church or state, that seignior shall be put to death; also the one who received the stolen goods from his hand shall be put to death."

(Note that the thief is punished by death, and his beneficiary or fence, as the case may be, is also put to death.)

Law 21: "If a seignior made a breach in a house, they shall put him to death in front of that breach and wall him in." (The punishment for breaking into a house is not limited to killing the culprit on the spot. He is additionally immured.)

part of the owner of the house for defending himself and his household at night

#### BIBLE

In no law code of the Bible is any property protected at the expense of a life. No thief is put to death; instead, he must make restitution.

Exodus, 22:1-3: "If the thief is seized while tunneling, and he is beaten to death, there is no bloodguilt in that case. If the sun has risen to him, there is bloodguilt in that case. He must make restitution; if he lacks the means, he shall be sold for his theft. (There is no bloodguilt on the

5. Princeton University Press, Fifth Princeton Paperback Printing 1971, Vol. 1, pages 138-165

## CODE OF HAMMURABI

## BIBLE

from an intruder, presumed to be a thief. If, however, "the sun has risen on him . . ." the thief may not be killed by the owner of the house but if he is, the owner is guilty. Surely bloodguilt is a religious concept.)

Law 22: "If a seignior committed robbery and was caught, that seignior shall be put to death."

for the sheep." (In other words, he shall make restitution, and pay a fine for his theft.)

Law 23: "If the robber has not been caught, the robber seignior shall set forth the particulars regarding his lost property in the presence of god, and the city and governor in whose territory and district the robbery was committed, shall make good to him his lost property." (A seignior, a man of property, does not sustain a property loss, as the city and governor shall "make good to him his lost property.") Law 24: "If it was a life (that was lost), the city and governor shall pay one mina of silver to his people."

Law 209: "If a seignior struck another seignior's daughter and caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus." Law 210 continues: "If that woman has died, they shall put his daughter to death." (This is an example of the replacement of the slain person by another person. Another example of vicarious punishment is found in the following law.)

Law 229: "If a builder constructed a house for a seignior, but did not make his

Exodus 21:37: "When a man steals a an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox, and four sheep

Except for one clearly defined and limited case of ransom for a life, which we will later consider in the case of the goring ox, (Exodus 22:28 -32), nowhere in the Bible is there even a suggestion that a human life can be offered by financial agreement between persons.

Vicarious punishment is prohibited. In Exodus 22:31, and again in Deuteronomy 24:16, we read: "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime."

## CODE OF HAMMURABI

## BIBLE

work strong with the result that the house which he built collapsed and so caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death."

Law 230 continues: "If it has caused the death of a son of the owner of the house, they shall put the son of that builder to death."

Law 250: "If an ox, when it was walking along the street gored a seignior to death, that case is not subject to claim."

Law 251: "If a seignior's ox was a gorer and his city council made it known to him that it was a gorer, but he did not pad its horns or tie up his ox, and that ox gored to death a member of the aristocracy, he shall give one-half mina silver."

Law 252: "If it was a seignior's slave, he shall give one-third mina of silver." (For his contributory negligence in the death of a person the owner's responsibility was satisfied by a monetary payment.)

or female, he shall pay thirty shekels of silver to the master, and the ox shall be stoned." (In verse 28 the ox is to be killed. It is given no further opportunity to kill a man or woman, and its meat is not be used for food. The ox has acquired bloodguilt, but the owner is innocent. In verse 29, as a result of his contributory negligence in the death of a man or woman, the owner has acquired bloodguilt as well as the ox, and he and the ox are killed. Verse 30 specifies the one case in the Bible where a monetary payment is an acceptable penalty in a case of homicide: the owner of the ox may "ransom" himself; he may "redeem" his life.)

Exodus 22:28-32

28: When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox is not to be punished.

29: If, however, that ox has long been a gorer, and its owner, though warned, has failed to guard it, and it kills a man or a woman the ox shall be stoned and its owner, too, shall be put to death.

30: If ransom is laid upon him, he must pay whatever is laid upon him to redeem his life.

31: So, too, if it gores a minor, male of female, (the owner) shall be dealt with according to the same rule.

32: But if the ox gores a slave, male

## SOCIAL STATUS AND PENALTIES

The next point which Greenberg makes in his evaluation of ancient Near East law is: "Social status is decisive in evaluating harms and assessing penalties."

### CODE OF HAMMURABI

Law 196: "If a seignior destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy they shall destroy his eye."

Law 197: "If he has broken another seignior's bone, they shall break his bone."

Law 198: "If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver."

Law 199: "If he has destroyed the eye of a seignior's slave or the bone of a seignior's slave, he shall pay one-half his value."

### BIBLE

Exodus 22:26-27

26: "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.

27: If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth."

(Under this law the slave has rights. These rights were human rights, religiously grounded no doubt, in the concept that the slave, like his master, was created in the divine image.)

It seems clear that, despite what might appear to be similarities, two contradictory sets of values are here expressed. The one set appears natural to an established materialistic society, the other to a young religiously oriented society, which had entered into a covenantal relationship offered by the One God, Whose word thereby became their law. This God, unlike all known gods, was not subject to life and death cycles, or to sexual needs. He could not be seen, and He commanded that He not be represented. He demanded for Himself complete loyalty and devotion. He abhorred idolatry, bloodshed, cruelty, injustice, and superstition. He proposed to regulate this new society and the lives of its members by teaching them how to live ethically, happily, as free men under Him. To this end He gave them legislation which, while it fundamentally regulated their behavior, did so for their nation's best interests. To this end He also gave them instruction to imitate Him,<sup>6</sup> to develop for themselves and for their society those ideal

6. Leviticus 19:2



qualities, which they could approach, so that eventually a Holy God would be served by a Holy people.<sup>7</sup> He promised them rewards for obedience to His commandments, punishments for disobedience, and His abiding love and protection forever.<sup>8</sup> In addition to giving them life, He gave them law, form and substance, legal policy and legal sanction.

7. Exodus 19:5-6

8. Leviticus 27:1-46

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## WORLD JEWISH BIBLE CENTER IN JERUSALEM

### NEW IMPETUS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF BET HATENAKH

Nearly eight years have elapsed since the late President Zalman Shazar and other leading personalities attended the "Aliyah LaKarka" (ground-breaking ceremony) for Bet HaTenakh — the World Jewish Bible Center — on a hill in Jerusalem overlooking Mount Zion. This great project was initiated by David Ben-Gurion, a founder of the World Jewish Bible Society, who cherished the hope that his name would be linked for all time with the establishment of such a center in Israel's historic capital.

"Our people gave the Bible to the world," he affirmed, "and we must give it concrete expression in the Bet HaTenakh. Such a House of the Bible, built by our own hands, will become a World Center for Judaism and for the entire world, here in Jerusalem . . . The purpose and goal of this House is to bring together all that has been said by the Bible and about the Bible, reflecting its influence on all nations in all the languages of the world."

The site is both magnificent and historic, and the complex that will arise on it is destined to house a complete Biblical library; a museum of Biblical art and rare objects; exhibitions; research and educational facilities; a garden of Biblical flora and fauna; and displays showing the Bible's impact on world history and Western civilization. The Bet HaTenakh will also serve as headquarters for the WJBS and its affiliated organizations.

### INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Now at last, this visionary enterprise is moving from the stage of an ideal to that of reality. On June 15, 1978, a World Executive for the Bet HaTenakh held its first meeting at the Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem and elected as its chairman Mr. Haim Finkelstein, who served until recently as head of the World Zionist Organization's Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora. Sub-committees of this Executive are now hard at work, tackling various questions of a legal, architectural and financial nature, so as to ensure speedy implementation of the project.

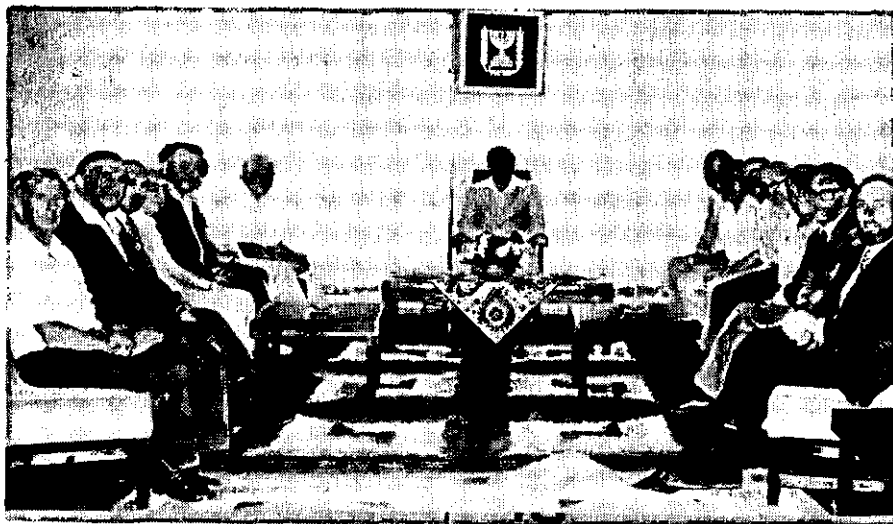
Mr. Finkelstein, long a devoted and enthusiastic advocate of the Bet HaTenakh, visualizes three main partners in this scheme: the Israel Government

and other State bodies; private benefactors within the State of Israel; and the communities of the Diaspora. Efforts are already being made to harness their support and both Mr. Finkelstein and Professor Haim Gevaryahu (Chairman of the WBSJ) will be visiting Latin America and the U.S.A. before the end of 1978 with the object of establishing Jewish Bible study groups, as well as committees of Friends of the Bet HaTenakh.

A key role in this campaign will be played by the American Friends of the World Bible Center in Jerusalem, headed by Dr. Morris S. Schulzinger of Cincinnati. An office has been opened in New York, with Dr. Joel S. Goor as its director, and there is every reason to hope that the Bet HaTenakh project will appeal to wide sections of American Jewry. Further activity is also planned in Israel, Western Europe, South Africa, and other areas of the world.

The Bet HaTenakh in Jerusalem will enhance Jerusalem's stature as the focus of prophecy and increase knowledge of the Book of Books among both the people of Israel and all who make the pilgrimage to the Land of the Bible.

#### RECEPTION AT BET HANASI FOR WORLD EXECUTIVE OF BET HATENAKH



Yitzhak Navon, President of Israel, center; Haim Finkelstein, Chairman, Bet HaTenakh World Executive, top left; Prof. Haim Gevaryahu, Chairman, World Jewish Bible Society, top right.

## TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

*With these pages we are continuing the third triennial Bible reading calendar, beginning with the first chapter of Joshua and concluding with the Book of Chronicles at the end of the third year. The sequence of the daily chapters is interrupted in order to allow for the readings connected with the Sidra of the Week and the holidays.*

December 1978	כסלו תשל"ט	December 1978	טבת תשל"ט
F 1 Malachi 1-2:7	א	Su 31 I Samuel 11	א חנוכה
Sa 2 חולדות	ב		
Su 3 Judges 12	ג	January 1979	
M 4 Judges 13	ד	M 1 I Samuel 12	ב חנוכה
T 5 Judges 14	ה	T 2 I Samuel 13	ג
W 6 Judges 15	ו	W 3 I Samuel 14	ד
Th 7 Judges 16	ז	Th 4 I Samuel 15	ה
F 8 Hosea 12:13-14:10	ח	F 5 Ezekiel 37:15-28	ו
Sa 9 ויצא	ט	Sa 6 ויגש	ז
Su 10 Judges 17	י	Su 7 I Samuel 16	ח
M 11 Judges 18	יא	M 8 I Samuel 17	ט
T 12 Judges 19	יב	T 9 I Samuel 18	י צום י" טבת
W 13 Judges 20	יג	W 10 I Samuel 19	יא
Th 14 Judges 21	יד	Th 11 I Samuel 20	יב
F 15 Hosea 11:7-12:12	טו	F 12 I Kings 2:1-12	יג
Sa 16 וישלח	טז	Sa 13 ויחי	יד
Su 17 I Samuel 1	יז	Su 14 I Samuel 21	טז
M 18 I Samuel 2	יח	M 15 I Samuel 22	טז
T 19 I Samuel 3	יט	T 16 I Samuel 23	יז
W 20 I Samuel 4	כ	W 17 I Samuel 24	יח
Th 21 I Samuel 5	כא	Th 18 I Samuel 25	יט
F 22 Amos 2:6-3:8	כב	F 19 Isaiah 22:6-28:13	כ
Sa 23 וישב	כג	Sa 20 שמות	כא
Su 24 I Samuel 6	כד	Su 21 I Samuel 26	כב
M 25 I Samuel 7	כה חנוכה	M 22 I Samuel 27	כג
T 26 I Samuel 8	כו חנוכה	T 23 I Samuel 28	כד
W 27 I Samuel 9	כז חנוכה	W 24 I Samuel 29	כה
Th 28 I Samuel 10	כח חנוכה	Th 25 I Samuel 30	כו
F 29 Zechariah 2:14-4:7	כט חנוכה	F 26 Ezekiel 28:25-29:21	כו
Sa 30 מקץ	ל שבח חנוכה	Sa 27 וארא	כז
		Su 28 I Samuel 31	כט

# TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

January 1979			שבט חשל"ט	February 1979			אדר חשל"ט
M	29	II Samuel 1	א	W	28	II Samuel 23	א
T	30	II Samuel 2	ב	March 1979			
W	31	II Samuel 3	ג				
February 1979				Th	1	II Samuel 24	ב
Th	1	II Samuel 4	ד	F	2	I Kings 5:26-6:13	ג
F	2	Jeremiah 46:13-28	ה	Sa	3	תרומה	ד
Sa	3	בא	ו	Su	4	I Kings 1	ה
Su	4	II Samuel 5	ז	M	5	I Kings 2	ו
M	5	II Samuel 6	ח	T	6	I Kings 3	ז
T	6	II Samuel 7	ט	W	7	I Kings 4	ח
W	7	II Samuel 8	י	Th	8	I Kings 5	ט
Th	8	II Samuel 9	יא	F	9	I Samuel 15:1-34	י
F	9	Judges 4:4-5:31	יב	Sa	10	תצוה שבת זכור	יא
Sa	10	בשלח שבח שירה	יג	Su	11	I Kings 6	יב
Su	11	II Samuel 10	יד	M	12	I Kings 7 תענית אסתר	יג
M	12	II Samuel 11 ט"ו בשבט	טו	T	13	Book of Esther פורים	יד
T	13	II Samuel 12	טז	W	14	I Kings 8 שושן פורים	טו
W	14	II Samuel 13	יז	Th	15	I Kings 9	טז
Th	15	II Samuel 14	יח	F	16	Ezekiel 36:16-38	יז
F	16	Isaiah 6-7:6	יט	Sa	17	כי תשא שבת פרה	יח
Sa	17	יתרו	כ	Su	18	I Kings 10	יט
Su	18	II Samuel 15	כא	M	19	I Kings 11	כ
M	19	II Samuel 16	כב	T	20	I Kings 12	כא
T	20	II Samuel 17	כג	W	21	I Kings 13	כב
W	21	II Samuel 18	כד	Th	22	I Kings 14	כג
Th	22	II Samuel 19	כה	F	23	Ezekiel 45:16-46:18	כד
F	23	II Kings 11:17-12:17	כו	Sa	24	ויקהל-פקודי שבת החדש	כה
Sa	24	משפטים שבח שקלים	כז	Su	25	I Kings 15	כו
Su	25	II Samuel 20	כח	M	26	I Kings 16	כז
M	26	II Samuel 21	כט	T	27	I Kings 17	כח
T	27	II Samuel 22	ל	W	28	I Kings 18	כט

## עשה תורתך קבע

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DOR le-DOR

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