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דפוס רפאל חיים הכהן בע"מ, ירושלים

RAHAB OF JERICHO

BY SOL LIPTZIN

Rahab of Jericho is the sole heroine of the *Book of Joshua*. As the strongest fortress barring the incursion of the Hebrew nomads into Canaan, their Promised Land, Jericho had to be captured by these invaders from across the Jordan. Failure to do so would hurl them back into the deserts among whose oases they had wandered for forty years since their escape from Egyptian enslavement. With the charismatic leadership of Moses no longer available to them since his disappearance at Mt. Nebo, they would face the danger of disintegrating into contentious tribes and might vanish from the historic scene upon which they had just entered.

It was Rahab who facilitated the conquest of Jericho by harboring the two spies that Joshua, the successor of Moses as commander-in-chief of the Hebrews, sent ahead on a mission to discover the strength and weakness of the town's fortifications and to report on the morale of the town's inhabitants. Rahab saved the lives of the spies by concealing them while the search for them was on and by helping them to escape to the hills, where they could hide out for three days until they were able to return safely to camp. Once back in the Hebrew camp, they could join in planning the strategy for the decisive campaign against the Canaanite stronghold.

What sort of woman was Rahab and what was her motivation in betraying her own gods and in bringing down destruction upon her own people?

THE RAHAB TRADITION

The Bible calls her a *Zonah*. This word has generally been translated as harlot. However, a minority of commentators has translated it as innkeeper. Since Jewish tradition saw her as the ancestress of distinguished prophets, including Jeremiah and the seeress Hulda, she could serve to illustrate the moral that no person, not even a prostitute, was beyond redemption, if such a person repented and undertook to walk in righteous ways. On the other hand, if Rahab's calling was

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that of an innkeeper, then she might be rehabilitated as a more respectable woman and no disgrace attached to her putting up two strangers for the night. Her generous deed in saving her imperilled Hebrew guests not only made her worthy of being spared, when Jericho's entire population was put to the sword, but, according to some authorities, even endeared her to Joshua, the head of the Hebrew host, who married her, after she converted to his God and threw in her lot with his people.

According to *Matthew* (1:5), Rahab was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth of Moab, another convert to Judaism. Rahab thus became the ancestress of King David and the royal Judean family, as well as of the Christian Messiah.

JOSEPHUS

While Paul in his *Epistle to the Hebrews* (11:31) and James in his *Epistle* (2:25) accepted the version that viewed Rahab as a harlot, Josephus Flavius in his *Jewish Antiquities* (Loeb Classics Edition, V,5) saw her as the keeper of an inn to which the spies came toward the end of the day in order to have supper before undertaking the return trip to the Hebrew camp. Their immediate return was frustrated, however, when the King of Jericho learned that these strangers, who seemed to be anxious to escape detection, were at Rahab's inn near the town's wall. He ordered them to be arrested for questioning. If necessary, they would be tortured in order to ferret out from them the real reasons for their coming. Rahab was in the midst of drying flax upon the roof of the inn when she learned of the approach of the king's men. She quickly concealed the strangers and then told the royal messengers that unknown strangers had indeed supped at her inn but that they had left before sundown and could be easily caught if pursued immediately. Without wasting time to search the premises, the king's men rushed out and sped along the roads leading toward the Jordan. When they found no trace of the strangers, they gave up the pursuit. After the tumult subsided, Rahab told the Hebrew spies that she had risked her life to conceal them and she expected them to keep this in mind. She exacted a promise from them that, during the assault upon the town, they would spare her from harm and those of her kin who would take refuge with her at the inn. Only then did she help them escape by letting them down the wall by a rope in the darkness. Joshua kept

the compact made by the spies. He presented Rahab with land as compensation for her brave deed and showed her every consideration.

RAHAB'S LOVELINESS

Talmudists and Jewish commentators laid great stress on Rahab's loveliness. There was no lord or patrician who did not seek her company. She was listed as one of the four most beautiful women in the world, the others being Sarah, Abigail and Esther. Nevertheless, she did not attract the attention of literary men as did heroines of the succeeding period of the Judges — Deborah, Delilah and Jephthah's daughter, or the heroines beloved by David — Michal, Abigail, Bathsheva and Abishag, or those that Solomon favored most — Sulamith and the Queen of Sheba. It was not easy for writers to transform a lovely harlot into a penitent savior of a foreign people or to find adequate moral reasons for her betrayal of her own people. Only a few modern writers centered their attention upon her and overcame all psychological obstacles to depict her as a good human being, pure at heart despite all temptations and pressures, wiser and more independent than other women of her age and environment. During the past century, attempts at idealizing her were made in the German drama of Rudolf von Gottschall, in the American novel of Frank G. Slaughter, in the Hebrew drama of Matityahu Shoham, and in the Yiddish historical romance of Shmuel Izban.

RAHAB IDEALIZED IN DRAMA

Rudolf von Gottschall (1823–1909) began as a revolutionary poet during the efflorescence of the German political lyric in the 1840's but, after the failure of the Revolution of 1848, he abandoned radical agitation and turned to the writing of historical novels, romantic epics and poetic dramas. The Egyptologist Georg Ebers, who is today remembered far less for his archeological studies, the Ebers Papyrus, than for his authorship of a romance which became the basis for Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*, published a biblical novel, *Joshua* in 1890, in which the exploits of the young hero in Egypt and Sinai were stressed but in which no mention of Rahab appeared. By contrast, Gottschall undertook, in his biblical verse drama *Rahab*, which was published eight years later, to center attention on

this heroine who became entangled in the Hebraic war against Jericho, but he does not include Joshua among the characters in the dramatic plot.

Gottschall introduces Rahab as the High Priestess of Astarte, the goddess of love, who is served both by temple harlots and by virginal priestesses. The dramatist models Rahab's character upon that of Goethe's classical heroine in the drama *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Just as the Greek priestess Iphigenia is dedicated to the service of Artemis, a service from which the ruler of Tauris seeks to release her by offering to share his throne with her, so too the Canaanite priestess Rahab can only be released from her priestly office by the king of Jericho and by no one else. In a moving scene, reminiscent of the wooing of Iphigenia by King Thoas, Rahab is wooed by Jericho's monarch and, like Iphigenia, she evades a positive response. She too thereby provokes the king's wrath. The roles of Orestes and Pylades, the two strangers in Goethe's drama, who are to be sacrificed at the altar of Artemis, are taken over by the two Hebrew spies, Joab and Ruben, who stumbled upon the holy grotto of the goddess Astarte, a grotto which may be entered only by priestesses. Intrusion by others is punishable by death. Joab crept along the grotto and caught sight of the beautiful priestesses as they performed the ceremony of the ablution and investment of Astarte and of her unveiled High Priestess in a cove of the Jordan. Fascinated by this vision, his thoughts circle about Rahab rather than about escaping from the dangerous, forbidden grotto. While Ruben sets out in search of an escape route and is caught by the guards of the sanctuary, Rahab comes across the overtired Joab who has fallen asleep and who appears in her eyes as the reincarnated Adonis, beloved of the goddess of love. She undertakes to save him. He, however, refuses to escape without his companion.

Rahab's plan to intercede with the king to pardon the captured Ruben is frustrated when she turns down the king's proffered hand. In the climactic third act, she is surprised with Joab in her chamber of the priestly palace by the suspicious monarch, who now realizes that she spurned his own love not because of her priestly oath to remain a virgin but because of her infatuation with this second Israelite spy. She is, therefore, degraded from her position as High Priestess to that of a temple harlot. At the ensuing royal feast, which she is forced to attend along with other temple harlots, to strike the cymbals, and to dance before the carousers, she revolts against her humiliation and hurls curses

upon the decadent city and its tyrannical king. From the harsh punishment awaiting her, she is saved by the storming Israelite army. However, her will to live is broken. Before dying, she comes to the realization that all gods, Canaanite or Israelite, bring death and destruction upon mortals. Only love can defy heaven's might and confer moments of happiness. Among all the characters, conquerors and conquered, she emerges as the purest and wisest.

RAHAB IDEALIZED IN FICTION

A no less idealizing portrait of Rahab, pure at heart despite her body's degradation, is painted by Frank G. Slaughter in his novel *The Scarlet Cord*, published in 1956. Compared to her kind, sensitive, wise personality, Joshua emerges as a strong-fisted boor, of extraordinary bravery but of little wisdom. The successful strategies for the campaigns against the Amorites and for the conquest of Canaan are devised by the physician Salman, who has travelled far and wide and who, therefore, knows the habits and weaknesses of peoples. The novelist, who served as a surgeon with the American army during the Second World War, emphasizes battle scenes and their aftermath in carnage and in the healing of the wounded. Joshua is always in the thick of battles and needs a surgeon's skill when the fighting is over. Winning victories against King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan and against the Canaanites after crossing the Jordan, he becomes ever more arrogant and self-centered. It is Joshua who seduces the priestess Rahab and who bears primary responsibility for her ensuing misery.

Rahab is first introduced as the guardian of the shrine of Yah or Yahu in the cave on the slope of Mount Nebo. She is not an Amorite but belongs to the offspring of the Habiru who came with their leader Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans. Only the main body of the Habiru nomads left for Egypt in the wake of the Hyksos invasion and were enslaved by the Egyptians after the expulsion of the Hyksos. A minority remained in the lands of the Amorites and the Canaanites. As the only child of a scribe, Rahab was highly educated and skilled in healing. She won the love of Joshua when he was wounded by a poisoned Amorite spear in the battle against Sihon and was nursed by her. On her way from her shrine in order to bring to her father the *mohar*, the betrothal money that Joshua gave her, she falls into the hands of a passing caravan and is dragged off to the slave market of Memphis, where her extraordinary beauty is



Rahab, an Original by Shulamith W. Miller
ותורדם בחבל בעד החלוק כי ביתה בקיר החומה *Joshua 2:15*

expected to fetch a high price for her as a harlot. She is bought by the Prince of Jericho, who came to Egypt to solicit Pharaoh's aid against the Hebrew invaders. She becomes the royal concubine when the prince ascends the throne on his return to his native land. However, when he is assassinated a few months later, she is degraded to the keeper of a brothel near the townwall. She saves the two Hebrew spies sent to Jericho and is herself saved from her horrible fate when the town falls to Joshua's army. Joshua, however, would have nothing to do with Rahab, the notorious harlot. While he goes on from victory to victory, she finally finds peace and happiness as the mate of the gentle, understanding physician.

IZBAN'S RAHAB

Rahab is also the central figure in Shmuel Izban's Yiddish novel *Jericho* (1966). Though not as well known as the author's earlier historical novel *Jezebel* (1960), which attempted an imaginative reconstruction of Israel's culture during the reign of King Ahab, it too calls into life a decisive period of early Jewish history.

The author, who lived in mandated Palestine for fifteen years before settling in the United States, was familiar with the terrain of Jericho and the Jordan valley. He was also able to draw upon the new discoveries of biblical archeology in the narration of the daily life and the religious rites of the Canaanites. But his greatest asset was his historical imagination. Unfettered by the scholar's need to stick close to verifiable facts, he could expand on the adventures of Caleb and Pinchas, the two Israelite spies who found in the wise and beautiful Rahab a protectress who helped them to accomplish their dangerous mission. Despite her ill-repute, she is idealized in this novel. As the daughter of a rich but later impoverished wine-merchant, she was filled with a thirst for vengeance upon the corrupt oppressors who ruined her family. This was her chief motivation in wanting to aid the invading Israelites. But her love for the upright and fearless Caleb also played a role. Her inn beside the town wall was visited by the most prominent aristocrats and warriors, from whom her true feelings were hidden. Stronger than the sword was the web of charm in which she entangled Jericho's corrupt king and courtiers, until she brought about their downfall. And when the hour of destruction came upon Jericho, her family alone was saved because of her wiles and courage. Caleb, who owed his life to her, then hoped to win her and

her heart too yearned for him. But it was Joshua, his commander-in-chief, who took her as mate, despite her foreign origin, even as Moses had taken the Midianite Zipporah.

While novelists could paint on a wide canvas the historic conflict between the two civilizations and the two religious systems of the Hebrews and the Canaanites which led to the fall of Jericho, dramatists who were attracted to this biblical theme were more limited. Dramatic economy necessitated their focusing attention on a single climactic moment of this conflict. They could do so best by making Rahab the central figure and concentrating the dramatic action on the last hours of the doomed town. In Rahab, the sacred harlot and chief priestess of Astarte or Ashera, goddess of love, the splendor and voluptuousness of the pagan world could find its most glamorous personification. Furthermore, in Rahab's discontent with her decadent environment and in her longing for the simpler, purer Hebraic world, the new religious revelation could best be expressed.

SHOHAM'S RAHAB

What the German dramatist Rudolf von Gottschall, who modelled his Rahab upon Goethe's classical heroine Iphigenia, priestess of Diana, failed to achieve, was successfully achieved by Matityahu Shoham, the pioneer of modern Hebrew drama, in his neo-romantic verse-play *Jericho*, written in 1923. While Gottschall was more at home in Germanic lore and Rahab was the sole biblical theme treated by him in a literary career that spanned more than half a century, Shoham was steeped in biblical lore since his childhood in Warsaw and chose only biblical subjects for his plays. His biblical characters ranged from Abraham and Bileam to Elijah and Jezebel. But none of his heroines were as attractive as Rahab.

Jericho was Shoham's first play, completed in his thirtieth year. His source was not only the Rahab-episode of *Joshua*, chapter III, which paved the way for Israel's victory at Jericho, but also the Achan-episode of *Joshua*, chapter VII, the transgression which brought about the defeat of Joshua's three thousand warriors before Ai. Shoham combined both episodes by making Achan one of the two men sent out by Joshua to spy out the defenses of Jericho and to report on the morale of Jericho's defenders. While the older spy Othniel, who

remembered Egyptian luxury before the Exodus, was unimpressed by Jericho's wealth, Achan, who grew up amidst the austerity of the desert, was overwhelmed by the splendor of this Canaanite citadel and dazzled by the beauty of Rahab, the hierodule of the pagan goddess of love. Upon Rahab's invitation, he attended the sumptuous banquet in which priests and dignitaries participated. Merriment was rather restrained because fear of the ascetic desert hordes and their invisible God hung over the assembled guests. Rahab derided her townsmen as cowards and weaklings, soft-willed, schooled in luxury, lacking the desert's force and flaming passion. She lured the daring, virile stranger Achan until, enraptured by her spell and overcome with burning desire, he remained with her when the sounds of battle were heard and all other guests left to man the ramparts. Locked in her enchanting arms, he betrayed his people by staying away from the fray. He protected Rahab and guarded her valuables against Israelite looters. After the fall of Jericho, he was tried as a traitor and condemned to be stoned. He defended himself by claiming that God made Rahab so lovely that she was irresistible. Hence, God was to blame for his behavior far more than he himself.

In Achan, the dramatist portrayed the struggle within the heart of man between the alluring, sensual world of paganism and the more spiritual, ascetic world of Hebraism. This struggle also raged in the heart of Rahab. It reverberated in Shoham's poems and later plays.

The Bible usually depicts its heroes and heroines as human beings, not only with human virtues but also with human weaknesses. However, it permits no blemish to fall upon lovely Rahab of Jericho, harlot or innkeeper, a Canaanite who became the ancestress of illustrious heroes and prophets. Biblical commentators and creative writers until the present continue to preserve her image in idealizing colors.

CHANGING LAWS

BY HYMAN ROUTTENBERG

Approximately one hundred sixty times we find the expression in the Talmud: "Formerly (or originally) the ruling was such and such but subsequently this was altered thus."

As we examine the various passages, we find that the changes that have taken place in the Halacha and religious customs were due mainly to new social, economic and religious conditions. In some instances changes in Jewish law were made so as to prevent abuses or as the Rabbis put it, 'for the better ordering of society'. Changes in religious practice were also made as a result of the destruction of the Temple and in the interests of peace.

NEW SOCIAL CONDITIONS

We shall now proceed to give examples of changes that have been made in each of the above mentioned categories. Let us begin with the changes that were made as a result of new social conditions. Our Rabbis taught: At first, whoever lost an article used to give its signs of identification and the article would be given to him. When it happened, however, that the deceivers increased in number, it was enacted that he should be told, 'Go forth and bring witnesses that thou are not a deceiver, then you shall be able to take it'¹. Thus we see that the law was changed because of new social conditions.

Similarly, in order to convey the news of the New Moon to the diaspora in Babylon, the original practice was to light beacons. When, however, the Cutheans (Samaritans) adopted evil courses and lit beacons on the thirtieth day, so as to mislead the Babylonians, the rule was made that messengers should go forth to announce the arrival of the New Moon². Furthermore, originally,

1. Baba Metzia 28b.
2. Rosh Hashanah 22b.

Dr. Routtenberg, ordained rabbi from Yeshiva University, Ph. D. degree from Boston University, had a distinguished career in the U.S. rabbinate before retiring in Israel. He is the author of *Amos of Tekoa* in which he explored the rabbinic interpretations of the prophet.

testimony with regard to the appearance of the New Moon was received from anyone. When, however, the Boethusians (the followers of Boethus)³ adopted evil courses, it was ruled that testimony should be accepted only from people who were known to the court (Beth Din)⁴.

Rabbi Judah stated: At first they used to give merely a written undertaking in respect of the Kethubah of a virgin for 200 zuz and in respect of that of a widow for 100 zuz, and consequently the women refused to marry under such precarious conditions. As a result of this, the men grew old and could not take any wives, until Simeon b. Shetah came and ordained that all the property of a husband is to be pledged for the Kethubah of his wife. It was also later ordained that the amount of the Kethubah was to be deposited in the wife's father's house⁵.

ABROGATION OF BIBLICAL LAW

In the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 26, the rituals accompanying the presentation of the first-fruits-at the Sanctuary in Jerusalem are prescribed. Upon presenting the basket of fruit to the priest, he would offer a prescribed prayer of thanksgiving (Deut. 26:5-10). This prayer or declaration had to be made in Hebrew. The sages tell us that originally all who knew how to recite the prayer in Hebrew, would recite it themselves, whilst those who were unable to do so, would repeat the prayer after the priest. But when it was discovered that those who were unable to read the prayer, refrained from bringing the fruit because they did not want to expose their ignorance in reading Hebrew, it was decided that both those who could recite and those who could not should repeat the prayer after the priest⁶. Thus the law was adjusted to new social conditions.

In chapter 21 of the Book of Deuteronomy we are told that if a slain man is found in the open country and the murderer is unknown, the elders of the nearest town shall slay a young heifer, in an uncultivated valley with a stream, and testify that they neither shed this blood nor saw it shed, and pray for forgiveness⁷. In relation to this Biblical law, our Rabbis made the surprising statement that when

3. Like the Sadducees, the Boethusians rejected the Oral Law and opposed the Rabbis.

4. Rosh Hashanah 22a.

5. Kethuboth 82b.

6. Bikkurim 3, 7.

7. Deut. 21:1-9.

murderers multiplied, the ceremony of breaking a heifer's neck was discontinued. The reason why it was discontinued is because it is only performed in a case of doubt; but when murderers multiplied openly, the ceremony was abandoned.⁸ Thus a Biblical law was abrogated as the result of a change in social conditions.

Another example of the abrogation of a Biblical law due to a change in social conditions, is the case of the woman whose husband suspects her of being unfaithful to him. In the Book of Numbers, chapter 5, we read that if a husband suspects his wife of unfaithfulness, he may bring her to the Sanctuary for an oath of purgation and the drinking of 'the water of bitterness'. If she is innocent, no injuries result; if she is guilty, the combined oath and ordeal produce physical effects that proclaim her guilt to the world⁹. Again, in relation to the above Biblical law, the Rabbis made the surprising statement that when adulterers multiplied, the ceremony of the bitter water was abolished by R. Johanan b. Zakkai. Thus our Rabbis taught: "*And the man shall be free from iniquity*" — at the time when the man is free from iniquity, the water proves his wife; but when the man is not free from iniquity, the water does not prove his wife¹⁰.

HYPOTHETICAL LAWS

Even more surprising than the abrogation of Biblical laws by the sages, are the instances where the sages declare that certain laws are purely theoretical and will never be put into practice. A good example of this is the case of the rebellious son who will not hearken to the voice of his parents. Such a son, we are told in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 21, shall be brought by his parents unto the elders of this city, and unto the gate of his place, and they shall say unto the elders of his city: 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he doth not hearken to our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard'. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee; and all Israel shall hear and fear"¹¹.

The Rabbis, not able to accept such a harsh law, declared that there never was a 'stubborn and rebellious son,' that deserved execution, and there never would

8. Sotah 47b.

9. Numbers 5:11-31.

10. Sotah 47b.

11. Deut. 21:18-21.

be such a son. Why then was the law written?, someone asked, and the answer given was, "that you may study it and receive reward." R. Simeon made the harshness of this law appear even more poignant when he asked: "Because one eats a 'tartemar' of meat and drinks half a 'log' of Italian wine, shall his father and mother have him stoned? But it never happened and never will happen"¹².

Another theoretical law that was never put into practice, is the law of a city that was found guilty of idolatry. Concerning such a city we read in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 13, "If thou shalt hear tell concerning one of thy cities . . . saying: 'Certain base fellows are gone out from the midst of thee, and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying: Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in the midst of thee; thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein . . . and it shall be a heap for ever; it shall not be built again"¹³.

As in the case of the rebellious son, the Rabbis apparently felt that the law was too severe. This prompted them to declare: It has been taught, there never was a condemned city, and never will be. R. Eliezer said: No city containing even a single Mezuzah can be condemned. Why then was the law written? That you may study it and receive reward¹⁴.

Similarly the Rabbis declared in regard to the leprous house which the Bible tells us in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 14, must be destroyed, that "there never was such a house and never will be. Then why was its law written? That you may study it and receive reward"¹⁵.

NEW ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Now that we have seen how changes in the Halacha have been made due to new social conditions, we shall continue by examining changes that have been made as a result of new economic conditions. The classic example of such a change was Hillel's Prosbul which he instituted in the first century of the present

12. Sanhedrin 71a.

13. Deut. 13:13-17.

14. Sanhedrin 71a.

15. Sanhedrin 71a.

era. In the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 15, the Bible tells us that every seventh year shall be a year of remission for all debts. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release that with which he hath lent unto his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother; because the Lord's release hath been proclaimed"¹⁶.

As Dr. Hertz points out in his commentary on the Pentateuch, this law was intended for an agricultural society in which each family had its homestead. A debt would only be contracted in case of misfortune. The loan was therefore an act of charity rather than a business transaction. Circumstances had altered altogether when economic life became more complex and people engaged in commerce. Debts contracted in the course of trading belonged to quite a different category, and this law could not fairly be invoked for their cancellation. This prompted Hillel to introduce a method whereby the operation of the year of release did not affect debts that had been delivered to the Court before the intervention at the year of release. According to this method, the creditor could secure his debt against forfeiture by appearing before the Beth Din and making the declaration: 'I announce unto you, judges of this Court, that I shall collect any debt which may have been outstanding, whenever I desire.' This institution was known as Prosbul. A Prosbul prevents the remission of debts in the Sabbatical year. The Talmud explains that Hillel made this regulation because he saw that people were unwilling to lend money to one another and disregarded the precept laid down in the Torah, "Beware that there be not a base thought in thine heart saying: 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand'; and thine eye be evil against thy needy brother, and thou give him naught; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin in thee"¹⁷. The Talmud then gives the text of the Prosbul which we have already given above¹⁸. Thus we see how a Biblical law was abrogated due to a change in economic circumstances. It is interesting to note that Rashi, in his commentary on the Talmud, explicitly states that Hillel in this instance abrogated a law of the Torah.

For economic reasons the Rabbis ruled that a purchase shall not be considered

16. Deut. 15:1-2.

17. Deut. 15:9.

18. Gittin 36a.

consummated upon the payment of money. Said R. Johanan: By Biblical law, the delivery of money effects possession. Why then was it said that 'meshikah' (drawing towards one self the object to be acquired) effects possession? Lest the vendor say to the vendee, "Your wheat was burnt in the loft". (If the delivery of coin should transfer ownership to the vendee even while the purchase is in the vendor's possession, the latter will be remiss in attempting to save it, should a fire break out on his premises; therefore actual 'meshikah' was instituted.)¹⁹

Ullah said: According to the word of the Torah, either a loan secured by a bond or a verbal loan may be recovered from mortgaged property. Why then has it been said that a verbal loan may be collected from free property only? On account of possible loss to the buyers (who might not be aware of the existence of the loan and would thus purchase property which might at any time be taken away from them).

Rabba, however said: According to the word of the Torah, either a loan secured by a bond or a verbal loan may be recovered from free property only. Why then has it been said that a loan secured by a bond may be recovered from sold property? In order that doors may not be locked in the face of borrowers. (No man would consent to lend any money if no land security were available)²⁰.

R. Hanina said: In accordance with the Biblical law, the juridical procedure in regard to the investigation (as to the day and hour) and examination (as to attendant circumstances) of witnesses applies to monetary as well as to capital cases for it is written "One manner of judgement shall you have"²¹. Why then did the sages declare that monetary cases are not subject to this exacting procedure? In order not to 'bolt the door' against borrowers²².

Ullah said: Creditors for loans may, according to the Torah, be paid out of the worst quality, as it is said, "Thou shalt stand without, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring forth the pledge without unto thee"²³. Now it is certainly in the nature of man (debtor) to bring out the worst of his chattels. Why then is it

19. Baba Metzia 47b.

20. Baba Bathra 175b.

21. Lav. 24:22.

22. Sanhedrin 2B-3a. Creditors would refuse to advance loans should difficulties confront them in collecting their debts.

23. Deut. 24:11.

laid down that creditors for loans are paid out of the medium quality. This is a Rabbinic enactment made in order that prospective borrowers should not find the door of their benefactors locked before them²⁴.

A hired laborer, within the set time, swears and is paid. Why did the Rabbis enact that a hired laborer should swear and receive payment? (The general principle being the reverse). Said R. Nahman: Fixed enactments were taught here. Thus, the oath is the employer's privilege, but the Rabbis took it away from the employer and imposed it upon the employee for the sake of his livelihood. The Talmud then asks: And on account of the employee's livelihood, are we to cause loss to the employer? (Since legally it is his privilege to swear to be free from payment). The Talmud replies that the employer himself is pleased that the employee should swear and be paid, so that workers should engage themselves to him²⁵.

Our Rabbis taught: Formerly they were wont to convey victuals to the house of mourning, the rich in silver and gold baskets and the poor in osier baskets of peeled willow twigs, and the poor felt ashamed. They therefore instituted that all should convey victuals in osier baskets of peeled willow twigs out of deference to the poor²⁶.

Our Rabbis taught: Formerly, they were wont to serve drinks in a house of mourning, the rich in white glass vessels and the poor in colored glass, and the poor felt ashamed. They instituted, therefore, that all should serve drinks in colored glass, out of deference to the poor²⁷.

Formerly, they were wont to uncover the face of the rich and cover the face of the poor, because their faces turned livid in years of drought and the poor felt ashamed. They, therefore, instituted that everybody's face should be covered out of deference for the poor²⁸.

Formerly, they were wont to bring out the rich (for burial) on a 'dargesh' (a tall ornamented state bed) and the poor on a plain bier (or box), and the poor felt

24. Baba Kamma 8a.

25. Baba Metzia 112b.

26. Mo'ed Katan 27a.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

ashamed. They instituted, therefore, that all should be brought out on a plain bier, out of deference for the poor²⁹.

Formerly, the expense of taking the dead out to his burial fell harder on his near-of-kin than his death so that the dead man's near-of-kin abandoned him and fled, until at last Rabban Gamaliel came forward and, disregarding his own dignity, came to his burial in flaxen vestments (that is, dressed in linen instead of expensive woolen vestments, as was the custom heretofore), and threerafter the people followed his lead to come out to burial in flaxen vestments. Said R. Papa: And nowadays all the world follows the practice of coming out even in a paltry shroud that costs but a zuz³⁰.

NEW RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

We shall now give some illustrations of changes that were made in the Halacha as a result of new religious conditions. The Mishnah tells us that the Mitzvah of Yibbum (to marry the wife of a brother who died without leaving any children) takes precedence over the Mitzvah of Halizah³¹. But then the Mishnah goes on to tell us that this was the case at first when the parties concerned used to carry out the law with religious intentions (in order to preserve the name of the dead brother). But now that they do not carry out the law religiously (but merely for sexual pleasure), the Rabbis have said: The Mitzvah of Halizah takes precedence over the Mitzvah of Yibbum³².

At first it was ruled; One who cooks food on the Sabbath unwittingly, he may eat thereof; if deliberately, he may not eat; and the same applies to one who forgets (a dish on the stove, and it is cooked). But when those who intentionally left it there grew numerous, and they pleaded, "We had forgotten it on the stove", the Sages retraced their steps and penalized him who forgot³³.

In the example which follows we have the reverse of what we had above; here the Rabbis made a change in the Halacha as a result of improvement in religious

29. Ibid 27b.

30. Mo'ed Katan 27b.

31. The ceremony of taking off the shoe of the husband's brother for refusing the Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-9).

32. Bechorot 13a.

33. Shabbat 38a.

observance. At first the Sages ruled: Three utensils may be handled on the Sabbath; A fig-cake knife (i.e. for cutting a cake of pressed figs), a pot soup-ladle (for removing the scum of the soup), and a small table-knife. Then (when they saw that the people became more strict in Sabbath observance) they permitted other articles, and they permitted again still more, and they permitted still further, until they ruled: All utensils may be handled on the Sabbath except a large saw and the pin of a plough³⁴.

At first people used to wash in pit water heated on the eve of the Sabbath; then bath attendants began to heat the water on the Sabbath, maintaining that it was done on the eve of the Sabbath. So the use of hot water was forbidden, but sweating was permitted. Yet still they used to bathe in hot water and maintain, 'We were perspiring'. So sweating was forbidden, yet the thermal springs of Tiberias were permitted. Yet, they bathed in water heated by fire and maintained, 'We bathed in the thermal springs of Tiberias'. So they forbade the hot springs of Tiberias but permitted cold water. But when they saw that this (series of restrictions) could not stand (they could not be enforced, being regarded as too oppressive for the masses), they permitted the hot springs of Tiberias, whilst sweating remained in status quo³⁵.

Mar Zutra or, as some say, Mar Ukba said: Originally the Torah was given to Israel in Hebrew characters and in the sacred (Hebrew) language; later, in the times of Ezra, the Torah was given in Ashshurith script (Assyrian; modern Hebrew square writing) and Aramaic language. Finally, they selected for Israel the Ashshurith script and Hebrew language, leaving the Hebrew characters and Aramaic language for the Samaritans³⁶.

Changes in religious practice were made necessary especially after the destruction of the Temple. Thus the Mishnah tells us that formerly (i.e. In Temple times), the lulab was taken for seven days in the Temple and in the provinces (including Jerusalem) for one day only. When the Temple was destroyed, R. Johanan b. Zakkai instituted that the lulab should be taken in the provinces for seven days in memory of the Temple³⁷.

34. Shabbat 123b.

35. Shabbat 40a; Yerushalmi Shabbat 3, 3.

36. Sanhedrin 21b.

37. Sukkah 41a.

Similarly, the Mishnah tells us that if the festive day of New Year fell on a Sabbath, they used to blow the shofar in the Temple but not in the country (including Jerusalem, according to Rashi; excluding Jerusalem, according to Maimonides). After the destruction of the Temple, Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai ruled that the shofar should be blown on the Sabbath in every place where there was a Beth Din (Court). According to R. Eliezer, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai laid down the rule for Jabneh only³⁸.

Our Rabbis taught: In former times, whoever found a lost article used to proclaim it during the three Festivals and an additional seven days after the last Festival, three days for going home, another three for returning, and one for announcing. After the destruction of the Temple, it was enacted that the proclamation should be made in the synagogues and schoolhouses. But when the oppressors increased, it was enacted that one's neighbors and acquaintances should be informed, and that sufficed. What is meant by 'when the oppressors?' They insisted that lost property belonged to the king.

IN THE NEW LAND OF ISRAEL

Just as there were changes in religious practice after the destruction of the Temple, so were there changes immediately upon entering the land of Israel. So long as the Israelites were in the wilderness they were permitted to eat the flesh of an animal no matter how it was killed. The injunction to slaughter an animal according to ritual was not intended to be effective until they had entered the land of Israel. This, according to R. Akiba, is derived from the following verse in Deuteronomy: "If the place which the Lord thy God will choose to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt slaughter of thy herd and of thy flock"⁴⁰. This verse, says R. Akiba, is stated specially in order to prohibit the flesh of a stabbed animal upon entering the land of Israel⁴¹.

FOR THE BETTER ORDERING OF SOCIETY

Finally, in many instances changes were made in Halacha in order to prevent

38. Rosh Hashanah 29b.

39. Baba Metzia 28b. That was Persian law, which the Jews felt justified in secretly resisting.

40. Deut. 12:21.

41. Hullin 17a.

abuses (lit. for the better ordering of society) and in the interests of peace. Thus, the Mishnah tells us that in former times a man was allowed to bring together a 'beth din' (i.e., three persons) wherever he was and cancel the get (divorce). Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder, however, laid down a rule that this should not be done, so as to prevent abuses, lest the bearer should give it to her in ignorance that it was annulled and she marry on the strength of it⁴².

The Rabbis ruled that the witnesses should subscribe their names in full, that is, their name and that of their father, and not merely their own name, which would be sufficient according to the Torah. This new ruling was made in order to prevent abuses, as it has been taught: At first the witness used simply to write 'I, so and so, subscribe as witness'. If then his writing could be found on the other documents, through which his identity could be established, the 'Get' was valid, but if not, it was invalid. Said Rabban Gamaliel: A most important regulation was laid down by the Rabbis, that the witnesses should write their names in full in a 'Get' in order to prevent abuses⁴³.

The marriage of a deaf man or a deaf woman was legalized by the Rabbis, as is evident from the Mishnah⁴⁴. Since 'halizah' was required, it is obvious that the preceding marriage, without which the question of halizah could never have arisen, is recognized as valid, despite the fact that a deaf-mute is elsewhere ineligible to effect a kinyan⁴⁵.

Our Rabbis taught: Formerly the mourners used to stand still while the people passed by. But there were two families in Jerusalem who contended with one another, each maintaining, 'We shall pass first'. The Rabbis, therefore, established the rule that the public should remain standing and the mourners pass by⁴⁶.

SUMMARY

Thus we see that changing circumstances and new situations in life necessitated adjustment in the Halacha. And that was the primary function of the

42. Gittin 32a.

43. Gittin 36a. A formal act of acquisition.

44. Yebamoth 112b.

45. Ibid. Because now it would be possible to find witnesses who recognized their signatures.

46. Sanhedrin 19a.

Oral Law. According to Joseph Albo, the Torah made provisions for such adjustments by providing general principles of interpretation. These principles were given to Moses orally and were incorporated in the Thirteen Rules of Interpretation enunciated by Rabbi Ishmael⁴⁷ Albo pointed out that "the Torah cannot be so comprehensive as to be adequate for all times, because the ever new details of human relations, their customs and their acts are too numerous to be embraced in a book. Therefore Moses was given orally certain general principles, only briefly alluded to in the Torah, by means of which the wise men in every generation may work out the details as they appear"⁴⁸. This explains perhaps why the sages said that the covenant which God made with Israel was made only for the sake of the Oral Law⁴⁹, for without the Oral Law the Written Law could neither be understood nor preserved.

47. B'raitā d'Reb Yishmael, Torat Kohanim, ch 1.

48. Sefer Ha-Ikkarim Vol. 3 ch. 23.

49. Gittin 60b.



Jewish life in Art & Tradition

THE SYMBOLS OF NATURE IN ISRAEL AND IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

BY KALMAN YARON

Unlike modern man who conceives the world in a rational manner and distinguishes between nature and spirit, between the inanimate and the animate, ancient man attributed psychic life to plants and animals, as well as to the inanimate world.

E.B. Tylor¹ was the first who used the term animism to describe the ancients' concept of attributing life to inanimate objects. He came to the conclusion that the fetishes of ancient rituals became holy to the ancients because they thought them to possess human spirit and sanctified soul. With the aid of this animistic concept, ancient man crystallized for himself a well-defined and concrete image of divine presences.

R.R. Marett² sought to define the primitive spirit as one which relates life to bodies of nature without having a clear conception of what life is. In a nebulous emotional manner ancient man believed that certain definite objects possess a supernatural power which could determine his fate.

Robertson-Smith³ also examined pre-logical thought connected with animism. He points out that primitive man usually ignores the distinctions between organic and inorganic nature. All objects seem living to them. The hidden life present in a sanctified tree or stone cause them to be considered alive.

H. Frankfort⁴ elaborates on the essence of the ancient pagan-mythical concept of the world and maintains that objects and ideas of all kinds, god, spirit, will, tree, heavens, symbols, deeds, truth, etc. — have no separate existence but

1. E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1871.

2. R.R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, 1914.

3. W. Robertson-Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, 1956.

4. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948.

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metamorphose from one form into another. The seen and the hidden are essentially the same. Hence there is no separation between nature, man and the divine. The mythical act, the mythical drawings and the symbolic ritual are all natural realities. Hence theogony, cosmogony and ritual rites are three aspects of the same authority, and not only man lives and speaks, but every object can communicate with man. In ritual performances confronting natural phenomena man renews personal contact with the forces of nature.

This ancient view finds expression in religious concepts and in ritual acts and myths in the entire ancient east: in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, Canaan, and also in ancient Greece (ritual of Adonis). Thus there was complete identity in the ancient east between the deity and the plant. The reproductive cycle of bloom and wilting in nature was, according to them, a concrete expression of the death and resurrection of the gods themselves. The cycles of life and death of the seasons of the year, of the heavenly bodies, of changes in nature, dramatize the cyclical hidden struggle between the forces of grace and flowering on the one hand and between the forces of death, darkness and total destruction on the other hand.

In one of the selections of the Canaanite Epos⁵ which recalls the actions of Baal, we read that at the time of his death all of creation was desolate. Baal's sister Anat enters later in a frightening bloody battle with the god Mot, her brother's eternal enemy and completely subdues him:

She seizes Mot the son of El;
With a blade she cleaves him;
With a shovel she minnows him;
With fire she parches him;
With a millstone she grinds him;
In the field she sows him;
His remains the birds eat;
The wild creatures consume his portions;
Remains from remains are scattered.

Albright⁶ perceived well that in no other ancient mythology was there such

5. D. Winton Thomas, Ed. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, 1958, p. 131.

6. William F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, Anchor Books, 1957, p. 232.

complete identification of the body of the god with the crop which is harvested, threshed, baked into bread, ground into flour, and finally sown into the field as corn. Albright stresses that the aim of the ritual is not to resurrect Mot but to revive Baal in a magic and sympathetic act.

In a similar mood, the rites of the Sumerian-Akkadian god, Tammuz, who annually departed from the world in the midst of summer, were enacted. On his departure all nature dried up. His mother, sister and wife mourned for him (c.f. Ezekiel 8:14) until he reappeared, at the beginning of the rain season. In the spring we hear the songs of praise and exultation for Tammuz who renewed his strength and awakened from his slumbering death. A holy ceremony of marriage is performed with the virgin Ishtar, mother of all the living. As a result, the soil becomes pregnant and grows grass and all kinds of plants.

In these rituals the vegetation is part of god and there is no difference between Tammuz and the trees or flowers. When one wilts, the other dies, and when they bloom, god revives. God is not compared to a flower or a tree. He is the flower or the tree.

Moreover, all who are familiar with the mythology of the ancient east know how close the association of the god, the king, and vegetation was in the consciousness of the people of the fertile crescent (especially in Phoenicia). The tree of life planted by the brooks of "living water" in the temple courtyard symbolized and represented both the king and god. Thus we read in the royal hymn for the King of Shulgy: "King Shulgy, the very gracious lord is a palm tree planted by the brooks of water". And Engnell⁷ justly concludes: "This description is not merely a literary metaphor but reflects realistic objects rooted in the ideology and ritual of the ancient east".

Kaufmann⁸ points out the basic differences between the image of the world of the Bible and that of the ancient pagan world. Nature and man are, according to Kaufmann, conceived in Israel as an entity entirely separate from the exalted divine presence. Not only is God not of the body of concrete nature, but nature in all its infinite breadth is unable to provide space for the transcendental divine presence (I Kings 8:27), and yet there is no place in all of nature devoid of His

7. I. Engnell, *Planted by the Streams of the Water*, Studia Orientalis, 1948, pp. 85 ff.

8. J. Kaufmann, *Encyclopedia Mikraït* 2, p. 662 ff.

presence (Psalms 139:7–12). The material and the spiritual are not on the same level, are not one in nature, but the spiritual is higher than the material; it is near to the divine presence, for in this the divine reveals itself to the created.

Nevertheless with regard to the forces of life in natural bodies, Kaufmann emphasizes that the poetic and spiritual descriptions in the Bible are not by way of esthetic “borrowing,” but express also a realistic aspect similar to the pagan image of the world. The natural bodies, like the sun and the stars (See Psalms 8; 19) are living, conscious creatures, and act according to destiny and purpose, except that their life and thoughts are not independent; they are the servants of the One above, serving their creator and “telling” about Him in their own way.

The degree of confusion prevalent also in Israel regarding the distinction between inanimate and living things is especially remarkable with regard to the image of the sea, as reflected in the Bible. The sea is conceived as a living creature who plotted to revert the universe to chaos. We find in the Bible numerous descriptions in which God had to subdue the rebelling sea with his powerful sword. He was constrained to limit it, to destroy, suppress, crumble, scatter, beat it, gallop on its high places, dry it up, tear it, cover it with doors, scold it, tear it to pieces, set up boundaries for it, control it by law, guard it, and take many similar actions against it. (See especially Isaiah 51:9–11, Psalms 74:12–16; 89:10–11, Job 9:13, 26:12–13, 38:8–11). And again, it is needless to stress that these are not poetic phrases but expressions of a living reality. In order to appreciate this archaic concept we have to ignore our knowledge of the causes of high and low tide, etc., and to try to see the sea through the eyes of the ancients, as a frightful giant monster which constantly attempts to break out unto the dry land in order to destroy all of creation.

It is also worth noting that in the above-mentioned places there is a complete identification between the various presences which God restrains: the rivers, the whales, the dragon, the abyss, Leviathan, and various monstrous forces all of which are merely different manifestations of the same force — the incarnation of the unrestrained, primitive, and disharmonious in creation which frightens, threatens, and carries the forces of darkness and destruction.

A much greater metamorphosis appears in the transfer of these myths from the realm of cosmogony to that of history. Thus we find in Isaiah (51:9–10): “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the days of old,

the generations of ancient times. Art thou not it that hewed Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon? Art thou not it that dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, that made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?" (See also the Song of the Sea, Exodus 15). The analogy here is between the chaotic and disharmonious forces which were about to harm creation and the enemies of Israel which wish to interfere with God's process of history. Hence Egypt is called Rahab (Psalms 87:4) and Ezekiel (29:3) refers to it as "the great dragon that lies in the midst of the rivers"⁹.

H. Wheeler-Robinson¹⁰, in his interesting chapter on "Nature in Creation", has many examples of the animistic conception prevalent in ancient Israel. Here are some: Elifaz promises Job a covenant with the stones of the field (Job 5:23). At Kadesh there was a "Spring of Justice" (Genesis 14:7). In Numbers (21:17-18) we find reference to a well as to a living entity. In II Samuel (5:23) we find that trees would provide oracle answers in times of attack. The stones of Beth El which Jacob used as a pillow were the means whereby he dreamt his vision of the ladder. Other examples are Joseph's dream in which the sun, the moon, and the stars bow down to him. The author of Psalm 68 calls on the sun, the moon and the stars to praise the Lord. The prophets call on the mountains to listen to the contention of the Lord (Micah 6:1-2; Ezekiel 36).

In Isaiah (14:8) the cypress and the cedar trees rejoice at the defeat of Babylon, while in Isaiah (55:12) the trees of the field clap their hands when God returns the remnants of Zion (See also Psalm 148, where all nature praises God, and the prayer of man merges with the mighty symphony of nature).

Well worth discussing are the biblical metaphorical expressions rooted in the vegetarian world. Indeed, from about one-thousand metaphors found in the Bible, some two hundred fifty (a quarter) are from the world of plants¹¹. The boundaries between man (in most cases the king) and the plant often become indistinct, similar to the mythical drawings in the ancient near east.

The term "plant" (Zemach or Zemach-Zadik), is frequently ascribed to the

9. On the ancient Israeli epic see especially: M.D. Casuto, *Shirat Haalilah B'yisrael*, in Kneset vol. 8, 1948.

10. H. Wheeler-Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, 1946.

11. For the significance of metaphors from the plant world see D. Yelin: *Torath Hamelitzza Haivrith*, Selected writings II, 1939.

king, and processes of growth are described (Jeremiah 25:5-6; 33:15; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). A similar reference in which the legitimate offspring of the king is called 'Zemach Zadik' was surprisingly found in a Phoenician inscription from Cyprus¹². In this context of attributing to the king vegetarian metaphors, it is worth while to mention Ezekiel (chapter 31) which brings us one of the version of paradise traditions. In this chapter Pharaoh is compared to a cedar of Lebanon, of beautiful foliage and shady growth, envied by the other trees in the garden of Eden. Because its heart rises in its loftiness, his fate is to be cut down and driven out of Eden (compare Genesis 2; Ezekiel 28; Isaiah 14:4 ff). This vital description of the garden and the tree endowed with life give ground to the assumption that it is rooted in the pre-logical animistic world, adopted from Canaanite fertility cult¹³.

One of the most interesting phenomena exemplifying the ancient animistic world in Israel is the peculiar perception of the Cherubim in the Bible. The Cherubim are first mentioned in Genesis 3:24 as living creatures guarding the tree of life. In another version of paradise traditions (Ezekiel 28:14-6), they are mentioned as the "covering Cherub." These Cherubim screening the ark-cover with their wings, are mentioned in Exodus 25:20. (Compare also with Exodus 37:9; I Kings 8:7; I Chronicles 28:18).

What is the relationship between these cultic ornamental artifacts and the "living" cherubim mentioned in the Eden tradition? And what is the connection between those and the "heavenly Cherubim" on which the Lord is riding? We have already seen that in the ancient world there are no clear boundaries between the living and inert objects. It is not surprising that Ezekiel, in his magnificent "Chariot vision," endows life to the ark and to the inert Cherubim, thus providing a heavenly chariot that moves, rises and flies, and serves as the throne of the Lord.

In conclusion we can summarize:

1. At times the metaphors, similies and parables in the ancient world are not literary ornamentation but present a world-image full of life.

12. Larnez Lapethos 2, or Neraka-Cooke N.S. I no. 29/11.

13. See K. Yaron, *The Dirge Over the King of Tyre*; Annual of the Swedish Theol. Inst. 1964, vol. III, pp. 28-57.

2. Various natural entities such as the sea, the rivers and the abyss differ only in form but present the same natural essence.
3. At the same time we have to make clear that this concept does not in itself necessarily contradict the spirit of Biblical monotheism. In its final crystallization the God of heaven and earth appears in the Bible as above and beyond nature. He is the One who created the universe and by His grace he gave certain natural bodies an independent life of their own.

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IN THE LANGUAGE OF MAN

BY CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

Anthropomorphic expressions in relation to God are common throughout the Bible. There are references to His form (Genesis 1:29), His eyes and ears (Psalms 34:17), His nostrils (Ibid 18:16), His mouth (Numbers 12:18), His feet (I Chronicles 28:2), His hand (Exodus 15:16), His finger (Psalms 8:4), and His arm (Jeremiah 27). These are just a few examples of numerous allusions found throughout Scriptures. In addition, there are many anthropopathic phrases ascribing to God almost every phase of human emotion and feeling, such as love, hate, delight, anger, compassion, revenge, disgust, kindness, etc. In the light of the above, are we to assume that the authors of the various books of the Bible envisioned God as a powerful corporeal being, as a sort of super-superman? When the psalmist mocks the idol worshipper by pointing out that their gods "have eyes but see not, have ears but hear not" (Psalms 115:5), is he in effect saying that the converse is true about our God: that He has eyes and can see and ears and can hear. Does his introductory sentence *כל אשר חפץ עשה* – "Whatever pleases Him He does" (Ibid v. 3) imply that God needs no physical accoutrements?

Our sages answered that question with the simple formula: The Torah speaks in the language of man – *דברה תורה בלשון בני אדם* (Berachot 31a). Before an idea can be understood by the human mind, it must be expressed in human terms. God's will in creating the world can only be conveyed through words like "He said", "He did" or "He formed". By referring to "His watchful eye" or "His outstretched arm" the Bible conveys God's interest in man and in His protection, even though we are aware that it only approximates the idea. It is quite possible that the ordinary man in the street, the *עם הארץ*, took these phrases literally and in his mind, which was incapable of abstract thinking, he pictured God in some form or another. What interests

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us is what the prophets and the authors of Scripture thought. Were they truly anthropomorphic or did they, like our Rabbis said, speak in the language of man? Even a modern author can confuse the two. Dr. Freedman, the commentator to Genesis in the Soncino Bible, commenting on chapter 11:5, "The Lord came down to see" interprets Ibn Ezra's words דברה תורה בלשון בני אדם as an anthropomorphism.

It is interesting to note that never has any physical representation of God been found either in documentary references or in archeological discoveries. The dictum of the first two commandments seems to have prevailed as far as representing God was concerned, even though the second part of that commandment did not deter the Jews from worshipping other gods and making images representing them. Were there any truth to the idea that speaks of the gradual development of the purely spiritual concept of the Divinity in later times, and that in biblical days God was regarded as one who possesses human forms and attributes, then it would be inconceivable, or at best, highly improbable, that they would make no attempt to reproduce that image in concrete form. They deified the snake that Moses put up in the wilderness as an antidote for snake bite but never worshipped the cherubim which were actually on the ark in the Holy of Holies and were supposed to be the vehicle through which God expressed His will. The stories of man seeing God (Exodus 22 ff) did not affect the common belief that "Man cannot see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). When Manoah, a simple farmer, saw the angel who came to tell him about the birth of Samson, disappear in the flames, he exclaimed: "We shall surely die because we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). It was the common sense of his wife that calmed him. When Hezekiah decided to strengthen and purify the service to God he broke down "the altars on the high places". There was no mention of statues or other representations of Him. Even the golden calves Jeroboam put up to deter his people from making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem may not have been idols. They may have been intended as a replacement for the Cherubim as a vehicle for oracular pronouncements (Metzudot to I Kings 12:28). Anything that was part of, or in any way connected with, the service of God was never raised to the position of deity.

This brings us to the interesting question of whether the biblical authors

believed in a physical god and whether all the anthropomorphic references were literal in their minds, or whether they were consciously speaking “in human terminology”. Assuming the latter, many problems are solved. Within the limitations of this paper, I shall discuss two or three phrases as illustrations.

When Samuel informed Saul that divine consent to his reign would be removed, he quoted God saying **למלך את שאול כי המלכתי את** – “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king” (I Samuel 15:11). Taken literally, there is a glaring contradiction in his statement eighteen verses later: **כי לא אדם הוא ויתנחם** – “He is not a man that He should repent” (Ibid, v. 29). To Samuel neither phrase was anthropopathic. He could not think of God as being sorry for something he did at one time and being willfully obstinate at another time. In the first case God gave Saul the kingship on condition that he obey Him (Ibid 10:25). Since he did not obey, the kingdom was taken away. All this was in the original plan and there was no repentance in the accepted meaning of the word. In the second case, “repent” means “being sorry” or “changing one’s mind”. To that Samuel says, “God does not have human feelings and does not repent”. He cannot be swayed by human emotions but the words are used only to help us understand.

The similar phrase **וינחם** – “And the Lord repented” (Exodus 32:14) – is explained by the Midrash as part of God’s plan to forgive them, contingent on Moses’ prayer. “Allow me” – **הניחה לי** – and I will destroy them, was the signal to Moses that if he will not “allow Him” (through prayer), then there will be no punishment (Brachot 32a). God does not “repent”, i.e. change His mind because He feels sorry or He realizes He made a mistake. Divine punishment, or lack of it, always depends on something else which is in the realm of “free will”. Just as a computer is programmed to consider each step with a “yes” or “no” and to follow, if yes with (a) or if no with (b), so is God’s predesigned plan. The Bible phrases it not in computer but in human language, and says: God repented.

Another example is in the story of Abraham and Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18). Abraham was visited by three angels, one of whom promised him a son, while the other two proceeded to Sodom to destroy the cities and to save Lot and his family. The divine decision was already made and

finalized, and a messenger sent to implement it. Then God decided to tell Abraham of His plan so that it might be an object lesson to him and his children (Ibid vs. 17-18). He preceded His information, "I will go down and see" – *הכצעקתה הבאה אלי* – whether they are really as bad as they seem (Ibid 21). This seems odd. Did God pass judgement and carry out His decree and then go down to investigate? To take the story literally as an anthropomorphism, God acting as a human being would act, makes no sense. The verse becomes clear if we take the phrase, "I will go down" to mean: To invoke a response which will become a true lesson in righteous justice (v. 18). The expression "I will go down and see" was not *whether*, but to what *degree* they sinned. Abraham understood it and the bargaining session follows logically. He was not trying to change God's mind since he knew that this would be impossible. That explains why he never prayed nor entreated when he was told to sacrifice his son or when he was informed that his children would be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years. In his dialogue with God he was trying to discover the minimum of righteous people required to avert retribution on an entire group.

Anthropomorphism and anthropomorphism, the actual belief that God possesses human emotions and has a physical body, was foreign to the leaders of the Jewish people even in the biblical period. The vision of seeing God in Isaiah's call to prophecy (Isaiah 6) is more of a surrealist dream than a credible description of a vision. In a room fifteen feet high he saw God sitting on a high and exalted throne though only the hem of His garments filled the entire temple, and there was still room for the angels to fly about and above Him! Obviously the vision was intended not to be realistic so that the message would be clear. Rabbi Yehudah Hechasi in his Shir Hakavod (Song of Glory), chanted in the synagogue after the Sabbath morning service, expresses it beautifully.

*They imagined Thee not as thou art really
They depicted Thee in countless visions
They saw in Thee old age and youth
With the hair of Thy head now gray now black.*

Though many of the so-called anthropomorphic allusions fall into this

category, at least as many are the outbursts of poetic enthusiasm. The hymn of thanksgiving in II Samuel 22 and in the Song of Praise in Psalm 104 are excellent examples of this form of poetry. The allusions, as in Job 26, to God's victory over well-known Canaanite and Babylonian legendary figures, like Rahab, or Abaddon, or the Rephaim that live under water is no more proof that the ancient Hebrews believed in them than that Milton believed in idols when he spoke of "loathed Melancholy of Cerebous and bleakest Midnight born" (*L'Allegro*) or Shakespeare when he mentions Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself, and eyes like Mars...the herald Mercury (*Hamlet*, Act III).

There is a form of anthropomorphism we use in our daily speech which, because it does not refer to the deity but to inanimate objects, we recognize as poetry and call it personification. Thus we speak of the foot of a mountain, the neck of the wood, the heart of the matter, etc. Even in the Bible we find these expressions: The tongue of the sea (Joshua 15:8), the heart of heaven (Deuteronomy 4:11), the heart of the sea (Proverbs 3:19), rivers applaud (Psalms 89:8) and hills dance (Psalms 114:4). Poetical expressions of what the heart can do is compiled in an interesting list in Koheleth Rabba 1:16. The heart sees, understands, walks, stands, falls, cries out, etc., and for each action quotes an appropriate biblical verse. Resh Lakish goes a step further and says that "everything God created in man He created in the earth" (Yalkut Shimoni 186): i.e. the earth has eyes — "and it covered the eye of the earth" (Exodus 10:15); the earth has ears — "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, o earth" (Isaiah 1:2). In the same way he "proves" that the earth has a head, a face, a mouth, hands, arms, hips, feet, and that it eats, drinks, vomits, gets drunk, and even gives birth. It is obvious that Resh Lakish did not mean it literally, and it is just as logical to assume that the authors of the biblical books did not take the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic references to God literally, as they never attempted to create them in visual form. It was their way of expressing the divine in human understandable language.

THE CONFIRMATION OF NOAH'S BLESSING

An Interpretation of Genesis 8:21 – 9:11

BY AARON SOVIV

Noah and his sons, the progenitors of the second human race after the destruction of the first by the Flood, were the recipients of divine blessings and commandments, in the manner granted previously to Adam. The text of Genesis 8:21–9:11 which describes the disembarking from the ark and what followed it, is therefore a repetition of the story of Adam, with some obvious resemblances and variations.

The twice-stated: "Never again will I doom the world because of man" (8:21) is in contradistinction to the previous twice-stated malediction, "cursed be the ground because of you" (3:17;4:12). This promise is enforced by the twice-stated blessing: "Be fertile and increase and fill the earth" (9:1; 9:7). This again is a repetition of the same blessing given before to Adam (1:28). Then comes the twice-stated: "I now confirm My covenant with you and your offspring to come" (9:9; 9:11).¹

The passage in Genesis 8:21-9:17 contains seven such doubly-stated Divine utterances.² This is an obvious departure from the usual prosaic style of the Genesis narratives and evidently indicates that a poetic text served as a background for this prose.

A few words have to be said here in explanation of the phrase, "confirm My covenant". All the English Bible translations mistranslate the Hebrew **הִנַּחֵם**

1. The quotations come from the New J.P.S. translation of the Torah, Philadelphia 1962. Only in the last quotation "confirm" substitutes for "establish". The reasoning behind this change will be explained in the following paragraphs.

2. In addition to the three already quoted examples, the following four repetitions should be noted: 9:4, 9:5, 9:9, 9:11,9:12, 9:15, 9:16.

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מקים אח בריתי (9:9). Nearly all of them render it: “I now establish my covenant”. Speiser and the new JPS translation render the same Hebrew verb into “establish” (9:9) and “maintain” (9:11). While “maintain” might be satisfactory, “establish” is misleading; it carries eight meanings, according to the dictionary, of which only one – to make stable, make firm – fits the intent of the Hebrew verb “Le-hakim (brith)”. The other dictionary meaning – to found, to institute – is completely misleading. The authoritative medieval Hebrew Bible commentator, Rashi, explains 9:9: לעשות קיום וחיווק בריתי – “to give durability and strength to the covenant”³. This Rashi comment is based on a previous text (6:18), where the same Divine promise is made to Noah, before he entered the ark.

Cassuto buttresses this Rashi interpretation by his insight into Genesis 17:7, where the same verb והקימותי אח בריתי appears. From the contents of the narrative it is evident that here God does not refer to a new covenant; He only confirms a previously entered covenant (Genesis 15:18). According to Cassuto, a distinction has to be drawn between “making” or “entering” (literally “cutting”) a covenant and “confirming” a previously entered covenant. In our case (9:9 and 9:11) God simply confirms the covenant He made with Adam, and assures its fulfillment in Noah and his sons.⁴

Where in the Bible does this covenant with Adam appear? Cassuto’s reply is that the blessing granted to Adam upon his creation (1:28) is equivalent to a covenant. The Bible uses many synonyms for “entering a covenant”, and “blessing” is one of them. In the biblical way of thinking, “blessing” implies a mutual relationship between God and man. Man blesses God and expresses to Him his feelings of gratitude and reverence. In response, God favors man and bestows upon him His blessings of peace and bounty. The most important

3. In *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Harry M. Orlinsky, editor, Philadelphia 1969) an explanation is given in which the change to “I will maintain” in verse 9:11, is based on the Rashi commentary. Why does not the same apply also to 9:9? Rashi explains these two passages in the same manner.

4. All this is clearly expressed in Cassuto’s *Me-Adam ad Noah (From Adam to Noah)*, and also in his *Torath Ha’tuodoth (The Documentary Theory)*, p. 42-43. However, it is somewhat blurred in the English translation (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*) because of the translator’s acceptance of the New J.P.S. Torah translation.

blessing is “be fertile and increase”.⁵ In the patriarchal period the blessing was handed down from father to son, like all the other possessions. Before Jacob leaves his father’s house, he receives from Isaac the blessing: “And God Almighty bless you...and give you the blessing of Abraham” (28:3-4). In turn, Jacob does the same to Joseph (49:26).

As in the case of Adam, the blessing of Noah and his sons is followed by a demand to obey commandments. Three commandments are explicitly mentioned: The prohibition to consume “flesh with the life thereof, which is blood”; the prohibition of murder; and the obligation to establish courts of justice for the prosecution of those “who shed man’s blood”. “Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed” (9:6). When Abel was murdered, God assumed the duties of a judge. Now it becomes the duty of human society to punish the murderer. The chiasmal parallelism of this proverb, in which every word is repeated in a crosswise manner, serves as an indication of its hoary antiquity: שׁוֹפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם — בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָךְ. Adam received only one explicit commandment: “But as for the Tree of Knowledge of good or bad, you must not eat of it” (2:17). However, we must assume that he was implicitly obliged by his Creator to observe all the ethical commandments given to Noah and his sons. Otherwise, how could God hold Cain responsible for the murder of his brother, when the biblical account nowhere prohibits such murder? And on what grounds was God justified in punishing Noah’s generation with total extinction for “corrupting its ways on earth” (6:12), when such “corruption” was not forbidden by any previous utterance of God? We may therefore assume that man’s moral behavior does not require a Divine command. The fact that man was created “in His image, in the image of God He created him” (1:27), is a sufficient guarantee of man’s moral responsibilities. As a latter-day rabbinic saying states: “As He is merciful and gracious, so should you be merciful and gracious”⁶.

The “likeness of God” (5:1) and His image, which are embodied in man, are the basis of man’s rationality and morality. Because he was created in the image of God, Adam was capable of giving “names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky, and to all wild beasts” (2:20). In the biblical frame of

5. “Beraha” (Blessing) in *Encyclopedia Mikraith*, v.2, p. 354-358.

6. Babylonian Talmud Sabbath 133b.

reference, giving a name means knowing the nature and the essence of the thing to which the name is applied. This is also the ground for God's warning to Cain before the killing of Abel: "Sin is the demon at the door, whose urge is towards you, yet you can be his master" (4:7). Only when man showed himself incapable of obeying the moral imperative implanted in him, did God give to Noah and his sons (meaning, to all of mankind) the three commandments mentioned before.

According to rabbinic interpretation (Sanhedrin 56a), Genesis 9:3-6 contains the following seven commandments: 1. The establishment of courts of justice. 2. The prohibition of blasphemy. 3. The prohibition of idolatry. 4. The prohibition of incest. 5. The prohibition of bloodshed. 6. The prohibition of robbery. 7. The prohibition of eating flesh cut from a living animal.⁷ These commandments are obligatory on all men, on all created "in His likeness". While the Jew is obliged to observe all the 613 commandments of the Torah, the non-Jew is required to live according to these "seven commandments for the sons of Noah". This is the meaning of "fearing God" to which the Bible refers so often.⁸

Is the covenant with Noah a two-sided or a one-sided covenant? The prevailing opinion in biblical scholarship is that the covenant with Noah is an act of Divine grace, for it involves no corresponding obligations on the part of man. God binds Himself unilaterally to Noah and to all succeeding generations of man.⁹ The binding character of the moral law is implanted in man by the Divine act of creation and does not require a corresponding approval on his part.

7. According to Hertz's comment to Genesis 9:7.

8. Genesis 20:11; 39:9; Exodus 1:17, etc.

9. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, N.Y. 1966, p. 57, Nehama Leibowitz *Iyunim Besefer Bereshith* (Studies in Genesis), Jerusalem 1966, p. 61-63.

WHAT'S IN A BIBLICAL NAME

by LOUIS KATZOFF

In Biblical times great significance was attached to the choice of a name. In the case of the twelve sons of Jacob, the name is chosen by either Leah or Rachel and the reason is stated. What is interesting is the consistency of the contrasting moods of the two matriarchs in their choices and the reasons given.

This brief analysis will show that the names of Leah's children and of her maid-servant Zilpa, are all upbeat, optimistic and hopeful. Contrariwise, the names of Rachel's and Bilha's children were given, as it were, in a mood of depression, bordering on frustration and contentiousness.

Leah's yearning for Jacob's love is reflected hopefully in her choice of names of her children and those of her maid-servant:

Reuven: *The Lord has seen my affliction* — ראה ה' בעניי — *now my husband will love me* (Gen. 29:32).

Shimon: *This is because the Lord heard* — שמע ה' — *that I was unloved, and has given me this one also* (29:33).

Levi: *This time my husband will become attached to me* — ילוה אישי אלי — *for I have borne him three sons* (29:34).

Yehudah: *This time I will praise the Lord* — הפעם אודה — (29:35).

Gad: (Zilpah's) *What luck* — בגד — ! *So Leah named him Gad* (30:11).

Asher (Zilpah's): *What fortune* — באשרי — ! *So she named him Asher* (30:13).

Issachar: *God has given me my reward* — נתן שכרי — *for having given my maid to my husband* (30:18).

Zevulun: *God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will honor me* — יזבלני אישי — *for I have borne him six sons* (30:20).

The contrast is striking in the reasons for Rachel's choice of names of her children and of Bilha's: They express an intense yearning — a yearning for

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children of her own. One notes an undertone of contention with God in the naming of Dan (Bilha's son). *God has judged me* — דנני אלקים. *He has heeded my plea and given me a son* (30:6).

In the name of Naftali (also Bilha's son) we discover a frustrating sense of rivalry with her own sister. *A fateful contest I waged with my sister* — עם אחותי נפחלתי — *yes, I have prevailed* (30:8).

In the name of Joseph one senses an echo of a previous argument she had had with her husband: *Give me children or else I die* (30:1). To which Jacob had angrily answered: *Am I in God's stead who has withheld from you the fruit of thy womb* (30:2). Now that her son was born, she called him Joseph for *God has taken away my disgrace* — אסף את חרפתי (30:23). And only as an after-thought: *May the Lord add another son* — יוסף לי בן אחר — *for me* (30:23).

Binyamin: *Rahel called his name Son of my Sorrow* — בן אוני — but his father called him Son of my Old Age — בנימין.*

*. I am indebted to David Cohen, printer of Dor le-Dor, for the following interesting interpretation: How come that whereas all the names of the children were given by Leah or Rahel, in this instance Rahel's choice of name — Ben Oni — is overruled by Jacob and the name Benjamin is fixed. The answer lies in what each wished to express: As she was dying, Rachel recalled her guilt in stealing her father's household idols (תרפים) and wished to call her last child "Son of my Transgression" (און), thus taking the blame and punishment for her misdeed. Jacob would not hear of this but exclaims: It is my fault, for had I not expressed a curse — in Hebrew oath also is "yamin" — when your father Laban confronted me about the theft of the teraphim, you would have lived. Therefore he called him Binyamin: Son of my Oath or Curse.



TORAH DIALOGUES

BY HAROLD D. HALPERN

BEMIDBAR – NUMBERS

The Book of BeMidbar (Numbers) contains both legislation and historical narrative. The period dealt with is, as the Hebrew title indicates, the 38 years of the Israelite travels in the wilderness before their arrival at the banks of the Jordan River.

QUESTIONS

SHELAH

1. *Why would God indicate a necessity for Moses to send spies (13:2)?*
2. *Compare the intelligence-gathering mission here with that in the Haftarah. Which elements insured the success of the latter in contrast to the failure of the one in the Torah? (v. also Dor-le-Dor, Summer 1977).*
3. *What reminders of modern Israel can you find in Chapter 13?*
4. *What lessons for our time can be garnered from the episode of the spies and the harsh punishment meted out to them and their followers?*
5. *The maftir portion of this sidrah (15:37–41) is the familiar passage concerning tzitzit (fringes) recited in the daily prayers.*
 - a. *According to Torah, what is the significance of the fringes?*
 - b. *Connect this paragraph with an earlier episode in this sidrah.*
 - c. *Can you find a key verb used in this passage that is also found in the spy incident?*

KORAH

1. *We are usually able to detect a logical connection between a Torah chapter and those adjoining it. How is chapter 16 of Sidrah Korah connected with Shelah Lecha (chaps. 13–15) and BeHaalotcha (especially chaps. 11–12) which precede it?*
2. *Politicians try to win over to their side as many different groups as possible. From the Torah text, deduce which dissident parties Korah appealed to.*
3. *In what ways does Korah's rebellion and Moses' reaction to it differ from previous occasions, such as those mentioned in response #1? (cf. also BeHaalotcha question #5 in Dor-le-Dor IX:2)*

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ANSWERS

SHELAH

1. Despite God's help in the takeover of the land of Canaan, it would still be necessary to be familiar with the terrain and defensive capabilities. The Talmud (Sotah 34b) and commentators believe that Moses was not ordered to send spies but merely given permission to do so. They cite Deut. 1:21 as proof.
2. There are important differences. Moses dispatches prominent tribal chieftains while Joshua sends anonymous spies. The latter are apparently intelligence professionals while the 12 are not even referred to as "spies" (cf. Josh. 2:1 and Num. 13:2). In the Torah the cumbersome group embarks on its mission with fanfare but in the Haftarah the two go out stealthily. The former report to the entire people (13:26), the latter to their commander, Joshua (2:23). After analysis it's not surprising that one fails while the other succeeds!
3. Verse 22 mentions the Negev and Hebron. Verse 23 describes a trademark and allegory used today, especially by the Israeli government tourist agency. Verse 24 refers to Eshkol, a name adopted by a late Prime Minister of the State.
4. The attitudes toward resettlement and reclamation of the Land of Israel in modern times are analogous in many ways to the report and reaction of the ancient Israelite scouts. Today too there are nay-sayers who speak evil of the land and evince hopelessness regarding the future of the State of Israel. Others courageously go up to make the barren land blossom and demonstrate confidence in Israel's future like Joshua and Caleb who proclaimed "Tovah . . . the Land is very, very good." The Torah emphatically teaches that only with a positive attitude can the Jewish people inherit the land.
5. a. The Torah declares that we may be distracted by our eyes and hearts to perform shameful acts. The tzitzit recall the commandments and our sacred responsibilities.
b. The spies judged by what they saw and their hearts grew faint. They should have recalled the promises of God as tzitzit should remind us of the mitzvot.
c. The verb חָרַר (tur) is used in both passages (13:2, 16, 17, 21, 25, and 15:39, v. Rashi ad loc.)

KORAH

1. Chapters 13 and 14 relate instances of rebellion vs. God and Moses. These include the spies incident (13:26 ff), the talk of returning to Egypt (14:1-4), the abortive invasion attempt (14:40-44), and the Sabbath

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QUESTIONS

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4. *Prof. Leibowitz and other commentators call attention to sarcasm and irony in the arguments of the disputants in Chapter 16. Find the expressions to which they refer.*
5. *Korah and his fellow mutineers are invited to offer incense before God on censers along with Aaron, the high priest. What became of the censers and what significance does their disposition possess?*

BALAK*

This entire Sidrah deals with the attempt of Balak, king of Moab, to utilize sorcery to prevent Israel's advance into his land. Mainly it related the encounters of the heathen diviner, Balaam with God and Israel. Some of the following material was suggested by Prof. Nehama Leibowitz of Hebrew University.

1. *The very presence of this sidrah (which is referred to as the "Book of Balaam" in some ancient manuscripts,) in the Torah is somewhat surprising since it involves dealings among heathens and their efforts to curse Israel. What historical and religious lessons are conveyed by "Balak"?*
2. *Since the Torah denounces and rejects magic and incantation (Deut. 18:9-14 and elsewhere) why does God concern Himself here with reversing Balaam's potential imprecations?*
3. *One of the strangest episodes in the Torah is the incident of Balaam's ass in chap. 22:21-35.*
 - a. *How do you explain the speech of the ass?*
 - b. *What religious teachings can you attribute to these verses?*
4. *Balaam blesses Israel principally in three passages: 23:7-10; 18-24 and 24:3-9. Find the differences between the three pronouncements with regard to*
 - a. *God's role in Balaam's visions*
 - b. *Balaam's attitudes towards King Balak and Israel*
 - c. *The use of literary devices.*
5. *Relate Chapter 25, which deals with the immorality and apostasy of Israel at Baal Peor, to the events in the previous four chapters.*

* Consult also *Balaam — An Unauthentic Prophet*, by Shimon Bakon, Dor le Dor Vol IX, No. 2.

ANSWERS

Korah continued from p. 151

violator (15:32 v. Ramban ad loc.). Ramban also connects the Korah rebellion to the events in Num. 11. According to the Midrash, Korah challenged Moses on the laws of tzitzit (fringes) promulgated just preceding this Sidrah (15:37 ff). There is also an ironic undertone in 16:3 after we read in 12:3 that "Moses was a very humble man . . ."

2. Levites (not Aaronic), the tribe of Reuben and probably eldest brothers in general, tribal chieftains and malcontents (16:1, 2, 13, 14).
3. Past rebellions and murmurings are mainly directed at God. This one is aimed at Moses' right to lead and Aaron's to act as the Kohen (16:3 and 17). That's why Moses appeals to God to verify their positions (16:6-7 and 15-17).
4. Both Moses and the rebels mimic phrases used by their opponents as a form of mockery (see 16:3 and end of v. 7; v. 9 and v. 13). In verse 13 Dathan and Abiram sarcastically refer to Egypt as the "land flowing with milk and honey!"
5. They were used to place the altar in the courtyard. They had become sanctified because they were used for a sacred purpose and because they symbolised God's choice of Aaron as high priest (17:3).

BALAK

1. This sidrah is a rare view of Israel from the other side as visualized by the Torah. We learn of the impact of the invading TRIBES UPON THEIR NEIGHBORS. We are also given a glimpse of a respected non-Israelite "prophet" of renown. The generous praises and predictions regarding Israel also make "Balak" a most appropriate part of the Torah, especially in view of all the criticism levelled against the people in adjoining passages, although the Midrash remarks that criticism is more beneficial. It also cites this portion as an indication that God deprived the heathen of the gift of true prophecy (v. also response #2).
2. Sorcerers like Balaam enjoyed great prestige. We learn from the Mari archives (letters unearthed near the Euphrates River ca. 1750 B.C.E.) that consultation with diviners was a widespread and respected practice. There is no doubt that this attitude also affected the Israelites whose morale would suffer if the curses were pronounced, even if they disbelieved them. Even more, the pagan nations who believe in sorcery would be encouraged by foreboding oracles to attack Israel (Abravanel). Any future Israelite defeats would also be attributed by the people to sorcery. Perhaps the religious lesson of the sidrah is that Israel's covenant with God protects it against all its enemies.

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ANSWERS

Balak continued from p. 153

3.
 - a. Some commentators view the ability of the ass to reason and speak as a miracle while the Talmud attributes the potential for this marvel to the sixth day of creation. Other commentators, such as Maimonides and Saadia, explain the episode as a dream. S.D. Luzzatto (19c.) notes that דבר — speak — is not used with reference to the ass (but אמר — say, is used!). He theorizes that no actual speech took place. Instead, the groaning and braying of the ass was interpreted by Balaam with the words given in the Torah.
 - b. Yehezkel Kaufman sees here another round in the struggle of religion against magic. He regards the episode of the ass as a way of showing up and ridiculing sorcery. In contrast “there is no divination in Jacob.” The Midrash juxtaposes Balaam, the greatest sorcerer, with the lowliest beast: The ass saw what Balaam could not until “God opened his eyes”; God put words in both their mouths; Balaam who reputedly could destroy a nation with mere ex-ecration, resorts to a stick to beat his beast and threatens it with the sword. Both are equally subject to God’s will. Thus, this episode and the entire sidrah are “concerned with discrediting superstition and belief in magical practices.”
4.
 - a. The peculiar term ויקר is used for God’s communication to Balaam, only in the first two blessings. This term is never used with an Israelite prophet (Nahmanides). The prelude to the third blessing points out that divination was not utilized (24:1) nor does God “put words in his mouth” this time. Instead, the Torah speaks of “the spirit of God” descending upon Balaam and the words are a truly divine prophetic message (v. 4, cf. Nahmanides and Rashbam).
 - b. His attitudes towards Balak appear to change radically. In the first blessing he is “Balak, King of Moab,” in the second he is simply Balak and son of Zippor and finally he is not mentioned. Conversely, Balaam’s praise of Israel grows from factual observations and mild admiration to praise for its history, its opposition to sorcery and its military prowess. In the third pronouncement he is generous with blessings of prosperity, future victories and international prominence.
 - c. There is a progressively greater use of metaphor and simile in the three blessings.
5. Beginning with chapter 21 we find various local efforts to block Israel’s penetration of the region. Military means fail (chap. 21) and incantations cannot be mustered against them (chaps. 22–24). Now the sexual wiles of Moabite women are employed, according to Numbers 31:16, upon the advice of Balaam (see Mattot, question #2).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

As the author of an earlier article on Kohelet (Jacob Felton, *Kohelet – A Re-Interpretation*; Dor le-Dor, Fall 1976, pp29ff), I have read with much interest the article on Kohelet by Dr. Elchanan Blumenthal (*Dor le-Dor*, Fall 1980) and I am glad to see that we both take as our point of departure an almost identical interpretation of the word *Yitron*. You call it “abiding value.” In the same way, I stress the derivation of *Yitron* from *hoteir*, that which is left over, namely: anything left over after a person who has lived a good and wise life dies. Contrary to the Authorised Version’s: “What profit has a man of all his labour...,” I translate: “What is left over from a man’s labour under the sun?.” In other words: Has life any real value? Has a man or a woman who have led a wise and good life added anything (a *yitron*) to the sum total of what existed on earth when they were born? Perhaps the most pertinent philosophical question, even today.

I also agree with you that Kohelet is not a pessimistic Book. It gives an affirmative answer. After these basic agreements, our ways part.

I divide the Book into two parts. Part one, from 1:1 to 3:14. In that part, Kohelet examines whether man can add anything lasting to the material world. He finds that everything turns and returns in circles. Sun, water, wind (not the four elements of Aristo). A palace

which he has built (at least, in his poetic imagination) is nothing lasting either, for his son may be a fool and may not like it. In life, “There is a time and season for everything.” Nothing lasting. No *yitron*. Neither accumulation of wisdom nor bodily enjoyment satisfy. The summing up in 3:14 “...one cannot add anything (a *yitron*) to what God has made...and God has done it, so that one should fear him.” Part one thus ends on the fear of God, the same as, afterwards, the whole Book. Proof that the last two verses are not a fake addition.

Part two which extends to the Book’s end, contains many different outlines of courses of men’s lives. Happy starts, continuing happy to the end. Happy starts turning to failure. Unhappy starts, remaining sad. Unhappy starts, with happy endings. All this as he stresses many times, not necessarily connected with whether the man is good or evil. Good and wicked people share the same fate (among many similar statements, see 8:10ff.) 8:12 “...for I also know that it will be good with those who fear God...” As he has said in the same breath that many who fear God have unhappy lives on earth, this is clear proof that Kohelet is based on justice being done in the World-to-Come. Also the “there” (3:17) where God sets right what human judges have miscarried, proves the same. Part II also contains much sound advice: To work hard, to seek

friends, to find happiness with one's wife, not to put all one's eggs into one basket, to invest in property, not to oppose the king, not to talk evil about the king, even in secret, etc. This part culminates in encouraging young people to enjoy their strength and youth, but never to forget that life is short and that they will have to account to God, after death, for what they have done with the opportunities for doing good, useful, wise things in life.

Then follows the beautiful, gripping description of failing capacities in old age. Then death: "When the silvercord is torn... and the jug lies broken by the well... and the mourners go about in the market." Summing up: there is a yitron, namely: fear of God. This is the yitron which you take into the World-to-Come and for which you earn yourself eternal happiness.

Jacob Felton

Dear Mr. Halpern.

What a wonderful idea to mark the Bar-Mitzva of our son by making him a member of the Bible Readers' Union. May we suggest that Jewish parents throughout the English-speaking world adopt this custom by enrolling their son on Bar-Mitzva — and why not girls on their Bat-Mitzva? — as members of the World Jewish Bible Society in Jerusalem. We are sure that they will learn much from and appreciate the quarterly Dor le-Dor and its informative and valuable articles. Moreover, as your Editor and Associate Editor say, "Membership will strengthen the feeling of identification with Eretz Yisrael, the land of the Bible and with Am Yisrael, the people of the Book."

(signed) Rabbi & Mrs. M.Z. Suffrin,
London.

Dear Mr. Halpern,

I was very interested in the article in Dor-le-Dor "The Golden Calf in Exodus 33. vol. VIII, No. 4 on the fashioning of the golden calf in the wilderness, and how the wording of the inspired text is shown to be exactly correct. You and I do not need such evidence to confirm our faith but it is useful when contending for the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. You will recall that the writer said that the ancient method of making molten or cast images was to make the shape in wax. This was then easily engraved. Then the whole heated up. This caused the moulding cover to set hard, while the wax ran out at the base. The molten gold was then poured into the mould. When cooled, and the mould was opened out, the finished calf emerged with all the detail work and engraving clearly shown, exactly as the wax pattern. Well, this is in keeping with archaeological finds. These finds also confirm the meticulous accuracy of God's word.

I am keeping very well, which is something to be very grateful to God at my age of 86½ years."

(signed) Gerard M. Clements, Sutton,
Surrey.

עשה תורתך קבע

TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

March 1981	אדר ב תשמ"א	April 1981	ניסן תשמ"א
Sa 7	Haftarah: I Kings 7:51-8:21(A) I Kings 7:40-50(S)	S 5	Micah 7
S 8	Joel 3	M 6	Nahum 1
M 9	Joel 4	T 7	Nahum 2
T 10	Amos 1	W 8	Nahum 3
W 11	Amos 2	Th 9	Habakkuk 1
Th 12	Amos 3	F 10	מצורע
F 13	ויקרא	Sa 11	Haftarah: II Kings 7:3-20
Sa 14	Haftarah: I Samuel 16:1-34	S 12	Habakkuk 2
S 15	Amos 4	M 13	Habakkuk 3
M 16	Amos 5	T 14	Zephaniah 1
T 17	Amos 6	W 15	Zephaniah 2
W 18	Esther	Th 16	Zephaniah 3
Th 19	Esther	F 17	אחרי כוח
F 20	13	Sa 18	Haftarah: שבת הגדול Malachi 3-4:24
Sa 21	Haftarah: שושן פורים Jeremiah 7:21-8:3	S 19	Song of Songs פסח
S 22	Amos 7	M 20	Song of Songs פסח
M 23	Amos 8	T 21	Song of Songs חול המועד
T 24	Amos 9	W 22	Song of Songs חול המועד
W 25	Obadiah 1	Th 23	Song of Songs חול המועד
Th 26	Micah 1	F 24	חול המועד
F 27	שמיני	Sa 25	Haftarah: כא אחרון של פסח II Samuel 22
Sa 28	Haftarah: כב Ezekiel 36:16-38	S 26	Haggai 1 כב אחרון של פסח
S 29	Micah 2	M 27	Haggai 2 כג
M 30	Micah 3	T 28	Zechariah 1 כד
T 31	Micah 4	W 29	Zechariah 2 כה
		Th 30	Zechariah 3 כו
April		May	
W 1	Micah 5	F 1	קדושים כו יום השואה
Th 2	Micah 6	Sa 2	Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15 כח Ezekiel 20:2-20
F 3	תוריע	S 3	Zechariah 4-5 כט
Sa 4	Haftarah: כט Ezekiel 45:16-46:18	M 4	Zechariah 6 ל

TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

May 1981	אייר חשמ"א	June 1981	סיון חשמ"א
T 5 Zechariah 7	א	W 3 Psalms 10	א
W 6 Zechariah 8	ב	Th 4 Psalms 11	ב
Th 7 Isaiah 10:32-11:11	ג	F 5 נשא	ג
	יום העצמאות מוקדם	Sa 6 Haftarah:	ד
F 8 אמור	ד	Judges 13:2-25	
Sa 9 Haftarah:	ה	S 7 Ruth	ה ערב שבועות
Ezekiel 44:15-31		M 8 Ruth	ו שבועות
S 10 Zechariah 9	ו	T 9 Ruth	ז שבועות
M 11 Zechariah 10	ז	W 10 Psalms 12	ח
T 12 Zechariah 11	ח	Th 11 Psalms 13	ט
W 13 Zechariah 12	ט	F 12 בהעלותך	י
Th 14 Zechariah 13	י	Sa 13 Haftarah:	יא
F 15 בהר	יא	Zechariah 2:14-47	
Sa 16 Haftarah:	יב	S 14 Psalms 14	יב
Jeremiah 32:6-27		M 15 Psalms 15	יג
S 17 Zechariah 14	יג	T 16 Psalms 16	יד
M 18 Malachi 1	יד	W 17 Psalms 17	טו
T 19 Malachi 2	טו	Th 18 Psalms 18	טז
W 20 Malachi 3	טז	F 19 שלח	יז
Th 21 Psalms 1	יז	Sa 20 Haftarah: Joshua 2:1-24	יח
F 22 בחקונו	יח ל"ג בעומר	S 21 Psalms 19	יט
Sa 23 Haftarah:	יט	M 22 Psalms 20	כ
Jeremiah 16:19-17:14		T 23 Psalms 21	כא
S 24 Psalms 2	כ	W 24 Psalms 22	כב
M 25 Psalms 3	כא	Th 25 Psalms 23-24	כג
T 26 Psalms 4	כב	F 26 קרח	כד
W 27 Psalms 5	כג	Sa 27 Haftarah:	כה
Th 28 Psalms 6	כד	I Samuel 11:4-12:22	
F 29 במדבר	כה	S 28 Psalms 25	כו
Sa 30 Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-22	כו	M 29 Psalms 26	כז
S 31 Psalms 7	כז	T 30 Psalms 27	כח
June		July	
M 1 Psalms 8	כח יום ירושלים	W 1 Psalms 28	כט
T 2 Psalms 9	כט	Th 2 Psalms 29	ל

דף יומי

We add here the daily Talmud page followed by the Jewish Community

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ל' בסיון מחזילים מסכ' מנחות ב'

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החברה היהודית העולמית לתנ"ך
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דור לדור

DOR le-DOR

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