Violence in the Life of Moses:
How it Affects him as a Jewish Male Role Model

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Digest

This thesis examines the role of violence in Moses' life through an extensive study of the "Slaying of the Taskmaster" story.

Chapter One focuses on the topic of violence. Violence is examined through the scientific studies of instinctivists, behaviorists, and sociobiologists. The chapter concludes with an exploration into possible societal influences on violent behavior and our ability to predict it.

Chapter Two examines the role of masculinity and societal pressures on males. The chapter also, through personal reflections and textual materials, looks at the dichotomies and challenges faced by Jewish males.

Chapter Three takes the previous two chapters into consideration as Moses and his killing of the taskmaster is analyzed. Through Midrashic interpretation (both rabbinic and modern) and psychoanalytic studies of Moses, this chapter attempts to piece together the scenarios which led up to this fateful act. The chapter concludes with an examination of how Jews throughout the ages have defended Moses, even whitewashing the severity of his actions. Questions are raised, such as why not hold him totally accountable and why we as a people feel a need to defend our heroes.

The thesis concludes with my personal motivations for the choice of this topic and my reactions to this defense of Moses.

Preface

> And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, of his brethren. And he looks this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.
>
> *Exodus 2:11-12*

Every Passover our family would read these verses – a Jewish hero tale of social justice. And every Passover I would think to myself "what a hero Moses was, he saw injustice and killed the villain." This was an angry role model for a young Jewish boy. As I grew older I struggled with the societal image of the Jewish male. I did everything I could to become a "tough Jew." Every Passover I would look forward to hearing how Moses killed that taskmaster. Each year the slaying would grow more violent as I grew more intent on becoming ever tougher. Eventually after many years, I began to realize that my toughness was just a defense against connecting to emotions. The story of Moses faded into my memory. Then I became a father…

Now, as I watch my daughter take her first steps I think about the world into which she is walking – and I read this story once more with a new perspective. My wife and I will be raising our child in a world of violence; a world of children killing children, ethnic cleansing, murder rates skyrocketing, countries on the brink of nuclear war. Unfortunately the list seems endless and I as a father will be faced with the daunting task of protecting a child in the minefield of the twenty-first century.

Anger and violence were my outlets for too long and now I strive to walk the path of peace. I still battle the demons of the closeness between Moses' anger and the potential for my own. The battle is fought every day. I have chosen to become a Rabbi,

a teacher of my heritage and lover of our Torah. The reality is our heritage is one of violence. Our Biblical ancestors often acted immorally and even murdered. To make peace within myself as a Rabbi and a Jew I must engage with the painful side of our Jewish family tree. It is through this project, this journey that I will hope to find some peace. Perhaps, through a greater understanding of the nature of violence and its role in our Torah, especially in Moses' early life, will I be able to change our world: to make it a bit safer for my child.

The fact is that Moses killed a man. No matter how we tell this event a man died at the hands of perhaps our greatest leader. Over many years the biblical commentators, rabbis and theologians have defended Moses' actions with careful explanation and cleansing of character. Each generation has tried to justify this act of violence. Moses is our hero and as such needs our protection. But does he really? A question, which arises, is the choice that Moses made to use violence. Why? Was this killing justified? And how do we as descendents accept that our hero had, at least for a moment, a violent side of his character?

To Jews and non-Jews Moses is a hero. He fits the criterion established by thousands of years of myth. We as humans need heroes. Our religions are filled with mythological giants whom we live through vicariously. Yet we often need our heroes to be more than human. We need them to be greater than us – greater in strength, in power, and in character. Joseph Campbell writes in his book *The Hero of a 1000 Faces*, "The masters of legend have seldom rested content to regard the worlds greatest heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found. On the contrary,

the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception."[1] But it is the ordinary characteristics that teach us about our own lives. The anger that Moses displays in killing the taskmaster is a feeling many of us can identify within ourselves. We might not see violence as a viable option but if we look deep enough we can begin to understand.

The role of violence in the life of Moses will be explored in this thesis. The thesis in Chapter One will examine the psychological causes of violence utilizing modern clinical psychological research. By examining the background of violent behavior, in the areas of family history, environment, and personality construction, I hope to identify patterns that might have led to Moses' use of violence.

Chapter Two on *Images of Masculinity* will explore specific societal and Jewish perspectives on "being a man." Moses was rewarded for strong, powerful leadership. How many male stereotypes contributed to how he interacted with others? Was he rewarded for his violence behavior? How does Moses measure up to modern societal and Jewish imagery of masculinity?

In Chapter Three I will consider possible reasons for Moses' resorting to violence and more importantly, how do we as Jews justify his actions? Traditionally the rabbis vilify the enemy (i.e., the taskmaster), thereby relieving Moses of personal responsibility. I hope that an honest examination of Moses' moment of violence will open the door to future lessons of violence prevention. Only by understanding our heroes and our own potential for violent behavior can we begin to understand and eventually control these urges.

Notes to Preface

[1] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces.* (NewJersey, 1949), 319.

Chapter One – Violence

We live in a violent world. We and our children are inundated with violent imagery. Go to the movies, turn on the television, read a newspaper and you'll find violence. We've come to apathetically accept that it's part of our lives. We have also come to accept that aggressive behavior can lead to success – in business, in school, in sports. How are the concepts of aggression and violence connected? There is no proof that aggression inevitably leads to violence or that they are interchangeable terms. Myriam Miedzian writes in her book *Boys Will Be Boys* of her choice to use the term violence instead of aggression, "My decision to use the term 'violence' grows out of the ambiguity of the term 'aggression.' This ambiguity tends to make acts of violence more acceptable when they are called 'aggressive' rather than 'violent.' The reason for this is that the term for 'aggression' can be used in several highly divergent senses, some of which have a very positive connotation."[1]

Aggression can be advantageous for all of us, including our ancestors. Without the motivation to kill for food or protect one's family – the hunter-gatherer society would never have been able to exist. But human violence for violence sake is an intriguing and upsetting offshoot of such behavior patterns. It is damaging and tragic to all involved. James Gilligan in his book *Violence: Reflecting on a National Epidemic* writes,

> Human violence is much more complicated, ambiguous and, most of all, tragic, then is commonly realized or acknowledged. Much of what has been written about violence, even by those experts who study it – criminologists, criminal lawyers, forensic psychiatrists, moral philosophers, political scientists, and historians – comes only from the point of view of their own specialties which tend to preclude the tragic dimensions of violence. But those who deal with individual violence on a daily basis, judges and lawyers, criminologists and forensic psychiatrists, law enforcement professionals and prison administrators are fully aware of how tragic violence is, not only for the victims but also for the perpetrator.[2]

For the purpose of this chapter, which deals with exploring the phenomenon of violence, I will first examine briefly the schools of instinctivism (Sigmund Freud and Konrad Lorenz), the school of behaviorism (B F. Skinner) and the social-biological theory of Edward O. Wilson. I will then examine Dr. Gilligan's work in greater detail and establish a compendium of possible motivations for violence (childhood factors, abuse, etc.). A second section will examine the possible correlation between childhood experiences and violence in adult life; and will conclude with possible motivations for killing.

Instinctivist Theory

The instinctivist school comes from the teachings of Freud who had, by the 1920's, formulated a new theory of which the passion to destroy – 'death instinct' was considered equal in strength to the passion to love.[3] Sigmund Freud's work on non-erotic human aggression and destructiveness was hardly touched upon by Freud himself.[4] Freud was so absorbed with

sexual repression that he overlooked the importance of aggressiveness until post-World War I.[5] He had, however, in 1915 in his work *Three Essays*, postulated that there may be aggressiveness that arises independently from the sexual instinct. The assumption that Freud makes explores the possibility that ego instincts are the source of aggressiveness. "Hate, as a relation, is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring of stimuli. As an expression of the unpleasure evoked by objects, it always remains in an intimate relation with the self preservative instincts..."[6]

Freud began to hypothesize that in every human there were instinctual life forces vying for attention. In his work *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he wrote about his initial hypothesis.

> Starting from speculations on the beginning of life and from biological parallels, I drew the conclusion that beside the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state. That is to say, as well as Eros there was an instinct of death.[7]

The tension created by these two competing instincts is incredibly powerful. Freud recognized the need to reduce and release this tension. Fromm writes of Freud's recognition, "That each living cell is endowed with two basic qualities: Eros and the striving for death and that the principle of the tension reduction is preserved in a more radical from: the reduction of excitation to zero."[8]

Freud describes the death instinct as what he calls the destructive

instinct in his work "Economic Problem of Masochism." He writes of the goal of the libido to take care of this death/destroying instinct. "The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfills the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outward... The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instructive mastery, or the will to power."[9]

This destructive instinct is powerful. It lies deep within the psyche of the human. Its release manifests itself in often deviant and dangerous behaviors. But to hinder its release – to ignore its power and tension also may be dangerous. Freud writes in his work "New Introductory Lectures" in 1933 about the destructive instinct.

> We can only perceive it under two conditions: if it is combined with erotic instincts into masochism or if – with a greater or lesser erotic addition – it is directed against the external world as aggressiveness. And know we are struck by the significance of the possibility that the aggressiveness may not be able to find satisfaction in the external world because it comes up against real obstacles. If this happens, it will perhaps retreat and increase the amount of self-destructiveness holding sway in the interior. We shall hear how this is in fact what occurs and how important a process this is. Impeded aggressiveness seems to involve a grave injury. It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction.[10]

This theory caused great internal turmoil for Freud. On one hand he was a theoretician and on the other hand he was a humanist.[11] Fromm writes of Freud's struggle between these two poles.

> The theoretician arrives at the conclusion that man has only the alternative between destroying himself (slowly by illness) – [Freud had written in his work "An Outline of Psychoanalysis," 'holding back aggressiveness is in general unhealthy and leads to illness' – Freud 1933] or destroying others; or – putting it in other words – between causing suffering either to himself or to others. The

> humanist rebels against the idea of this tragic alternative that would make war a rational solution of this aspect of human existence.[12]

The complexity of Freud's language, coupled with his own ambivalence, affected the popularity of his instinctivist theory on aggression. This was evident in the lack of interest by the popular audience.[13] Thirty years later, a scholar in the field of animal behavior decided to examine human behavior in relation to violent aggression, and by the mid-1960's, another instinctivist, named Lorenz, would captivate the populous.

Konrad Lorenz, an animal behaviorist, wrote an extremely accessible book called *On Aggression* in 1966. To environmentalists of the late 60's, with concerns about war and nuclear threat, this study became extremely popular in the field of social psychology.[14] Although summarily discounted by most neuroscientists and psychologists, Lorenz's book was seen by many others to answer the question of the problem of where violence comes from in humans. This spawned a group of animal behaviorists turned human behaviorists.[15] Erich Fromm in his book, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, wrote of this new wave of instinctivist thinkers. "All of these works contained basically the same thesis: man's aggressive behavior as manifested in war, crime, personal quarrels, and all kinds of destructive and sadistic behavior is due to a phylogenetically programmed, *innate instinct* which seeks to discharge and waits for the proper occasion to be expressed."[16]

For Lorenz, as with Freud, human aggressiveness is seen as an *instinct* fed by an overflowing fountain of energy, and not necessarily a result of a reaction to outside stimuli.[17] Animals and man will often need to find stimuli to release this energy – even if it isn't necessary for a release. They search for and even create stimuli. This is called appetite behavior.[18] Lorenz writes in 1970,

> Man creates political parties in order to find stimuli for the release of dammed-up energy, rather than political parties being the cause of aggression. But in cases where no outside stimulus can be found or produced, the energy of the dammed-up aggressive drive is so great that it will explode, as it were, and be acted out *in vacuo*, i.e., 'without demonstrable external stimulation...the vacuum activity performed without an object – exhibits truly photographic similarity to normal performance of the motor actions involved...This demonstrates that the motor coordination patterns of the instinctive behavior pattern are hereditarily determined down to the finest detail.[19]

The similarity to Freud's earlier model is clearly evident. Both theories see the instinctive nature of aggression. Both also recognized the importance of the internal turmoil. Fromm writes, "For Lorenz, aggression is primarily not a reaction to outside stimuli, but a 'built in' inner excitation that seeks for release and will find expression regardless of how adequate the outer stimulus is: 'It is the spontaneity of the instinct that makes it so dangerous.'"[20] Fromm continues, "Lorenz's model of aggression, like Freud's model of the libido, has been rightly called a hydraulic model, in analogy to the pressure exercised by dammed-up water or steam in a closed container."[21]

The hydraulic theory is one half of Lorenz's theory. The other

mainstay is that there is a specific mechanism by which aggression is created.[22] The idea is that aggression serves a specific purpose in life, it serves the survival of the species and the individual. In animals this is evident in mating habits (defending one's mate) and social rank order.[23] Aggression takes on a preservative function in the process of evolution.[24] A difficulty in superimposing animal behavior on humans is we tend to be, by our nature, extremists. Fromm writes, "Lorenz argues, the instinct that served the animals survival has been 'grossly exaggerated' and has 'gone wild' in man. Aggression has been transformed into a threat rather than a help to survival."[25] Why would man choose to show harmful aggression to other men for seemingly no purpose? Lorenz writes,

> Above all, it is more than probable that the destructive intensity of the aggressive drive, still a hereditary evil of mankind, is the consequence of a process of intra-specific selection which worked on our forefathers for roughly forty thousand years, that is, throughout the Early Stone Age. When man had reached the stage of having weapons, clothing, and social organizations, so overcoming the dangers of starving, freezing, and being eaten by wild animals, and these dangers, ceased to be the essential factors influencing selection, an evil intra-specific selection must have set in. The factor influencing selection was not the wars being waged between hostile neighboring tribes. These must have evolved in an extreme form of all those so-called 'warrior virtues' which unfortunately many people still regard as desirable ideals.[26]

Lorenz began with the innate factor of aggression found in all animals. That is true with my examples cited. However, his theory of the hydraulic character of dammed-up aggression resulting in the cruelty and murderous impulses falls short of the mark when applied to humans.[27]

Lorenz's colleague Niko Tinbergen summarizes this shortcoming in his article "Of War and Peace in Animals and Men" in which he states,

> On the one hand, man is akin to many species of animals in that he fights his own species. But on the other hand, he is, among the thousand of species that fight, the only one in which fighting is disruptive...Man is the only species that is a mass murderer, the only misfit in his own society. Why should this be so?[28]

To be sure, Freud and Lorenz shared the hydraulic connection, but there were great differences between the men and their theories. The main difference was that Freud studied man and Lorenz studied animals, even basing his theories about the hydraulic fixture of aggression on experiments with fish and birds in captivity.[29] The problem for Lorenz is that his theory is animal-based.

This method was criticized by Lorenz's colleagues including Niko Tinbergen who wrote, "One must beware of the dangers inherent in the procedure of using physiological evidence from lower evolutionary levels, lower levels of neural organizations and simpler forms of behavior as analogies for the support of physiological theories of behavior mechanisms at higher and more complex levels."[30]

Eventually the greatest division between Freud and Lorenz within the school of instinctivist theory would be Lorenz's almost slavish devotion to Darwinism – for Lorenz, Darwin became his prophet and evolution his passion. Fromm believes that this shift would further isolate Lorenz from the answer to his question. It would take a blend of not only Freud in thought

and Lorenz in theory, but also, perhaps, a reevaluation of aggression all together.[31]

Environmentalist/Behaviorist Theory

The opposing view to the instinctivists came from both the environmentalists and the behaviorists. According to the environmentalists, a man's behavior is exclusively molded by the influence of his environment, i.e. by culture and society as opposed to 'innate' factors.[32] Man was inherently good from birth and due to bad education, institutions, and example had evolved evil aspects.[33] In contrast to the later behaviorist, especially B.F. Skinner's neo-behaviorist theory of aggression – these environmentalists were not concerned with biological manipulation and engineering but rather with the philosophical pursuits of social and political change.[34] The environmentalist inherently believed that a "good society" would create good men cultivating their inherent goodness.[35]

Behaviorism founded by J. B. Watson in 1914 was based on the core value that "the subject matter of human psychology is the behavior or activities of the human being." Watson believed that all "subjective" concepts not readily observable should be ruled out. These concepts were: sensation, perception, image, desire, and even thinking and emotion, as they are subjectively defined.[36]

Skinner's neo-behaviorism is based on the same basic principle of

Watson's earlier theory. Fromm writes of Skinner's concepts, "[Skinner believes that] psychology as a science need not and must not be concerned with feelings or impulses or any other subjective events; it disdains any attempt to speak of a 'nature' of man or construct a model of men, or to analyze various human passions which motivate human behavior...Skinner's 'psychology' is the science of the engineering of behavior, its aim is to find the right reinforcements in order to produce a desired behavior."[37] Fromm continues, describing the concept of conditioning by reinforcement used by Skinner,

> Skinner speaks of 'operant' conditioning. Briefly this means that unconditioned behavior, provided it is desirable from the experimenters standpoint is rewarded, [followed by pleasure]. As a result, the subject will eventually continue to behave in the desired fashion...Reinforcement can occur in two ways: it happens in the normal cultural process or it can be planned, according to Skinner on teaching and this led to a design for culture.[38]

Fromm's critique of Skinner's neo-behaviorism in relation to aggression is that it has no holistic theory of man seeing only the behavior and not the behaving person.[39] It also fails to recognize the limits of conditioning on a person's innate pathological make-up.

The reason that the behaviorist model is imperative to the study of aggression and violence is that a majority of aggression theorists write with a behaviorist orientation.[40] However, many of these behaviorist psychologists have moved past Skinner's naive laboratory controlled experiments to a deeper understanding of how man himself, the doer, not just

the deed, is important. A. H. Buss, in his book *The Psychology of Aggression*, expresses the well-rounded behaviorist view on aggression,

> There are two reasons for excluding the concept of intent from the definition of aggression. First it implies teleology, a purposive act directed toward a future goal, and this view is inconsistent with the behavioral approach... Second, and more important, is the difficulty of applying this term to behavioral events. Intent is a private event that may or may not be capable of verbalization…One might be led to accept intent as an inference from the reinforcement history of the organism. If an aggressive response has been systematically reinforced by a specific consequence, such as flight of the victim, the recurrence of the aggressive response might be said to involve 'an intent to cause flight. However...it is more fruitful to examine directly the relation between reinforcement history of an aggressive response and the immediate situation eliciting the response.[41]

There is an attempt to explain a connection between aggression and behaviorism in the frustration-aggression theory proposed by J. Dollard in 1939. The basic hypothesis is that the existence of frustration always led to some form of aggression. This was amended by one of the original authors, N. E. Miller, in 1941 that frustration could instigate a number of different responses, only one of them aggression.[42]

The pinpointing of frustration as the only or a primary cause of aggression was accepted by a vast majority of psychologists. Buss writes critically, "The emphasis on frustration has led to an unfortunate neglect of other antecedents as well as aggression as an instrumental response. Frustration is only one antecedent of aggression and not its most potent one."[43]

As important as behaviorism has been to the psychological

understanding of many facets of human life it falls short on the study of aggression – especially deadly or violent aggression. E. I. Megargee, in his review "The Psychology of Violence: A Critical Review of Theories of Violence," wrote in a summary of the behaviorist violence studies,

> Few of these studies that we examined attempted to test theories of human violence. Those empirical studies, which did focus on violence, were generally not designed to test theories. Investigations that did focus on important theoretical issues generally investigates milder aggressive behavior or used intra-human subjects.[44]

The theories of instinct vs. environment are attempts to explain a complex issue with a limited worldview. The new trend is to replace the "either, or" with a "more or less" attitude. The model for this new view is a continuum upon which one end represents almost complete innate determination and on the opposing end lies almost complete learning.[45] F. A. Beach in his 1955 article "The Descent of Instinct" writes of the importance of such a continuum in relation to instinctivist theory.

> Perhaps a more serious weakness in the present psychological handling of instinct lies in the assumption that a two-class system is adequate for the classification of complex behavior. The implication that all behavior must be determined by learning or by heredity, neither of which is more than partially understood, is entirely unjustified. The final form of any response is affected by a multiplicity of variables, any two of which are genetical and experiential factors.[46]

Similar criticism is expressed by N. R. F. Maier and T. C. Schneirla in their book *Principles of Animal Psychology*. They write,

> Because learning plays a more important role in the behavior of higher than in the behavior of lower forms, the natively determined behavior patterns of higher forms became much more extensively modified by experience than those of lower forms...Higher forms are therefore less dependent upon specific external environmental

> conditions for survival than are lower forms. Because of the interaction of acquired and innate factors in behavior it is impossible to classify many behavior patterns. Each type of behavior must be separately investigated.[47]

Sociobiologist Theory

Sociobiology applies the theory of evolution to human behaviors. Aggression, according to the sociobiologist was an advantageous trait to secure survival and was passed on to offspring.[48] As early hunting and gathering societies competed for finite resources, the more aggressive groups – the ones with stronger warriors – tended to survive.[49]

Harvard professor Edward O. Wilson, the author of *On Human Nature* and *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* is at the forefront of this field. Wilson's hypothesis is that although human behavior is biologically based and the evolutionary theory of adaptation is applicable, it can only be fully comprehended through the interaction of culture and biology.[50]

Wilson believes strongly that violent aggression does not come from drive or instinct. He does agree that aggression is innate but his definition in *On Human Nature* is "the measurable probability that a trait will develop in a specified set of environments, not to the certainty that the trait will develop in all environments.[51]

"Wilson," Miedzin writes, "distinguishes his own understanding of violent aggression from those who believe, like Freud and Lorenz, in the 'drive-discharge" model...Wilson by contrast tells us that we must not picture

aggression as a fluid, constantly applying pressure against the wall of its containers, but rather as a mix of chemicals that can be transformed by specific catalysts if they are added at some later time."[52]

Wilson calls this the 'culture-pattern' model, which is based upon the connection of learning and genetic potential.[53] He writes in *On Human Nature* about this blend,

> Aggressive behavior, especially in its more dangerous forms of military action and criminal assault, is learned. But the learning is prepared...we are strongly predisposed to slide into deep, irrational hostility under certain definable conditions. With dangerous ease, hostility feeds on itself and ignites runaway reactions that can swiftly progress to alienation and violence.[54]

The presence of ethnocentrism and xenophobia in primitive tribes – the division of positive and negative into village vs. village – shows a connection to our "civilized" society.[55] For Wilson, this phenomenon – the resemblance of these two distinct societies lends credence to the argument for biology's place in aggressive behavior.[56] He quotes in *On Human Nature* the violent Yanomamo tribe of the Amazon as saying, "we don't want to kill anymore. But the others are treacherous and cannot be trusted." He sees this as one example of a universal tendency to xenophobia and advocates that studies in anthropology and social psychology be used to overcome it.[57] Political and cultural ties "that created a confusion of cross-bonding loyalties"[58] must be upheld.

Beyond Sociobiology

Gilligan, who has written a powerful and comprehensive treatise on the topic of violence believes that our society must reevaluate the way it looks at violent behaviors and violent actors. We tend to misinterpret violence out of fear and ignorance. He writes, "Given the degree to which our society is confined in its thinking about violence to the two alternative interpretive frames of the morality play and pathos, we have tended as a society to respond to the violence that surrounds us with a mixture of fatalism, apathy, frustration, and positiveness."[59] Even with our search for empirical certainties and workable theories, we tend to categorize all violent behavior as deviant or irrational. Theoreticians argue about instinctual aggression and the role of environmental stimulus, most people tend to just want to bury their heads in the sand. If we ignore the problem, let the police and prisons take care of it, lock them up and throw away the key then we adopt the "I don't have to worry about it" approach. It is easier to vilify the offending and punish them. Gilligan asks for a different approach. He expresses concern for not only society but also the offender. He writes,

> Psychoanalytically, all behavior, including violent behavior whether it is labeled as 'bad' or 'mad' is psychologically meaningful. But until it is understood, it cannot be prevented – that is brought under individual and societal self-control. The psychological understanding of violence requires recognizing how much method there is in violent madness, and how much psychopathology there is in the violence of everyday life. But such a psychological understanding requires that we see violence as tragedy.[60]

This tragedy is not one developed in a controlled environment or

through the comparison of the biological nature of animals to humans. The analysis of biological concepts is inherent to any study or investigation of the causes and prevention of violence.[61] As Gilligan states, "in the history of human violence, biological concepts have been among the most potent stimulants of violent behavior."[62] Pseudo-biology uses violence as justification.[63]

Gilligan maintains that the scientific studies of the instinctivists, environmentalists, behaviorists, and sociobiologists are less than adequate for a true understanding of violence. He finds that Lorenz and Wilson's attempt to show that violence is determined by biologically determined and inborn instinctual drives has so many problems "that it is valueless, and dangerously unhealthy as a theory."[64]

Gilligan's reasoning is twofold. He finds the assumption that "violence is an inextricable part of our 'in born' human nature"[65] and will lead to us trying to control our own and others' urges – missing other factors leading to violence all together. He states,

> I emphasize the need to retire the concept of instinct because it is dangerous, for several reasons. The first is that the very notion that violence is instinctive tends to lead to an attitude of pessimism about the possibility of preventing violence. If by definition, we cannot eradicate 'instincts' because they are inherited, then what is the point in ever thinking that we can do something substantial toward preventing violence? Such notions can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.[66]

In relation to the intinctivists, not only will we become pessimistic, criticizes Gilligan, but also we will attempt to make certain types of violence

acceptable outlets for this internal hydraulic drive. He continues,

> A second reason this concept is dangerous is that it leads us to believe that violent impulses need to be discharged periodically or they will build up to the point where they explode spontaneously and uncontrollably. One corollary of these notions is the idea that one way to prevent violence is to expose people to aggressive (but nonlethal) alternatives to criminal or military violence, such as violent sports, competitive economic arrangements and so on, to provide an 'outlet' for men's 'innate violent drives,' on the mistaken assumption that that will diminish the incidence and destructiveness of crime and war. But...the cause of violence is clearly a cultural value that stimulates violence in every sphere, not an 'instinct' that can be diminished in intensity by being discharged in aggressive athletic contests.[67]

Gilligan realizes that one must somehow explain aggression and come up with a theory of behavior. If one can recognize how misleading the concept of instinct is, it can then be retired and replaced by other explanations of violence. "One can turn," as Gilligan writes, "to human emotions – specific emotions such as love, hate, shame, guilt, emotions which act as motives, or causes, of behavior. This is compatible with the valid and useful aspects of psychoanalytic theory."[68]

So what are the causes of violence according to Gilligan? The first is the striving for a specific goal of a violent act, and the second is the primary cause of all violence – a search for justice and the role of shame. Gilligan writes of injustice,

> All violence is an attempt to achieve justice, or what the violent person perceives as justice, for himself or for whomever it is on whose behalf he is being violent, so as to receive whatever retribution or compensation the violent person feels is 'due' him or 'owed' to him, or to those on whose behalf he is acting, whatever he or they are 'entitled' to or have the 'right' to; or so as to prevent those whom one love or identifies with from being subjected to injustice. Thus, the attempt to achieve and maintain justice, or to undo or prevent injustice, is the one and only universal cause of

violence.[69]

Dr. Gilligan moves away from a view of violence as a breaking of moral codes of behavior. We, as a society, should stop trying to teach violent people the difference between right and wrong – through punishment and more violence. The similarities between the "criminal" and "punisher" are striking. Gilligan states, "Crime and punishment are conventionally spoken of as if they were opposites, yet both are committed in the name of morality and justice, and both use violence as the means to attain those ends."[70]

To take the moral high ground only leads us farther from understanding violence and in turn preventing it. Gilligan suggests that instead of asking the "unanswerable moral and legal question of, 'How *should* we live?' An appropriate question may be 'How *can* we live?'"[71] Gilligan believes we should examine,

> ...what biological, psychological, and social forces and processes protect, sustain, and preserve *life* and which ones lead to *death*? Not 'How can we attain justice?' or 'What is good and evil, moral and immoral, just and unjust?' but rather, 'What are the causes of homicide and suicide and assault; how do they vary from one context to another; and how can we use that knowledge to reduce the frequency with which people inflict those kind of injuries on themselves and others?' – questions that can be answered...[72]

If the search for justice is the goal of violent behavior, the root cause is the concept of shame. Shame is a universal trait – a damaging blow to the psyche and self- esteem. Gilligan writes of its power to lead to violence,

> The emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence whether toward others or toward the self. Shame is a necessary but not a sufficient cause of violence, just as tubercle bacillus is necessary but not sufficient for the development of tuberculosis. Several preconditions have to meet before shame can

> lead to the full pathogenesis of violent behavior. The pathogenic or violence-inducing effects of shame can be stimulated, inhibited or redirected both by the presence or absence of other feelings such as guilt or innocence, and by the specific social and psychological circumstances in which shame is experienced.[73]

"The different forms of violence," Gilligan continues, "whether toward individuals or entire populations, are motivated by the feeling of shame. The purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride, thus preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the feeling of shame."[74]

Gilligan presents three preconditions in relation to shame, which may predicate violent behaviors. "The first precondition is," Gilligan states, "the secret that they feel ashamed – deeply ashamed, chronically ashamed, acutely ashamed, over matters that are so trivial that their very triviality makes it ever more shameful to feel ashamed about them so that they are ashamed even to reveal what shamed them."[75] Gilligan believes that these feelings must be hidden in secret to prevent perceived weakness, "often violent men will hide this secret behind a defensive mask of bravado, arrogance, 'machismo,' self-satisfaction, insolence, or studied indifference."[76]

The preservation of a man's self-esteem and image of self fuels a majority of violence especially homicide. Gilligan believes that "a man only kills when he is, as he sees it, fighting to save himself, his own self – when he feels he is in danger of experiencing 'the death of self' unless he engages in violence."[77]

"The second precondition for violence deals with the proverbial

cornered animal or back to the wall attitude found in a majority of violent offenders." Gilligan writes, "The second precondition for violence is met when these men perceive themselves as having no nonviolent means of warding off or diminishing their feelings of shame or low self esteem – such as socially rewarded economic or cultural achievement, or high social status, position, and prestige. Violence is a 'last resort.'"[78]

The third precondition is the most intriguing to me. It is "that the person lacks the emotional capacities or the feelings that normally inhibit the violent impulses that are stimulated by shame. The most important are love and guilt toward others and fear for self."[79] Could this be where family environment and childhood trauma comes into play? Gilligan summarizes these preconditions as follows, "A central precondition for committing violence, then, is the presence of overwhelming shame in the absence of feelings of either love or guilt; the shame stimulates rage, and violent impulses, toward the person in whose eyes one feels shamed, and the feelings that would normally inhibit the expression of those feelings and the acting out of those impulses, such as love and/or guilt, are absent."[80]

The motivations of the school of instinctivism, behaviorism, sociobiology, and modern psychoanalysis are genuine and well intentioned. Violence frightens and intrigues. The public outcry to understand how "children kill" or our fascination with war and crime has fueled these studies and theories for the past century. Violence as an instinct, a drive to be

released at all costs doesn't answer our new questions. The definition of the root of violent behavior needs to be broadened or expanded to incorporate the complexities and sociology of the offenders of the 21st century. Dr. Gilligan hypothesizes about a possible approach and attitude.

> If we replace the outmoded concept that violence is 'instinctual,' we must remember that violent behavior, like all behavior, can only occur in a psycho physiological and anatomical matrix that creates the potential to engage in violent behavior. Bringing our understanding of this psycho physiological matrix into line with the more recent ethnological thinking, we could say that the potential to engage in violent behavior is built into the very structure and functioning of our central nervous system, which can be 'triggered' by the social environment. Unless it is triggered, this potential will remain dormant and quiescent.[81]

Gilligan is a new breed of the sociobiologist. He concludes, "even those biological factors that do correlate with increased rates of murder, such as age and sex, are not primary determinants or independent causes of violent behavior. They do not spontaneously, in and of themselves create violent impulses; they only act to increase the predisposition to engage in violence, when the individual is exposed to social and psychological stimuli that do stimulate violent impulses."[82]

Environmental Factors

To truly prevent violence one must understand the environmental factors and stimuli of which Gilligan speaks. Part of one's environmental nature is one's childhood and family system. Now a father myself, I have come to realize how much a loving environment can nurture and develop a

child's personality and growth. Conversely, a negative environment can crush a child's ability to function positively in their world. So which child becomes violent? Thousands of studies have been done to link one's childhood and family environment to possible later violent behavior. In the discussion following, I would like to examine how a lack of connection, parental abandonment, and abuse/trauma can serve as possible predictors for later violent behavior. As Gilligan hypothesized in the previous section there are definite inherent connections between the biology and the environment. Studies have shown that many children who become impulsively violent as a baby had neurological abnormalities.[83] These difficulties could be caused by biological predisposition but just as readily subsequent to both by the lack of connection, parental abandonment, and abuse/trauma.

Robin Karr-Morse and Meredith S. Wiley in their powerful book, *Ghosts from the Nursery: Tracing the Roots of Violence,* share an incredibly poignant and metaphorical explanation of the connection between the biological makeup of a child and his/her family environment.

> One way to picture the interaction between the neurological biological traits of the child and familial or social factors creating violence is to imagine each individual as a small lake. Each lake is different; the size and depth and breadth of our lakes vary. Each is unique in its dimensions since birth. The parameters of our lakes are determined by biological and genetic factors. The water in each lake is the fluid force of potential, the basic competence and confidence we each bring to life. Positive experiences in our environments serve as the wind and rain that enlarge the size of our lakes – we may grow deeper or broader and develop our potential capacities. The water in our lakes increases from these experiences. But negative familial and social factors are like rocks in our lakes. Some rocks, such as multiple family moves, are small; most of us have several of these. Others, such as early physical or sexual abuse, are huge rocks that may rise above the surface of the water.

> Numerous large boulders in a very small or shallow lake have a far greater impact in reducing the total volume of water than the same number of large rocks in a large and deep lake. A child who begins life with an expansive lake will be less likely to experience immediate overflow from a huge rock outcropping than a child who starts with a lake rendered small and shallow by negative biological factors such as neurological impairment. All lakes will be affected by boulders, and if there are several, the water can become dammed or overflow, leaving the lake nearly empty. Those children with small and shallow lakes from the beginning are most at risk.[84]

Authors Karr-Morse and Wiley believe, as do many others, that to focus on just the biology of an aggressive or violent child or adult is to miss the causes of the "boulders." "Children," they write, "reflect what they have absorbed biologically and socially."[85] The authors maintain what many adults in our society find it difficult to recognize, that "the child they once were continues to live at the core of the adult they have become."[86] There is a definite connection between one's early childhood experiences and later behavior.

In his book *Echoes from the Womb*, Dr. Ludawig Janus elegantly clarifies this connection, "Earliest experiences remain within each of us. Our whole existence is based upon the vitality and the dynamic experiences of our very beginning. This period is physically and psychologically the foundation of our life and our experience and of our relationship to the world."[87]

The path to potential violence begins at birth, if not even before. Studies have shown pre-natal behaviors such as drug use and malnutrition can affect a child's potential for emotional wellbeing and stability. But it is after a baby is born when the concept of connection becomes imperative to

nurture a "healthy" child. Dr. James Garbarino in his book, *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*, attributes to this connection a quality almost of divinity.

> The process of kindling the divine flame begins with connection. Child development is fundamentally social: a human infant can neither survive physically nor develop normally on its own. This is why there is no such thing as 'a baby;' there is only 'a baby in relation to a someone else.' An infant cannot survive psychologically and spiritually on its own. To begin the process of human development, a child needs not so much stimulation as responsiveness; children need to make connection through entering into a relationship.[88]

This connection is often termed attachment. When the attachment is damaged or nonexistent the child bears the risk of disconnecting from the world both physically and psychologically. Garbarino establishes a fundamental point of attachments role in human development.

> Development science and theory point to this fundamental fact: human development proceeds from attachment in the first year of life. Starting at about three months of age, babies come to know and love the people who care for them. By the age of nine months, most babies have formed a specific attachment to one or more caregivers. This attachment is a mixture of knowing them in their particularity and feeling for them, as special individuals, a special sense of positive connection.[89]

The infant becomes aware that strong emotional feelings can be trusted with another in the context of relationship. The child will also, through these positive connections, establish a sense of empathy and the ability for emotional sensitivity in emotional relationships.[90]

Dr. Allen Schore, the author of *Affect Regulation and the Origin of Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* states,

> The self is not present at birth. This emerges over the course of infancy. And it emerges over the course of infancy only if it is part

> of a relationship with the care giver...In an optimal scenario, the infant is an active participant in a relationship with an emotionally attuned primary care giver who extends opportunities for positive emotion and minimizes states of negative emotion.[91]

Dr. Schore continues by showing how this attachment affects the actual development of a child's brain and how a lack of attachment or negative reinforcement can lead to permanent damage.

> At the end of the first year, these same attachment experiences directly influence the growth of the infant's brain, especially the orbital prefrontal areas of the right brain that are involved in affect regulation and in coping with external and internal stress. Over time the cumulative effects of these early interactions set up an internal sense of security and resilience that comes from the intuitive knowledge that one can regulate the flows and shifts of one's emotional states either by one's own coping capabilities or within a relationship with caring others. The development of this prefrontal area is responsible for empathy, and therefore for that which makes us 'human'...So a securely attached infant learns in the first two years of life that certain internal subjective states are shareable with others, that one human being is among other humans. This *capacity for empathy* gives him or her a sense of connectedness with others and therefore a human identity.[92]

Lack of such connection, coupled with prolonged and shameful experiences, fosters low self-esteem. It becomes worse when humiliation is involved. Little comfort is expected from other people. Schore concludes that "early unregulated humiliation may be a common source of transmission of severe emotional disorders associated with the under regulation of aggression and an impaired ability to empathetically experience the emotional state of others."[93]

Bruce Perry in his article "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the Cycle of Violence" writes of a child who has killed – an individual left without the "ability to connect, to trust, and ultimately to

experience empathy."[94] Perry states,

> The part of his brain which would have allowed him to feel connected to other human beings – empathy – simply does not develop. He has affective blindness. Just as the retarded child lacks the capacity to understand abstract cognitive concepts, the young murderer lacks the capacity to be connected to other human beings in a healthy way. Experience, or rather lack of critical experiences, resulted in his affective blindness – this emotional retardation...If a child feels no emotional attachment to any human being, then we cannot expect any more remorse from him after killing a human than one would expect from someone who ran over a squirrel.[95]

One can readily see that the first few years of life are intensely important for possibly predicting later violent behavior. The importance of attachment is evident. Why would a parent not be attached? We will now examine two cases where parental involvement is either absent or negative, leading to unattached and unhealthy children.

The first situation is that of prenatal abandonment or rejections. The lack of attachment between parent and child can come about by an absent, distant, or negative parent figure. This can not only make for a difficult infancy for the baby but also may affect the child as he grows into adulthood.

Dr. Myron Hofer in his work "Hidden Regulators: Implications for a New Understanding of Attachment, Separation, and Loss" hypothesizes that "attachment behaviors serve the purpose of maintaining homeostatic balance in the baby's physical and emotional systems."[96] The baby begins to associate physiological security or homeostasis, experienced as contentment, with the *proximity* of his mother. This links attachment to the central nervous system. These early physiological regulatory experiences – resulting in either

contentment or rage or frustration or confusion – will establish later mental representations of the parent figure and the feelings associated with similar experiences later in life.[97] This homeostasis is so vitally important to the child's well being. Consistent care and responsiveness – absent in abandoned and neglected children – makes a tremendous difference in future violent potentiality. Karr-Morse and Wiley write,

> If a baby is separated from the mother, he or she experience the loss not only of the emotional but also of the physiological balance of basic systems that are maintained by the mother's proximity. This is similar if not identical to the kind of loss adults experience at the death of a life companion or a great love. One's entire physiological system may go into shock. We find ourselves unable to eat or eating too much, unable to sleep or sleeping too much, lacking energy or highly agitated, and experiencing heart palpitations, high blood pressure and memory lapses.[98]

Abandonment, whether physical or emotional, can lead to depression and rage. If the separation is not properly explained and worked through the outcome can be devastating to the developing psyche of the child. Heinz Kohut believes that when a child's caretakers ignore or do not respond to the child, they are withholding certain essential emotional needs and the chances of violent behavior in later life are increased. The "narcissistic need" contains our need for love, admiration and recognition. When these "needs" are not met in childhood, people carry in themselves narcissistic injuries.[99] These injuries may haunt a person for their entire lives causing extreme "narcissistic rage" in later adult life.[100] In his essay, "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage," Kohut expresses the certain characteristics inherent

in such a rage; "The need for revenge for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of these aims."[101]

British psychiatrist Michael Rutter in his article "Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life" examines the chain reactions that are likely after a child experiences abandonment and other disruptions of early relationships.[102] In his research "it is clear that for a boy to be separated from his mother in infancy and early childhood is a very significant risk factor for future development."[103]

Dr. James Garbarino, in his work with young violent offenders, explores the power of abandonment on a child,

> Being abandoned is a tough challenge for a child. Ironically, it may be better to lose a parent to an early death (even although many young children interpret this as a kind of abandonment) than to have a neglectful parent. At least then a child can accept the separation as inevitable and not of the parent's choosing.[104]

Garbarino continues, "Deliberate abandonment evokes in boys a deep shame...The shame of abandonment appears over and over again in the lives of kids who kill. Boys feel the shame of rejection."[105]

The intensity of rejection whether real or perceived leads to a future potentiality for a young boy to become a killer. Anthropologist Ronald Rohner in his book *Love Me, They Love Me Not* finds that "although cultures differ in how they express rejection, rejected children everywhere are at heightened risk for a host of psychological problems ranging from low self-esteem, to truncated moral development, to difficulty handling aggression and

sexuality."[106]

These rejected boys often grow into destructive teens. Where a child searches for connection he only finds separation. Where a boy reaches for love he finds nothingness. He is playing now against a "stacked deck." The chances of his success are slim and his ability to leave childhood unscarred non-existent. He is lost. Dr. Garbarino writes of these "lost boys."

> Disrupted relationships in childhood predisposes boys to trouble in adolescence. Whether it is outright abandonment or psychological rejection, violent boys often leave infancy and early childhood with one of the biggest strikes against them...These disruptions in his early relationships challenge a boy's every effort to find a place for himself in the world. The emotional pain and isolation these boys experience can push their souls into hibernation. When what they need is a robust sense of connection to the deepest resources of the spirit, they experience only emptiness. When what they most need is to feel they belong to someone positive and strong, they feel only disdain and see only weakness.[107]

This emptiness and pain, which affects abandoned children also, manifests itself in other childhood traumas. The search for unrequited love is often not just rejected or ignored but frequently the child becomes the receptacle for venomous hatred and abuse. Early trauma and abuse fill the childhoods of an overwhelming majority of violent offenders. And the cost of such abuse upon the survivor is massive. Repeatedly beaten, assaulted, raped, tortured, forced to watch family members undergo heinous abuses, these boys are imprinted with violence and punished for the rest of their lives.

Dr. Judith Herman writes in her book *Trauma and Recovery* of the damage such childhood abuse has upon the child's development and future.

> Repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with the formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness. Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses.[108]

Those of us who try to nurture and love our children would like to believe that children do not get abused. We naively would like to exist in a world where children are safe. That is not reality. Children, hundreds of thousands of them, are being forced to exist in an environment of fear and terror. Mommy and Daddy are the wielders of fist and belt. These children do not stand a chance. Their family won't let them. Dr. Herman writes of the abusive environment these children exist in, "Chronic childhood abuse takes place in a familial climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly disrupted. Survivors describe a characteristic pattern of totalitarian control, enforced by means of violence and death threats, capricious enforcement of petty rules, intermittent rewards, and destruction of all competing relationships through isolation, secrecy and betrayal."[109]

Herman continues,

> In addition to the fear of violence, survivors consistently report an overwhelming sense of helplessness. In the abusive family environment the exercise of parental power is arbitrary, capricious, and absolute. Rules are erratic, inconsistent or patently unfair. Survivors frequently recall that what frightened them most was the unpredictability of the violence.[110]

A person who murders is making his own choice. No one is putting the gun or knife into his hand. That is why we have prisons, people say, to punish these criminals. Just lock them up and throw away the key. Just execute them on death row. These answers are simplistically shallow. To stop people from killing each other we need to openly look at the reasons. Child abuse is not always a pathway to murder, but the horror many "criminals" have grown up with must be examined. These men have been prisoners their whole lives – systematically tortured and broken down. Dr. Herman explains,

> While most survivors of childhood abuse emphasize the chaotic and unpredictable enforcement of rules, some describe a highly organized pattern of punishment and coercion. These survivors often report punishments similar to those in political prisons. Many describe intrusive control of bodily functions, such as forced feeding, starvation, use of enemas, sleep deprivation, or prolonged exposure to heat or cold. Others describe actually being imprisoned: tied up or locked in closets or basements.[111]

At this point we must be careful to distinguish between the survivor who lives a non-violent adult life and the one who acts out aggressively as an adult. Dr. Herman writes that "survivors of childhood abuse are far more likely to be victimized or to harm themselves than to victimize other people."[112] Dr. Herman cites the findings of Carmen, Ricker and Mills in their article "Victims of Violence and Psychiatric Illness" and Pollack, Bnere and Schneider et al in their article, "Childhood Antecedents of Anti-Social Behavior: Parental Alcoholism and Physical Abusiveness."

Although a majority of victims do not become perpetrators

> clearly there is a minority who do. Trauma appears to amplify the common gender stereotypes: men with histories of childhood abuse are more likely to take out their aggressions on others, while women are more likely to be victimized by others or to injure themselves (Carmen, Ricker and Mills).
>
> A community study of 200 young men noted that those who had been physically abused in childhood were more likely than others to acknowledge having threatened to hurt someone, having hit someone in a fight, and have engaged in illegal acts. (Pollack, Bnere, Schneider).[113]

Violence is not just a male problem but an overwhelming majority is male driven and perpetuated by men. Gilligan writes that the only biological variables to be among the determinants of violent behavior are *youth* and *maleness*, stating that "these patterns are universal across cultures, historical epochs, and social circumstances."[114] In many cases children, especially boys, are stripped of their dignity, their security, and most damaging, their abilities to positively exist in their own futures. Severe child abuse tears them apart – literally from the inside out. Garbarino writes of this void as a soulless place of deep pain.

> Psychiatrist Leonard Shengold called his book on the effects of severe child abuse *Soul Murder*. He chose this title to reflect his belief that the catastrophically abused child, subject to so much internal devastation, is driven beyond the limits of humanness. I am not in the position to debate the theological issue of whether or not souls can die or be killed, but I do believe that Shengold's view contains an important insight, at the very least, souls can be wounded. At the extremes of human deprivation, it may well be true that the human psyche can be so terribly mutilated that the soul departs, leaving behind something else to fill the void – or perhaps just leaving an unfilled void.[115]

And this void, this emptiness is often filled with violence and anger when these young boys become adults.

Gilligan in his work with the most violent offenders in the

Massachusetts Prison System reinforces the effect early childhood abuse has on later violent behaviors.

> In the course of my work with the most violent men in maximum security settings, not a day goes by that I do not hear reports of how these men were victimized during childhood. Physical violence, neglect, abandonment, rejection, sexual exploitation, and violation occurred on a scale so extreme, so bizarre, and so frequent that one cannot fail to see that the men who occupy the extreme end of the continuum of violent behavior in adulthood occupied an equally extreme end of the continuum of violent child abuse earlier in life.[116]

Gilligan also recognizes that neither all violent adults were subjected to violent childhood abuse – nor do all of those children who have suffered violence become violent adults. But violent abuse in childhood, whether physical or psychological, is statistically relevant in the study of later violence. It is a predictor for a majority of violent adults.[117]

The loss of the self in childhood, the destruction of trust and attachment, and the fear and humiliation of potential violence can shape the accessibility to violence one may feel as an adult. Violence is not a viable option for the majority of people, but for those with the tragedy of shame, fear and damage in their childhood, this death of self leads to violence as the only option. In Gilligan's conclusion he focuses on the issue of shame.

> All of us know what it is to experience feelings of shame and humiliation, rejection and ridicule. These are painful feelings to be sure, but most people are not disastrously overwhelmed by those feelings to the degree that violent people are, which may be one reason why we find it so difficult to understand those who become so deeply shames as to undergo the death of self. It may be difficult to understand, let alone imagine, how the feeling of shame could actually lead to a total inability to feel, and to know how intolerable that emptiness and absence actually 'feels' when one has experienced a total loss of self-love. To suffer the loss of love from

> others, by being rejected or abandoned, assaulted or insulted, slighted or demeaned, humiliated or ridiculed, dishonored or disrespected, is to be shamed by them. To be overwhelmed by shame and humiliation is to experience the destruction of self-esteem and without a certain minimal amount of self-esteem, the self collapses and the soul dies. Violence to the body causes the death of the self because it is so inescapably humiliating. When we cannot fend off, undo, or escape from such overwhelmingly unloving acts, when we cannot protect ourselves from them, whether by violent or nonviolent means, something gets killed within us – our souls are murdered.[118]

Why do people turn to violence to solve their problems? Why is killing or harming another human being often seen as a viable outcome? The answer is, as Dr. Gilligan wrote, "complicated, ambiguous, and most of all, tragic."[119] The impulse to kill is driven by a complex series of impulses – psychological components. To achieve justice, as Gilligan hypothesizes, is the primary cause of violence.

Although the work of animal behaviorists such as Lorenz have been criticized, I believe that there is a sense of aggression inherent in our genetic make-up. We are caught between our drive to protect what is ours – our self, our soul, our loved ones – and the inherent need of humans to destroy. Even in the most well-adjusted, healthy individual these needs, urges, and feelings live just beneath the surface. In those faced with shame, abandonment, non-attachment, neurological or physical diminishments, or childhood abuse – the control of these impulses becomes increasingly difficult.

It is this dangerous mixture of biological predisposition and outside forces that can cause violent behavior. However to truly understand how

males such as Moses often turn to violence one needs to examine the role of gender. The drives inherent in masculinity can lead to violent behavior. Gilligan believes, as I do, that the sex roles or gender roles into which men are socialized need to be further explored for a comprehensive understanding of male violence.

Notes to Chapter One

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Chapter Two – Images of Masculinity

The penny flew high into the air. As it tumbled downward I looked at the boy. He was a ninth grader, one year older than I. I had met him once or twice, seemed like a good guy. As the penny's copper skin bounced on the gray linoleum floor, he shed his "good guy" image with a sneery comment. "Pick it up Jew boy!" he hoarsely laughed. I turned to see my friends frozen in horror behind me. Members of Irish Catholic families who had invited me to decorate their Christmas trees and attend church. They had kindled Shabbat candles with my family and celebrated Hanukkah with us since I was five years old.

"I said pick it up Jew boy," he repeated, pulling out the word Jew like an acidic piece of taffy. I stood up, bunched my fist in a ball and hit him, not once, not twice, but over and over again until I was pulled off of his now bloody body.

I wish I could say that that was my last fight or that all my fights were in defense of my Jewish honor. Yet opponents and enemies came and went for me for the next ten years – through high school, college, on athletic fields and in bar room brawls. I exercised my body until it became a weapon, a weapon for my anger, my pain. Always wanting to be a man's man, I became a body builder, a boxer, a bouncer.

No one ever again called me a Jew boy – my brother and I had reputations as "tough Jews." Yet I also loved to write poetry and be intimate

and gentle. Slowly and insidiously society rewarded me for the rough exterior and athleticism, anger and physicality. I learned to squash or hide the gentle side of myself into submission. And I was not alone. In her book *We've All Got Scars* Raphaela Best tells us that by second grade, in order to gain acceptance of his peers, "a boy had to overcome and root out anything in his own actions, feelings and preferences that could be viewed as remotely female. Displays of affection, playing with girls, helping to clean up the classroom were no longer acceptable. Whatever females did that was what the boys must not do."[1]

Coupled with the cultural stereotype of "manly" behavior was my rebellion against the typical "Jewish male." The Jewish male is a functioning dichotomy. This is especially true in the diaspora. We want to be "real Americans" – the John Wayne war hero, the football star and the tough guy. Yet we are treated as outsiders, as different, as emotional and intellectual. Michael Sikimmel writes in his article "Judaism, Masculinity and Feminism,"

> Historically, the Jewish man has been seen as less than masculine, often as a direct outgrowth of his emotional 'respond-ability.' The historical consequences of centuries of laws against Jews of anti-Semitic oppression, are a cultural identity and even a self-perception as 'less than men,' who are too weak, too fragile, too frightened to care for our own...the Jew shares this self-perception with other oppressed groups who, rendered virtually helpless by an infantilizing oppression, are further victimized by the accusation that they are in fact infants and required to beneficence of the oppressor.[2]

By the time I came of age in the late 1970's early 1980's, the Jews were respected members of the intellectual, political, and especially,

professional elite. Hospitals and law firms were filled with Jews. Businesses were run by Jews – the "old boy" network was getting a Hebraic transformation. But as a young man searching for Mordechai Analeiwitz and the warrior, the athletic, tough Jew, I felt alone. I responded to the Christian athletes with hero worship. I turned away from the intellectualism that had shaped my grandfather and father's generations.

Robert Rosenberg writes of this struggle with the opposing traditions that represent the Jewish male. He writes in his article "A Jewish Men's Movement?"

> Jewish men bring opposing traditions to their masculinity. We are often viewed as weak, not sexual – in fact emasculated. Jewish women are often seen as strong, powerful, and in some mysterious way, 'outside of sexism.' On the other hand, Jewish men are trained to be argumentative, rational thinkers, traditionally masculine traits. Yet we are often considered the most sensitive and least traditionally masculine men.[3]

This setting apart of Jewish men as different is not just used by the anti-Semitic oppressor. We Jews have traditionally embraced this "new" masculinity as a badge of honor. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin writes in his book *Searching For My Brothers* of the early biblical view of masculinity.

> Consider how the stories of sibling rivalry in Genesis convey this different view of masculinity. Whenever there is a pair of brothers – Ishmael and Isaac; Esau and Jacob; Joseph and his brothers – one brother is a hunter or a warrior, and the other is more sedentary and peaceful. One brother uses weapons, the other uses his mind. Each time the one who uses the mind is the one who wins – and often inherits the covenant. Toughness was for 'the nations of the world.' The mind and the spirit were the tests for Jewish manhood.[4]

My father is an incredibly intellectual man, a brilliant physician and avid scholar. I rebelled against him and this "soft" Jewish model of

masculinity for most of my childhood into young adulthood. Interestingly though it would be my own fatherhood that would help me truly transform and embrace the softer side of my existence.

I chose to write my senior sermon on the role of masculinity in relation to the love possible between two men, Moses and Jethro. I was a new dad to a beautiful flower named Emma Rose. I had watched 48 plus hours of labor with the strongest woman I ever had known – my wife Elizabeth – and now I needed to come clean of the man I wanted to be. This was the most painful and revealing sermon I had ever written. It pierced through the armor of violence and anger that had protected me in adolescence, through the apathy and indifference of my 20's; the nurturing eve of who I truly was unfolded like a late blooming flower. That experience led me to this chapter.

This chapter is entitled "Images of Masculinity." It will trace the relationship between violence and masculinity. Being a father has affected me deeply. There is no room for the violence of my previous existence. Gentleness and compassion, intimacy, the depth and honesty of shared feelings – these characteristics make me who I am today. They are appreciated and rewarded by my daughter and my wife. If this nurturing, loving male model makes me so satisfied, why did I embrace the violence and stereotypes of the hardened, macho masculinity? Because the male is often rewarded in both the modern and biblical world for being violent and aggressive; because the father often pushes the son into violence or even lack

of father figure all together; because to prove one is not a "woman" is central to one's gender identification; because concepts of honor, male glory and power define masculinity; because the pressures to succeed as warrior and leader force men to become hardened and distanced.

Being a "man" is a complicated process. Biological, societal, social, and familial pressures pull on the psyche of many boys. Their unresolved issues and acceptance of stereotypical behaviors can often lead to later depression, loneliness, frustration and violence. In his book, *Real Boys*, Dr. William Pollack writes about the mask of masculinity many boys end up wearing. "Many of the boys I see...are living behind a mask of masculine bravado that hides the genuine self to conform to our society's expectations; they feel it necessary to cut themselves off from any feelings that society teaches them are unacceptable for men and boys – fear, uncertainty, feelings of loneliness and need."[5]

The stereotypical male and it's model of behavior is maintained by a strict set of "rules," a timeless code of honor. Professors Deborah David and Robert Brannon in their work, *The Forty-nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role*, divided these "rules" into four imperatives or models of male behavior.

> ***The "sturdy oak."*** Men should be stoic, stable, and independent. A man never shows weakness. Accordingly, boys are not to share pain or grieve openly. Boys are considered to have broken this guideline, for instance, if they whimper, cry, or complain – or sometimes if they simply ask for an explanation in a confusing or frightening situation.
>
> ***"Give 'em hell."*** [This is] a stance based on a false self, of extreme daring, bravado, and attraction to violence. This injunction

> stems largely from the myth that 'boys will be boys' – the misconception that somehow boys are biologically wired to act like macho, high energy, even violent supermen.
>
> ***The "big wheel."*** This is the imperative men and boys feel to achieve status, dominance and power. Or, understood another way, the 'big wheel' refers to the way in which boys and men are taught to avoid shame at all costs, to wear the mask of coolness, to act as though everything is going all right, as though everything is under control, even if it isn't.
>
> ***"No sissy stuff."*** Perhaps the most traumatizing and dangerous injunction thrust on boys and men is the literal gender straight jacket that prohibits boys form expressing feelings or urges (mistakenly) as 'feminine" – dependence, warmth, empathy. According to the ideal of 'no sissy stuff,' such feelings and behaviors are taboo. Rather than being allowed to explore these emotional states and activities, boys are prematurely forced to shut them out, to become self-reliant. And when boys start to break under the strain, when nonetheless they display 'feminine' feelings or behaviors they are usually greeted not with empathy but with ridicule, with taunts and threats that shame them further failure to act and feel in stereo typically 'masculine' ways. And so boys become determined never to act that way again – they bury those feelings.[6]

This boy-code with all its components makes a young man feel ashamed of himself when they express true emotions. This same code haunts many of these children into adulthood, eroding their self-esteem, creating feelings of loneliness, disconnection and deep sadness.[7] It also affects their ability to connect with other people in their lives.

When a boy shows sadness or fear, our culture tells them that they had better get tough and "tough it out" by themselves.[8] As was mentioned in chapter one, most violence is perpetrated by young males against other young males. Dr. Pollack writes,

> Violence is the most visible and disturbing end result of the process that begins when a boy is pushed into the adult world too early and without sufficient love and support. He becomes seriously disconnected, retreats behind the mask, and expresses the only 'acceptable' male emotion – anger. When a boy's anger grows too

> great, it may erupt as violence: violence against himself, violence against others, violence against society...Violence is also about shame and honor. Violence is a boy's attempt to thwart shame and dishonor by going on the offensive, by hurting another human being.[9]

But even more troubling is the fact that boys are often rewarded for their violent behavior. Young men who can "handle themselves" are treated as gods on playgrounds across the country. Violence can help a boy become accepted, even into a relationship with other males. Dr. Pollack continues, " Ironically, violence in boys also sometimes represents a vain attempt on their part to reconnect with others, to make and keep friends. Whether it is winning a fight and thus impressing one's peers, helping other boys to beat up another kid or actually joining a gang, violence may give some boys, a false impression that they're somehow growing closer to one another, bonding, in effect, through their individual and collective acts of aggression and malevolence."[10] Dr. Pollack believes that the influence of society's stereotypes is a primary cause of violence in boys and eventually men. He writes that, " boys are constantly being rewarded by their peers, and even by their teachers and parents – for behavior that fits the traditional male stereotype."[11]

The response to shame and fear can lead to outbursts of anger and aggression. The choice for non-violence often may not be an option. Jean Baker Miller in her paper "The Construction of Anger in Women and Men," writes, "Boys are made to fear not being aggressive, lest they be found wanting, be beaten out by another, or (worst of all) be like a girl. All of these

constitute terrible threats to a core part of what is made to be men's sense of identity – which has been called masculinity."[12]

Growing up, one of the worst things you could be called was a "mama's boy." It expressed you were weak and needed protection – you weren't man enough. My football coach would yell, "let's go ladies, I don't want any mama's boys out there," and we'd hit even harder. Male gender identity is built around the recognition, and later the rejection, of the feminine – in this case one's primary female figure, one's mother. Psychoanalytic feminist, Nancy Chodrow, in her article "Gender, Relation and the Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective" writes of this challenge to males, "Underlying, or built into, core male gender identity is an early, nonverbal, unconscious, almost somatic sense of primary oneness with the mother, or underlying sense of femaleness that continually, usually, unnoticeably but sometimes insistently, challenges and undermines the sense of maleness."[13]

The search for the masculine in the young boy comes into contact with the need he feels for his mother. The boy realizes he must grow up to be a man and his mother is not going to be able to help him. So, as Timothy Beneke writes in his book *Proving Manhood*, "The boy comes to define his masculinity negatively – as that which is not feminine; he attempts to repress his internalized primary identification and dependence on his mother. He both represses what he regards as feminine within himself and devalues what he perceives as feminine in the external world."[14]

The separation from the mother also is a rejection of "feminine

traits." This struggle for gender identity and how to act like a man is exacerbated by the child's own internal confusion about gender roles and the societal pressures placed upon him by family and especially peers. Information on how to behave in a masculine way is often complicated and overwhelming. Anthropologist Margaret Mead writes in her seminal work *Male and Female*,

> It is not enough for a child to decide simply and fully that it belongs to its own sex, is anatomically a male or a female, with a given reproductive role in the world. For growing children are faced with another problem: 'How male, how female, am I?' He hears men branded as feminine, women condemned as masculine, others extolled as real men, and as true women...He hears types of responsiveness, fastidiousness, sensitivity, guts, stoicism, and endurance voted as belonging to one sex rather than the other.[15]

Mead concludes with this observation, " In his world he sees not a single model but many, as he measures himself against them; so that he will judge himself, and feel proud and secure, worried and inferior and uncertain, or despairing and ready to give up the task altogether."[16]

Inhibited behaviors consist of an incapacity to experience certain emotions – emotions which cause them to regress and identify with their mothers.[17] Beneke writes, "The inhibitions men tend to form consist of a generalized toughness, an incapacity to experience, acknowledge, or identify with emotions that might encourage regression: particularly sadness, grief and hurt."[18] Men are often reluctant to identify with weakness. This is a ramification fueled by the fear of being nurtured, a manifestation of the fear of maternal identification.[19] Beneke continues, "When boys repress their

identification with mother they are repressing a whole mode of relating that is empathic and weakly bounded. Crying, in particular, is regressive because it is an infant's primal expression of need for the mother."[20]

The gender roles that males are forced or force themselves into can cause violence. Gilligan writes, "we can only understand male violence if we understand the sex roles or gender roles into which males are socialized by the gender code of their particular cultures."[21] Gender codes reinforce the socialization of both men and women.[22] As I have mentioned previously, the relationship between men and women directly affects the potentiality for conflict. The rejection by or of the woman can lead to disturbing violent ramifications. These gender roles allow for models of behavior created to maintain power and dominance. Gilligan continues,

> Male gender codes reinforce the socialization of boys and men, teaching them to acquiesce in their own set of social roles, and a code of honor that defines and obligates these roles. Boys and men are exposed thereby to substantially greater frequencies of physical injury, pain, mutilation, disability, and premature death. This code of honor requires men to inflict these same violent injuries on others of both sexes, but most frequently and severely on themselves and other males, *whether or not they want to be violent toward anyone of either sex.*[23]

Men were often placed in positions of upholding honor and having no choice but to act violently. The socialization of boys and men is that the man is the sole active generator of honor.[24] This is not just a modern phenomena. Cultures based on male honor have created violent men for thousands of years – thereby further establishing differences between the roles of masculinity and femininity. Gilligan writes, "... the same relative differences

between the two gender roles can be found in many civilizations throughout history. The world emphasizes the importance of understanding that it is men who are expected to be violent and who are honored for doing so and dishonored for being unwilling to be violent."[25] It comes down to an issue of gender activity. Gilligan continues, "Men are honored for activity (ultimately, violent activity) and they are dishonored for passivity (or pacifism) which renders them venerable to the charge of being a non man...women are honored for inactivity or passivity, for not engaging in forbidden activities."[26]

These gender roles are so damaging that Gilligan believes that violence prevention cannot even begin without a complete change of the gender roles. Societal pressures lead to men who feel that non-violent behavior is not an option and to women who sit passively by. Gilligan believes that the central cause of gender role violence is shame.[27] He writes,

> The male gender role generates violence by exposing men to shame if they are not violent, and rewarding them with honor when they are. The female gender role also stimulates male violence at the same time that it inhibits female violence. It does this by restricting women to the role of highly unfree sex objects and honoring them to the degree that they submit to those roles or shaming them when they rebel.[28]

Gilligan believes that when shame and protecting one's honor are placed together, the ingredients are in place for violence. The systems which are based on a code of honor model are primarily patriarchal. This system does not condone violence – it legitimates, encourages, rationalizes, and even commands it.[29]

Gilligan also sees the advent of civilization, with its emphasis on patriarchal leadership, class, caste, age stratification and sexual asymmetry, as a seminal cause of violence.[30] Civilizations from ancient Mesopotamia to the modern age have been characterized by genocidal, xenophobic and male driven violence.[31] So how has the patriarchal society decided to deal with the problem of violence? Society has created a system of morality which states, "Thou Shalt Not Kill" – this Gilligan believes, "is an attempt at a kind of therapy, an attempt to cure the human propensity to engage in violence, which is stimulated by shame."[32] He refers to this as "guilt-ethics."[33] But Gilligan recognizes guilt is not the answer to solving the larger problems internal to violence. He writes,

> The reason that guilt ethics has not solved and cannot solve the problem of violence is because it does not dismantle the motivational structure that causes violence in the first place (namely, shame and the shame-ethics it motivates). Guilt and guilt-ethics, merely changes the direction of the violence that shame has generated, it does not prevent violence in the first place. It primarily redirects, onto the self, the violent impulses that shame generates toward other people.[34]

Gilligan believes that neither "shame nor guilt can solve the problem of violence," the reason being that "shame causes hate which becomes violence (usually toward other people) and guilt merely redirects it (usually onto the self)."[35]

Men have been taught to reject the idea of love as effeminate and soft – to experience intimacy as a sign of weakness – to tough out life by not feeling love of another or oneself. The code of male honor is based on the interplay of both shame and guilt. And that code stunts our growth and our

ability to nurture and love future generations. But how do these two forces so drastically affect a man's ability to love and care for himself and others? Gilligan writes,

> It is clear that shame and guilt do inhibit love. Shame inhibits people from loving others, because shame consists of a deficiency of self-love and thus motivates people to withdraw love from others and ration it for the self. Guilt, on the other hand, inhibits self-love or pride, which the Christian guilt-ethic calls the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. Guilt motivates people to hate themselves, not love themselves, because the feeling of guilt is the feeling that one is guilty and therefore deserves punishment (pain, hate) not reward (pleasure, love).[36]

Gilligan concludes that we have an aversion to dependency, particularly in the case of men. He believes that this fear of dependency is what causes violence.[37] Our need for others to depend on another is often pushed aside or repressed in the male. What happens to these intense and important needs? Gilligan hypothesizes, "For needs that are repressed do not get met, nor do they just disappear. The return of repressed needs, in unconscious, disguised form, is what the various symptoms of psychopathology consist of."[38]

From the time men are boys, they repress their essential needs. They mask their pain and eventually, tragically it disappears completely. Geoffrey Canada in his book *Reaching Up For Manhood* expresses his sadness at the code of silent suffering boys are forced to accept. He writes,

> Boys are taught to suffer their words in silence. To pretend that it doesn't hurt, outside or inside. So many of them carry the scars of childhood into adulthood, never having come to grips with the pain, the anger, the fear. And that pain can change boys and bring doubts in their lives, although more often than not, they have not idea where those doubts come from. Pain can make you afraid to love or

cause the safety of the ground you walk on to be threatened.[39]

Recently I watched my daughter, Emma Rose, sleeping. She was so peaceful and still. I stood and felt deep in my heart that I would do anything to nurture this precious spirit, to give her safety, to teach her to love herself and others, to be a model, myself, of a gentle man – one who lives a peaceful and loving life. That is my responsibility as her father.

Fathers of sons have a similar responsibility to teach their children to love themselves and others. Myriam Miedzian feels, as many other do, that a nurturing father presence could be the answer to preventing much of male violence in today's society. She writes, "...a loving, supportive father who is not afraid to show tenderness, empathy and tears, who, together with his wife, does not condone violence and does not try to mold his son into the traits of the masculine mystique, is most likely to have a son who will not use unnecessary violence. For such a boy, the separation from the feminine emotions is less sharp, for he can identify with his father and still retain some empathic loving qualities."[40]

It is obvious that fathers bring a different set of gifts to the relationship with the child than mothers. They teach differently; they nurture and discipline differently.[41] Those lessons, and the way fathers teach them, can lead to incredible growing experiences. Fathers do provide a unique perspective in the raising of children. In an interview, Wade Horn, the president of the *Fatherhood Initiative*, explained a father's potential

contribution to the healthy development of his children in two ways.[42]

"First," he says, " fathers love and support the mothers of their children, contributing stability to a family."[43] He also agrees that maternal warmth and freedom from depression are integral factors in the prevention of criminality in children. But he sees "the father's role as important both in mitigating against maternal depression and in facilitating the mother's ability to be warm and generative with their children.[44] "The second contribution," Horn states, "fathers can make in preventing later violence lies in their different style of teaching. Mothers tend to be verbal with their babies; fathers tend to be more physical – wrestling and engaging in rough and tumble play, especially with sons. Fathers have been wrongly discouraged from this form of play by well-meaning but misguided experts who believed it encourages aggression. On the contrary," Horn asserts, "new research shows that by rolling around in physical play with their children, fathers are actually teaching their children both emotional self-regulation and the ability to discern essential emotional cues in an interactive relationship. This type of physical play actually provides a mini-practice session in essential skills for handling aggression."[45]

Obviously, it is in the best interest of the child to have both parents involved and present.[46] The lack of a father's presence has a direct impact on the child. E.M. Heatherington and R.D. Parke write in their book *Child Psychology A Contemporary Viewpoint*,

> Research has consistently shown that, as a group, children who are securely attached to two parents show better adjustment than those attached to only one or the other. Each parent provides important role models for gender based issues with children. First loves are typically of one's opposite-sex parent, and these relationships may have lasting repercussions on future loves. When fathers are not in the home, the raising of sons by a mother alone can prove particularly challenging, especially as the child grows to adolescence in a family without positive role models.[47]

The father's influence is felt strongly as a caregiver. Myriam Miedzian writes that in the cases where there is a lack of involvement in child rearing the child will exhibit decreased empathy and sensitivity, a greater violence. This is because the young boys were not being rewarded for those qualities that will make them nurturing fathers.[48] A father who provides trust and a caring, nurturing attitude to parenting will allow his son to develop fully. His identity will not be stunted by hyper-masculine and misogonistic attitudes. Miedzian writes of the potentiality of such a nurturing relationship,

> When a boy is able from the earliest age to identify with his father, and when that identification includes loving, nurturing and feeling connected with others, then his developing a masculine identity does not depend on his repressing his identification with his mother and her feminine qualities. He does not need to be contemptuous of women in order to solidify his identity as a man. Having had a nurturant father, he is more likely to be empathic toward others, including girls.[49]

The responsibility for men should be to be models of compassion and openness to emotions. These are the things we should be teaching our children. This is what Jewish men should be teaching their children. The role models before us lead us to this path of the nurturing male. There is a wonderful midrashin, Exodus Rabbah 23:8, which provides an example of the nurturing father – God.

When did the Holy One Blessed Be He cause the population of Israelites to grow so dramatically in Egypt? Exactly how did this happen?

When Pharaoh decreed: 'Every male child shall be thrown into the Nile' what did the Israelite women do?

When a woman would sense that she was going into labor, she would go into the field to have the child. Once the child was born, the mother would turn her eyes to heaven and say, 'I have done my part, just as you told me "be fruitful and multiply." Now you do your part!'

And what did the Egyptians do? When the Egyptians saw the Israelite women going into the fields to have their children, they would sit opposite them at a distance.

When the women would finish delivering their children and would return to the city, the Egyptians then took stones and went to kill the babies. The babies would be swallowed up in the field, and then appear at a distance, and again be swallowed up, and again reappear at a distance. Finally the Egyptians became weary of this and went away.

And how did the babies survive out in the fields? There were some who said that the angels took care of the Israelite children. But others disagreed. Rabbi Chiyya the Great said: God Himself would wash and clothe the children. He would feed them and he would clean them.

And the babies continued to grow in the field like the plants, and they would sneak into the houses mixed in with the flocks of sheep...

But how did they know to go to their own parents? The Holy One Blessed Be He would go with them, and show each one his parent's house, and God would say, 'Call your father by this name and your mother by this name.' The child would then say to the mother, 'Don't you remember when you bore me in a certain field on a certain day five moths ago?' And the mother would say,

"Who raised you?' And the child would say, 'A certain young man, with nice curly hair. There is no one like him – and he is standing right outside the door.'

They would go to look for him, but they could not find him. And then, when they arrived to the Red Sea and saw Him, the children would point Him out to their mothers, and they would say: 'This is my God, this is the one who raised me in the fields.'

God is portrayed as a nurturing father – a caregiver. These are qualities that we should strive for as men. But the lure of societal pressures to repress these caring pieces of ourselves is difficult to resist. Especially for the Jews of America, Rabbi Salkin writes, "The American definition of masculinity has classically been: toughness, a preference for solitary action, a lack of emotion, a fondness for sports, a respect for military strength, a disdain for egghead intellectualism. The American dialogue on masculinity is peppered with proverbs such as 'Take it like a man,' 'Be a man about it,' 'What are you, a man or a mouse?'"[50]

Judaism asks us to be a man also – but the criterion take on a different tone. Our sages present definitions of manhood not steeped in machismo and physical toughness, rather on behavior and ethical actions. In Mishnah Avot 2:6, it is written, "Hillel said: In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." And later in the same chapter another great sage, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, gives us the map of how a man should act in his community. In Mishnah Avot 2:10-11, 13 it is written,

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said: Go into the world and observe the right course a man should steadfastly follow.

Rabbi Eliezer said: Be generous with your means.

Rabbi Joshua said: Be a good friend.

Rabbi Yose said: Be a good neighbor

Rabbi Simeon said: Consider the consequences of your actions.

Rabbi Eleazor said: Cultivate an unselfish heart.

Be a *mensch* – that is the dream of Jewish parents. They just want their child to grow up to personify *menschlikeit* or kindness, compassion, caring, respect, and love for others. This is difficult in a society where these qualities are often categorized as weak or effeminate. This feminization of the ideal became problematic for many Jewish men, especially secular Jews. Marc Kaminsky in his article "Discourse and Self-Formation: The Concept of Mensch in Modern Yiddish Culture" has isolated two aspects in the construction of the mensch.[51] Kaminsky writes,

> Mentsh, as cultural ideal, proposes an ideal of person that is purportedly genderless, a norm to which both genders have to adhere. Now, we are accustomed to thinking of such ideals as erasures of difference, in which women were subordinated. No doubt this is an important line of analysis to follow and work through. But to let this monological concept monopolize interpretation would be a mistake. There are two points to be made. Within a certain ongoingness of tradition, exalted gender-free ideals are a starting point upon which conventional notions of the differences between genders are set to work in a scale of values that subordinates women. But the second point is more important...The concept of mentsh in modern Yiddish culture exalts on ethics of the household, of the extended family, of the sphere of the domestic, and from the purview of the masculinist ideals of the alien cultures in which [Ashverazic] Jew lived, refigured the feminization of Jewish men in ways that secular Jewish men had to be conscious of.[52]

Daniel Boyarin in his book *Unheroic Conduct* states the belief that

the feminization of the Jewish male is common and, "there is a wide spread sensibility that being Jewish in our culture renders a boy effeminate." Boyarin found this feminine role comfortable as a Jew. He writes, this lead to "a story of inexplicable gender dysphoria, but one that had for me, even then, a rather happy ending. I didn't think of myself so much as girlish but rather as Jewish."[53] For Jewish men who didn't fit the typical male image – the "feminized" Jewish male stereotype, became a haven for acceptance and understanding. Harry Brod writes in his book, *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity*,

> I found the feminist critique of mainstream masculinity personally empowering rather than threatening. As a child and adolescent, I did not fit the mainstream male image. I was an outsider, not an athlete but an intellectual, fat, shy and with a stutter for many years. The feminist critique of mainstream masculinity allowed me to convert my envy of those who fit the approved model to contempt. It converted males previously my superiors on the traditional scale to males below me on the new scale, for I had obviously shown premature insight and sensitivity in rejecting the old male model.[54]

The Jewish model of manhood was full of contradictions to the non-Jewish masculinity. It revered intellectualism – *Torah rather than toughness*.[55] The Jewish male was an ethical man. The acceptance of the strict ethical and moral code of behavior taught men to curb base instincts and ascend to thoughts of spiritual integrity. And where surrounding cultures practiced the gospel of subduing and repressing outer showings of emotion, the Jewish man was to have access to his emotions.[56]

Men are not supposed to show emotion, to share or especially to cry. Crying shows inherent weakness and is left to the women and girls. But this

is not a Jewish model of living. Jewish society has been professing a different model – starting with the Bible. Rabbi Salkin writes,

> Real patriarchs cry. They cry at moments of loss. Abraham cries at the death of Sarah. Jacob cries when he meets Rachel. Jacob cries when he thinks Joseph is lost. David weeps at the loss of his sons. Men cry out of pain. Ishmael cried when he was in need.[57]

The Midrashists recognize the power of men's tears. In Genesis Rabbah 53 the Midrash states, "that because Ishmael cried, generations later God would cause Miriam's well to spring up and nourish the Jewish people in the wilderness." It isn't only in moments of pain and loss that our Biblical ancestors shed tears. Salkin continues,

> Biblical men cry when they encounter ethical wrong doing. When Jacob deceives Esau he cries with a loud wail. Centuries later the Jews in Persia would weep over their imminent destruction by the wicked Haman, a descendent of Esau through the Ire of Amalek. Men (also) cry when they encounter a past they thought that they had lost. When Joseph could no longer hide his identity from his brothers in Egypt, he wept profusely. Men weep when they encounter their own mortality. "The Judean King Hezekiah weeps out of fear of his own death." [II Kings 20;1-3][58]

Our tradition teaches us that a man's character is measured by his gentleness and his compassion; a man's strength is felt in his touch and in his kiss; a man's integrity is gauged by the depth and honesty of his feelings. I want my daughter to learn that from me. That is a Jewish male – a kind man, a good nurturing man, or sensitive intellectual man, a man who can cry and feel things deeply. To be such a man did not mean that I was weak, but rather shared true strength.

I have spent my life trying to defend against the Jew-boy stereotype, to prove that I was as strong as the non-Jew, if not stronger. The docility of

the Jewish male with their books and study did not interest me – even repulsed me. Jewish guys were such wimps or, as Rabbi Salkin heard from a young college student, "wusses." Rabbi Salkin's answer was both profound and poignant to me as I enter the rabbinate in June. He replied to the student,

> It's not that Jewish men are wusses. It's that our code of masculinity is simply different. We demonstrate our masculinity through a love of ideas and words, and infatuation with argument and intellectual striving. Some people think that to be a man you have to know how to go it alone. Not Jewish men. We live like men in the midst of a community, showing responsibility and living lives of interconnection. Some people think that to be a man is to 'do what you gotta do.' Not Jewish men. We show that we are men though a strict adherence to a moral code. It means lifting ourselves higher than we ever thought possible.[59]

Then what happens when one of our greatest Jewish male role models, Moses, does something as violent as killing another man? Where was the love of ideas and words? Where was the intellectual striving? How does his act affect our moral code as Jewish men? And how will we respond to his actions?

Notes to Chapter Two

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[2] Michael Sikimmel, "Judaism, Masculinity and Feminism," in *Changing Men: Issues in Gender, Sex and Politics,* Summer/Fall 1987, Issue 18, 14-15.
[3] Robert Roesnberg, "A Jewish Men's Movement?" *Ibid.,* 19.
[4] Jeffrey K. Salkin, *Searching For My Brothers.* (New York, 1999), 2-3.
[5] William Pollack, *Real Boys.* (New York, 1998), 5.
[6] Deborah David and Robert Brannon cited in Pollack, 24.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Pollack, 25.
[9] *Ibid.*, 338.
[10] *Ibid.*, 339.
[11] *Ibid.*, 349.
[12] Jean Baker Miller, "The Construction of Anger in Women and Men," in *Stone Center Working Paper Series*, 1983.
[13] Nancy Chodorow, "Gender, Relation & Difference," cited in Beneke, 15.
[14] Timothy Beneke, *Proving Manhood.* (New Jersey, 1985), 51.
[15] Margaret Mead, *Male and Female.* (London, 1947), 128.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Beneke, 56.
[18] *Ibid.*, 57.
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[21] Gilligan, 229.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*, 230.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*, 231.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, 233.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*, 235.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.*, 236.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*, 237.
[38] *Ibid.*, 238.
[39] Geoffrey Canada, *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun.* (Boston, 1995), 4-5.
[40] Miedzian, 84.
[41] Karr-Morse & Wiley, 235.
[42] *Ibid.*, 236.
[43] Horn cited in Karr-Morse & Wiley, 236.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*, 239.
[47] Heatherington & Parke cited in Karr-Morse & Wiley, 239.
[48] Miedzian, 88.
[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Salkin, 2.
[51] Kaminsky cited in Boyarin, 36.
[52] *Ibid.*, 56.
[53] Daniel Boyarin,*Unheroic Conduct*. (California, 1997), 57.
[54] Harry Brod ed., *A Mensch Among Men*. (California, 1988), 7-8.
[55] Salkin, 3.
[56] *Ibid.*, 4.
[57] *Ibid.*, 44.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*, 68.

Chapter Three – Moses: Hero, Killer, or Both?

> And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brothers, and looked upon their burdens: and he noticed an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brothers: *and he looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.* [Exodus 2:11-12]

A murder performed in defense of another. The murderer was young, inexperienced, and frightened. The murderer was a victim of an absent father and difficulties in childhood. A murderer unable to use other means of settling his conflicts. A murderer acting spontaneously, even impetuously. And a murderer, the elite leader of, prophet for, and developer of the Israelite peoples. Moses has been our Jewish male role model for thousands of years. Yet he is a killer, an attacker in a homicide, a murderer.

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Dr. James Gilligan in his study of violent criminals writes of the murderer,

> In bodily language, murder is to behavior what paranoia is to

> thought, and hate is to feelings. Murder is the symbolic representation of a paranoid thought, but by means of actions rather than words, in people who are not necessarily delusional, psychotic, or insane (at least in terms of the conventional psychiatric and legal definitions of those terms.) Violence towards others may be thought of as the behavioral equivalent of paranoia, or the behavioral version of it – its hypostasis the translation into physical reality of the waking dream (or nightmare) which paranoia represents in terms of words and thought, fantasies and delusions.[1]

Gilligan continues, describing the men he worked with in the prison system. He writes of what murder represents to them. "Murder represents (for the murderer) the ultimate act of self-defense, a last resort against being overwhelmed by shame and 'losing one's mind,' an attempt to ward off psychosis or 'going crazy.' The subjective sense on the part of the murderer is that he must commit this act or lose

everything – his mind, his sanity, himself."[2]

The urge to kill – to protect oneself – is often pitted against a moral obligation to preserve life. That is the tension imbedded in the sacred text of the Bible. Biblical man struggled against his base needs. The punishment for murder was swift and punitive, especially in the cases of pre-meditative killings. J. Arthur Hoyles writes in his book *Punishment in the Bible*,

> Of the crimes against their fellow men the most serious was, of course, murder. For pre-meditated homicide the death penalty was automatic. There was no question of individual responsibility of the killer, there was no question of appeasing the family of the deceased, there was no question of buying off the supreme penalty or providing a substitute as a scape-goat. Blood belongs to God, and the shedding of blood is an insult to him. To propitiate him is the purpose of the extreme penalty. 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.' [Genesis 9:6][3]

Even with such punishment available and such decrees built into our primary texts, man continued to kill, continued to murder. Eric Fromm examines the concept of the internal struggle inherent to man. The passion to do evil competes with the knowledge of moral and decent behavior from the very beginning of our religious narrative. Fromm writes in his book *The Heart of Man*,

> Is man basically evil and corrupt, or is he basically good and perfectible? The Old Testament does not take the position of man's fundamental corruption. Adam and Eve's *disobedience* to God are not called sin; no where is there a hint that this disobedience has corrupted man. On the contrary, the disobedience is the condition for man's self-awareness, for his capacity to choose, and thus in the last analysis this first act of disobedience is man's first step toward freedom. It seems that their disobedience was even within God's plan; for, according to prophetic thought, man just *because* he was expelled from Paradise is able to make his own history, to develop his human powers and to attain a new harmony with man and nature as a fully developed individual instead of the former harmony in which he was not yet an individual. The Messianic concept of the prophets certainly implies that man is not fundamentally corrupt and that he can be saved without any special act of God's grace. But it does not imply that this potential for good will necessarily win.[4]

Fromm believes that man's continuous potential for violence comes from his ancestors. It is an internal pattern played out over and over again in our myth and stories. The lure of evil and ultimately violence has colored our history as Jews – the Bible is the proof text. Fromm continues,

> The Old Testament offers at least as many examples of evil-doing as of right-doing, and does not exempt even exalted figures like King David from the list of evil-doers. The Old Testament view is that man has both capacities – that of good and that of evil – and that man must choose between good and evil, blessing and curse, life and death. Even God does not interfere in his choice; He (God)

> helps by sending His messengers, the prophets to teach the norms which lead to the realization of goodness, to identify the evil, and to warn and to protest. But this being done, man is left alone with his 'two strivings' that for good and that for evil, and the decision is his alone.[5]

A killer stands alone – the shedder of blood from the beginning of our story. This story was born of our "expulsion from Eden with the knowledge of good and evil."

> And the man knew Hannah his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain saying, "I have acquired a man-child from the Lord. And she again bore, his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground as an offering to the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the first of his flocks and of the fat parts thereof. And the Lord had respect to Abel and his offering: but to Cain as his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very angry, and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why are you crestfallen? If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin crouches at your doors and to you shall be his desire.' *V'ah yomer Kayin el Hevel achiv, vay'hee bee yotain ba sadeh va ya kom Kayin el Hevel achiv, vayahar sayhoo.* And Cain talked with his brother Abel; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. [Genesis 4:1-8][6]

The passage then continues in verses 9-16 with a dialogue between God and Cain and a concluding narrative. The murder is central to the story not only in its structure but also in its placement in this passage. Dr. Mark McEntire in his book *The Blood of Abel* writes of these two factors involved in the murder.

> The rapid nature of Cain's three-fold action seems quite intentional. He says, he rises up and he kills. The first phrase appears to be the opening of dialogue between the two brothers. The Hebrew verb *Amar*, to say, typically introduces a direct quotation, but the words

between the two brothers are missing. It is as if the dialogue has been ripped out of the story in order to bring on the murderous act of Cain that much more quickly...The overall structure of 4:1-16 also highlights v.8 by placing it alone at the middle of the passage.

Opening Narrative (vv. 1-5)
Speech of Yahweh to Cain (vv. 6-7)
The Murder of Abel (v.8)
Dialogue between Yahweh and Cain (vv. 9-15)[7]

The murder is the centerpiece of the story. Cain kills his brother, denies his involvement, and eventually is punished for his crime. What is the motivation for the killing? Regina M. Schwartz in her book *The Curse of Cain* poses this possible motive. She writes, "While the story of Cain and Abel does not pause to offer anything like a full account of logical explanations or deep motivations, it is

safe to say that it tells a story of sibling rivalry."[8]

Rivalry over what we ask? This seemingly inexplicable turn to murder comes from a competition. Schwartz continues, "What are they competing for? Not, it seems for the favor of their earthly parents, Adam and Eve, but for the favor of their heavenly Maker."[9]

The Biblical verses Genesis 4:4-5 offer a strange statement where one brother's sacrifice is accepted and the other's is rejected. "The Lord looked with favor upon Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast."

It seems that perhaps God sets up the first murder. It is God's

rejection of Cain that became this saga. Regina Schwartz writes of this "cold-hearted" God, "Why did God condemn Cain's sacrifice? What would have happened if he had accepted both Cain's and Abel's offerings instead of choosing one, and had thereby promoted cooperation between the sower and the shepherd instead of their competition and violence? What kind of God is this who chooses one sacrifice over the other?"[10]

God's behavior challenges our genteel sensibilities of a divine entity working for our benefit. Perhaps, God is giving us an example to look at as Jews. Schwartz continues,

> This God who excludes some and prefers others, who casts some out, is a monotheistic God – monotheistic not only because he demands allegiance to himself alone but because he confers his favor on one alone. While the biblical God certainly does not always govern his universe this way the rule presupposed and enforced here, in the story of Cain and Abel, is that there can be no multiple allegiances, neither directed toward the deity nor, apparently, emanating from him.[11]

God is our Judge not judgmental. God had created humans only to witness the death of one of his creations, the first family. The murder of Abel would affect not only the victim but also his family system. McEntire writes, "The first family on earth, according to Genesis, consists of four persons at the point of Genesis 4:2. By the end of the narrative in Genesis 4:1-16, twenty-five percent is the victim of a homicide, and the remaining fifty percent are immediate family members of both a victim and a perpetrator. In

this brief passage, the world has changed dramatically because of the entrance of violence."[12]

God's role in this destruction is both intriguing and troubling. The text itself expresses three questions according to McEntire which are, "how is God related to violence, how violence affects humanity and how violence changes creation."[13]

The story of Cain and Abel begins to examine not only the origins of human violence but also God's role in the process. God takes both an active and passive role in the circumstances surrounding the first murder. God does not accept Cain's sacrifice. Not only does Cain's sacrifice face rejection but also the very nature of his sacrifice may lead to this violent reaction. Noted Biblical scholar René Girard in his seminal work *Violence and the Sacred* discusses the role of criminal sacrifice in the diffusion of violent tendencies. Girard understands animal sacrifice as a mechanism of victimization in which humans find a controlled outlet for violent aggression. The story of Cain and Abel presents two brothers, one with such an outlet (Abel) and one without such an outlet (Cain). Cain's act of murder may then be viewed as his only viable outlet for the violent tendencies which seem basic to human existence. God's absence from the murder scene calls into question – why a passive stance? Or even more troubling – why not even a warning for the victim (Abel)? Cain warranted such a warning. God is quick to warn Cain

of the dangerous creature crouching in wait for him, but there is no warning for Abel.[14]

This lack of God's presence and connection will lead to a tension inherent to Israel's history as a people. Meir Sternberg writes in his work *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, "Mysteriously, the crime itself takes place in God's absence. Genesis 4 raises important issues about God's presence and absence in relation the victim and, subsequently, God's role in the suffering and death created by violence." Sternberg argues, "the tension created by the alternatives Yahweh gives to Cain in 4:6-8 foreshadow the tension between faith and doubt which characterizes Israel's history."[15] The violence borne of the first family will eventually spin out of control. Vengeance and murder now become common place. Later in chapter four, Lamech proudly sings of vengeance, "I have killed a man for wounding me / a young man for striking me. / If Cain is avenged sevenfold / truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold." [Genesis 4:23-24]

It would seem to be appropriate to blame Cain for the violent acts which follow his fratricide. But, Williams cautions us, that this was a personal conflict between two brothers.

> It is, however important to recognize that insofar as Cain's murder of Abel is a founding act, thus sharing in a universal mythical theme, it is not concealed or given any sort of justification in the biblical narrative. Nor is the act that founds the people Israel or any

> of its great institutions. It is the human act of one who is typical in the measure that he desires what his brother has, and when he cannot perceive himself as different from his brother as his equal or superior he kills him. He cannot tolerate the differentiation that God has made, so he slays his brother.[16]

The story of the expulsion from the Garden [Genesis 3] and Cain and Abel [Genesis 4] have served to introduce mankind to chaos and conflict. Removed from idyllic life, the first humans were thrust into a world of uncertainty and discomfort. Although these stories help to express some of our primal needs and reactions to pain and jealousy, it is important to recognize as Williams writes, "Israel is not founded on an expulsion or murder committed by its ancestors, but is created through a process of becoming exceptional vis-à-vis the violent structures in the midst of which it came to be."[17] However, this is not to say that all of Israel's history was void of any future violence and her figures always morally sound and peaceful, Williams continues, "the ironic and critical recognition of participation in victimization and violence is, as a matter of fact, the most distinctive quality of Israel's literature among ancient texts."[18]

Frustration, jealousy, and man against man can all be predecessors to violent behavior. Pitting brother against brother will lead to confusion and eventually the possibility that the slighted, or loser, will turn to violence to "even the score." Protecting one's inalienable rights to what is "rightfully ours," whether the blessing, the love of father, or the adrenaline rush of a man

to man battle, fuels modern murderers and also the passions and attitudes of our ancestors throughout the book of Genesis.

Noted Biblical scholar and writer Karen Armstrong traces the role of violence and anti-social/moral behavior in our ancestors. Her work *In the Beginning* forces us to look at our greatest patriarchs as human beings – not always paragons of peace and morality. She writes of Abraham, in relation to his immediate family,

> Abraham could act with exemplary charity toward total strangers, but he could be murderously cruel toward his own family, particularly his children. In this story of God's chosen family we find very few of the 'family values' that Jews, Christians and Muslims, who all in their different ways claim to be children of Abraham, avow as crucial to the religious life. Abraham's household was troubled; in no way did it replicate the lost harmony of Eden.[19]

We must be wary in the examination of Moses to see that violence itself could be an inherited trait. This trait was so commonplace that even as many years separates Moses from the patriarchal archetypes presented in Genesis, it is still present in Exodus. Armstrong continues, "Each generation would add to the family's suffering. Fathers, wives, sons, and brothers would revile each other, inflicting a psychic damage that frequently erupted in violence."[20]

Each of the early patriarchs harbored the potential for aggression and cruelty. They were paradigms of human behavior. Jacob was such an example. He possessed the qualities necessary to be a leader of the Jews yet

was also prone to deception and cruelty. His treatment of Leah speaks to this latter trait. Armstrong explains this cruelty to Leah in an intriguing argument. She writes, "Jacob's hatred of Leah sprang from the split in his own soul. Throughout Genesis, we have seen that human beings tend to project their guilt outward when in the wrong. Adam, Eve, and Noah had all turned viciously on others when they had sinned."[21] Jacob felt guilty about the deception of Esau and his self-abuse turned into wife abuse. This is a common trait of many violent offenders. The violence serves to release an internal tension of guilt or shame. Jacob's treatment of Leah was perhaps a substitute for the treatment of Esau, and Jacob decided to make Leah's life miserable.

Jacob's behavior is not only difficult to understand when he acts upon his anger and guilt, but also disturbing when he does not show loving action or any action at all. After his daughter Dinah is brutally raped and imprisoned by Shechem, Jacob's reaction is terrifyingly apathetic. Armstrong comments on Jacob's behavior when told the news about Dinah,

> At the time of the rape, Jacob's sons were away from home with their flocks. But Jacob was in the family encampment outside the town. His reaction was chilling. He had 'heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah,' the narrator tells us, but 'held his peace' awaiting the return of his sons [Genesis 34:5].[22]

The term used for "held his peace" – *hekcharish* – usually connotes in Biblical writings a sense of culpable inertia or negligence.[23] This apathy

on Jacob's part continues when he tells his sons of the crime and his non-involvement in her rescue. Silence in this case can be seen as a violent act. Yet, so can Dinah's brothers' reaction to her rape and imprisonment. Their response will set a new standard for Israelite violence and aggressive behavior. These men will later sell their brother Joseph into slavery and thereby establish the measuring stick for a family history of violent behavior.

The brothers told Hamor and Shechem that it would be dishonorable for their sister, Dinah (the rape victim!), to marry an uncircumcised man. If the local Hivites were willing to be circumcised, then intermarriage would be gladly accepted. Hamor agrees and convinces all the men of Shechem to undergo this painful procedure. All the males were rightfully weakened and in pain post-circumcision. At that point Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, entered the city and slaughtered them all. *Then* they rescued their sister.[24]

After Simeon and Levi had left the town and returned to Jacob's camp, the other brothers arrive in Shechem. Their actions are both astonishing and repugnant. The text of the Torah reads, "[They] came upon the slain and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in their houses, they captured and made their prey [Genesis 34:27-29].

Murder, revenge, and plunder – these traits surely must be denounced

by the commentary and rabbinic sources. They are not; they are justified. This will be a method which will also be present in the discussion of violence in the life of David. The commentators seem to whitewash the violent actions of Jewish characters while vilifying the "enemies of our people."

There are three primary lines of reasoning expressed to justify the actions of the brothers. Ramban in *Hilchot Melachim Chapter Nine*, codifies the Seven Noahide Laws that are incumbent on all human beings, and whose violators are subject to the death penalty. One of these laws forbids theft, which includes kidnapping. In taking Dinah against her will, Shechem violates this prohibition. The Seventh Noahide Law requires all people to carry out this code. By permitting Shechem to act as he did, the people of the city transgressed their responsibility to enforce the laws – so that they, like Shechem himself, were liable to the death penalty. So Simeon and Levi were just carrying out the enforcement of law that had been overlooked by the entire town population.[25]

Ramban maintains that Simeon and Levi were justified in killing the people because *all* of them were evil and violated the Noahide Laws. He suggests that nations that are the victims of aggression have the right to retaliate against their attackers. In this case, the city-state of Shechem committed an act of aggression against the nation of Israel, so Simeon and Levi had the right to counter-attack.[26]

Each commentator overlooks another lesson that also can be taken from this story. That violence is justified and supported by our tradition. That our heroes are held to a different standard than those of our neighbors. The text itself serves as a message that this behavior may not be acceptable. It is how we, as Jews, interpret it that can create a model of violence as retaliation and as acceptable behavior. Karen Armstrong comments on the reactions of both Simeon and Levi, and the rest of the brothers. Her interpretation provides a juxtaposition to the commentators.

> Until this point [Genesis 34:27-29] the narrator has been sympathetic to Dinah's brothers, but he does not flinch from exposing the full horror and cold-blooded violence of their crime. Abraham and Isaac had both lived on good terms with the native people of Canaan. This episode opened a new chapter of distrust, hatred, and contempt. This was just the first of many Israelite massacres of the indigenous population of the Promised Land.[27]

But Armstrong recognized that this story possesses no truly non-culpable male characters. This is a trait of a majority of the Genesis narrative text. The ambiguity of the character's ability to be categorized as "good or bad" is a family history for the Jewish people. Armstrong comments,

> Like so many stories of Genesis, this is no straight forward tale of right and wrong. The text emphasizes the brutality of the rape, which reduced Dinah to a mere object; we are told that Shechem 'lay with her by force' (34:2) rather than the usual phrase 'lay with her.' We are also shocked by the Hivites' insouciance afterward. They cheerfully proposed intermarriage and trade agreements as though nothing had happened. While Simeon and Levi's massacre is utterly abhorrent, the first major crime of the people of Israel, at least they left the city as soon as they had fought their way through to Dinah. The narrator gives the impression that the looting of the other brothers was even more repellent, because simply venal. There are no heroes in this sorry tale; all are villains – with the

obvious exception of poor Dinah.[28]

Are there any male heroes in the stories of Genesis? Or does the Jewish male possess a lineage of in the least case offensive imperfect models and in the most frightening violent and disturbing models of manhood? And do our rabbis and commentators support the violence by whitewashing and justifying even the most horrific of actions?

The purpose of examining a family history in the case of violence is to show that the environment in which an offender grows up in may affect his/her behaviors. The character of Moses had an immediate family and a historical lineage with its inception in the book of Genesis. The writers of Genesis provide us with the model of the flawed hero – a trait which defines Moses. This inherited vulnerability plays a role in his actions. Armstrong writes of this humanness of our patriarchs.

> Survival is an important theme in Genesis. Banished from Eden human beings had to struggle to remain physically, morally and spiritually intact. Most of us get damaged at some point along the way. Genesis is true to life here. It shows us no paragons. Even the great patriarchs of Israel have feet of clay. Moments of grace and inspiration in their lives are frequently followed by episodes which show these men to be as flawed, negligent, self-indulgent, apathetic, and egotistical as any of us lesser mortals. Genesis does not provide us with people who have achieved virtue.[29]

Armstrong does not believe that all hope is lost. By presenting characters who struggle, the text of Genesis can provide us a metaphorical exploration into human nature. It is our potentiality to do good which makes

our choices to do bad so difficult to comprehend. It is perhaps the very nature of man to struggle with such a paradox. Armstrong continues,

> From the first, Genesis teaches that a blessed life is possible for all creatures; we can all find our correct element and thrive therein. But Genesis also shows that it is more difficult for human beings than for other creatures to remain in the place allotted to them. We are conflicted and torn, tempered by the evil inclination, which is the source of some of our more brilliant cultural achievements as well as our greatest crimes.[30]

And this struggle between good and evil affects some of our greatest Jewish heroes. The role of violence is active in both their lives. It is this struggle to engage in life with such a tendency, predisposition, family history of violence and aggression that truly humanizes the heroic mythologies of Moses.

What type of man was Moses? Was the violence present in his life a metaphorical fable enacted to explain or highlight the presence of violence in our own lives? What is the role of shame and psychological triggers in Moses' early life? How did the commentators (both in the past and modern times) justify or clarity such violent actions? And finally what does this teach us today?

Moses' life begins in the midst of violence. The Pharaoh's decree to kill the firstborn sons of the Israelites causes an early traumatic event for Moses. He is taken from his mother and raised in an environment foreign to his own birthright. In actuality, violence is to follow Moses throughout his

life, especially his time in Egypt. The revelation of Moses' true identity and how he must free the Israelites is one of violence against the Egyptian culture he was thrust into as a baby.

Williams writes of the presence of violence in the Exodus story, "Violence permeates the Exodus story, but it should be quite clear that the sacred is a metaphor of violence."[31] To begin one's life within a context of infanticide had to affect the core system of Moses. The victimization of the Israelite people will trigger his seminal act of violence against the taskmaster. Moses has been characterized as a reluctant leader, but consistently as the shepherd of the flock, the innocent and helpless. That is coupled with the fact he will be forever connected with a protector God. Williams continues,

> The Exodus text as we have it narrates a process of struggle to witness to the revelation of the innocent victim. The plight and liberation of an oppressed people, and first of all their little ones, the newborn male children, are at the heart of the story. The innocent victim, if not recognized as such by the political powers, must have a defender, an advocate, and that defender in Exodus is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of Moses. But the disclosure of the innocent victim and the God of the victims does not come about quickly and easily. It requires a long and tortuous history with numerous setbacks, for mimesis, rivalry and violence are embedded in the symbols and institutions of the archaic cultural setting out of which Israel's forebearers come.[32]

Moses was born into a time of great oppression. There are many theories on the reasons the Pharaoh may have turned to infanticide. One of the most intriguing is presented by Emil Bock in his book *Moses*. He believes that the Pharaoh in question, Ramses II, in his search for ultimate

power delved into the world of black magic cultic practices. Bock establishes the hypothesis that the infanticide in Exodus is an imaginative hieroglyph concealing the execution of gruesome cultic practices.[33] That Egyptian life in decline fell into decadence and inhumane practices. The feverish Pharaoh lust for power infringed upon the beginning of the life of Moses.[34] Bock comments of this Pharaoh of Exodus,

> Apparently the Pharaoh referred to by the Bible – let us assume that his is identical with Ramses II – deeply invaded the domain of the Israelite people in order to appropriate victims for his unlimited greed for power. Not only the biblical narration of infanticide attests this but also related legendary traditions. The Pharaoh reputedly forced the Israelites to immure their newborn infants in the walls of the new cities in place of bricks, if they could not produce a sufficient number of bricks; and Pharaoh Malul was bathed in the blood of slaughtered children of Israel to cure his leprosy.[35]

The issues of a son discovering that his father (even an adopted one) is the generator of infanticide would be devastating . How much more so if the very people he is oppressing are your own people. The questions which arise from Moses' childhood show a struggle for identity, a possible repression, and a cathartic expression of liberation/acceptance in a single act of violence.

There are two major schools of thought about Moses' heredity. Sigmund Freud in his work *Moses and Monotheism* presents the hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian who in his own search for independence and power establishes a new religion and leads an oppressed under-class in

rebellion. Freud places the mythological Moses in the time of Ikhnaton's period and thus tries to unravel the complexities of his theory of Moses as an Egyptian. Freud writes, "Let us assume that Moses was a noble and distinguished man, perhaps indeed a member of the royal house, as the myth has it. He must have been conscious of his great abilities, ambitious, and energetic; perhaps he saw himself in a dim future, as the leader of his people, the governor of the Empire."[36]

Freud believes that Moses was in close contact with Ikhnaton, and an active adherent to his new religion. Upon the Pharaoh's death, and the reaction to it by the Egyptian people – Moses saw all of his prospects and hopes shattered. In this moment, Moses had lost his native country.[37] Freud hypothesizes that Moses learns from Ikhnaton's mistakes and uses his skills and position to poise himself as a new leader of a new people. Freud writes,

> The dreamer Ikhnaton had estranged himself from his people, had let his world empire crumble. Moses' active nature conceived the plan of founding a new empire, of founding a new people, to whom he could give the religion that Egypt disdained. It was, as we perceive, a heroic attempt to struggle against his fate, to find compensation in two directions for losses he had suffered through Ikhnaton's catastrophe...he [Moses] established relations with them [the Israelites] and directed the Exodus by the 'strength of his hand.'[38]

Elias Auerbach in his book *Moses* respectfully disagrees with Freud's assumption of Moses' origins. "...the only 'proof' that Freud can cite in support of the Egyptian origin of Moses is his name, his Egyptian name. The

evidence is not sufficient enough to support a thesis with such far-reaching consequences. A man's name is first merely a reference to the cultural milieu in which it is given."[39]

Auerbach believes that sometimes it is the milieu of the person's own people and thus the name represents a character's descent.[40] But more often than not, the name change is in direct correlation to an assimilation. Auerbach defends this theory with numerous examples from Jewish history. He writes,

> The Jews in their eventful history supply thousands of examples... In the Bible itself we have a case which provides an exact parallel to that of Moses. The Israelite Joseph goes to Egypt, there becomes an 'Egyptian,' and receives the Egyptian name Sapherath - Pa'neah [Genesis 41:45]...In later times, owing to cultural assimilation foreign names appear in Jewry in large numbers. Some biblical examples are: King Jehoichin calls one of his sons Sin-balussur (Sheshbassar); a pious Jew in Susa is named Mordechai (after the Babylonian god Morduk, his niece Esther (Ishtar); a priest of Jeremiah's time Pashur.[41]

Auerbach believes that if Moses were truly an Egyptian by birth, the legend of his life would be presented in a different light. It would have been reported that Moses was born to the King of Egypt and then turned on his father.[42] Although the relationship between Pharaoh and Moses is integral to the Exodus story, it is portrayed differently. Auerbach continues,

> Moses does not come from the king's circle, is temporarily in the lower sphere of the common people, and then returns to the circle of the king; but he emerges from the lower sphere of the suppressed people; appears temporarily in the sphere of the king, and then returns to the sphere of the people. This then must be a tradition which is strong enough to lead a complete reconstruction of the legendary account. We are therefore entitled to draw the

> conclusion: *Moses was not an Egyptian but an Israelite.* His Egyptian name shows that he was assimilated into an Egyptian environment and returned from it to the Israelites.[43]

Childhood

One of the struggles in searching for the causes of Moses' violent act against the taskmaster is that his childhood seems to be totally missing. Differing accounts have him either 20 years old or even 40 years old when the murder occurs. Why would the Biblical text leave out the formative years of Moses' life? To explore two explanations, I will call upon Dr. Auerbach and Dr. Dorothy F. Zeligs from her book, *Moses: A Psychodynamic Study*. Auerbach hypothesizes that Moses' lack of childhood narrative stems from the historical accounting of the times. He writes,

> Just as with all the great figures of the older periods in history, so is the case of Moses, at best we know historically the work he created as a mature man. Tradition can take note of him and become a part of the legend about him only when he begins to create history. His life up to this point gains interest only when his work suggests to people that they look back in the mood of later generations.[44]

One of the later generations crowning achievements is the creation of psychoanalytic thought to explain a person's psychological motivations. Dr. Zeligs chooses this avenue to explain the time gap in Moses' history found in the biblical text. She comments on this omission, "There is a curious gap in the biblical text regarding the early life of Moses. In a few highly concentrated sentences we are told about his birth and rescue. In the next

verse, Moses is already a grown man."[45]

Our modern psychological literature is full of incidents and studies on repression of childhood memories due to trauma. Whether Moses' early life was traumatic may not be an issue here, however. The intensity of Moses (signified by his striking of the taskmaster) may have created an environment where his childhood would have been quite stormy and disrupted. Dr. Zeligs hypothesizes on this period in Moses' life,

> If, as suggested, the family romance of the youthful Moses gave indications of intra psychic conflict regarding his feelings of self-acceptance as a Hebrew, Moses would have preferred to forget about the period in his life that intervened between the time of this adoption and his emergence into manhood. The gap in the text...can then be understood as representing a repression. It would coincide largely with the period of latency, a developmental stage during which infantile amnesia normally takes place. Under conditions of conflict this period could involve a longer span of time than usual. Moses was clearly a person of intense feelings and vivid imagination. The common psychological experiences of motivation would tend to affect him more profoundly than most. Deep emotions must have been involved in his efforts to detach himself from his original family and his group. Equally strong would have been the spiritual awakening, the return of his first loyalties.[46]

Dr. Zeligs continues by suggesting that Moses adolescence may have been long and stormy. She then cites Freud's theory that family romance theories usually begin during childhood, but may continue past puberty.[47] The question Dr. Zeligs focuses on is whether such a search for family identification could lead to such a violent and definitive action in the case of the taskmaster. She theorizes,

> If the unconscious fantasy of Moses was occupied with themes of

> freeing himself from ties of family and of group, there would be associated feelings of guilt. As a reaction, the youth's quest for personal emancipation may have been converted into a greater cause, a process not uncommon in the development of adolescence. Not only would the young dreamer free himself, he would liberate his entire people that were so shamefully enslaved. Thus, the family romance of the growing boy may have provided the impetus for the later achievements of the man.[48]

Not all of Moses' "achievements" were of a positive nature. Moses' first recorded act of his adult life was both an unequivocal assertion of identification with his own people and a violent outburst of anger.[49] "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up that he went out to his brethren and looked upon their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." [Exodus 2:11-12]

In two short verses, Moses' life changes unrevokably. "The intensity of his feelings," writes Dr. Zeligs, "expressed in this initial gesture conveys a quality of overcompensation, as if emotions long withheld were now breaking forth. He not only had compassion for the suffering Hebrew slaves, but he identified with them."[50]

The reality of the situation is that Moses killed another human being. Modern commentator Nehama Leibowitz states, "Strange and inescapable is the fact that Moses, first of the prophets, the lawgiver, begins his career by being involved in a killing. This disturbing circumstance has constantly

preoccupied commentators, ancient and modern."[51]

The fact of the case against Moshe Rabeinu is that he kills the Egyptian taskmaster. Judaism, especially our scholars and rabbis, spend the next 3000 plus years putting together the greatest defense "dream team" ever established. At all costs, it seems, that Moses must be defended in his action. I will now examine some of the case Judaism has constructed to defend perhaps our greatest leader. The defense counsel spans the rabbinic period, the commentators of medieval Jewry, the modern biblicist, the writer of historical fiction, the world of psychiatry, and, finally, my own personal statement. Not all of the statements presented to the court of public opinion will be pro-Moses, but I believe they show an insatiable need to understand and defend this act – a most troubling crime.

"...and he saw an Egyptian man striking down a Hebrew man, of his brethren. He looked this way and that way and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." The simplicity of this account leaves many openings to try to figure out what exactly transpired in this violent interaction. The challenge, especially when dealing with a religious figure, is to attempt to leave out the morality issues.

Dr. James Gilligan, in his study of violence, believes that reducing violence to the level of a morality play ignores the tragic nature of violence itself.[52] He writes, "From the tragic point of view, all violence is tragic – in

fact it is more tragic, the more inescapable and necessary it appears to be. The most tragic of dilemmas is to be forced into the choice between committing one form of violence to prevent another form of it, versus acquiescing passively in the other form of violence and thus permitting it to occur."[53]

Gilligan continues by explaining the overarching motivation for all violent acts – especially murder. The fact that the participant feels forced into such an action leaves little room for choice. Complicating the picture within the model of violence as a tragedy, the participant may feel that his/her choice is not only necessary but also justified. Gilligan writes,

> The first lesson that tragedy teaches is that all violence is an attempt to achieve justice, or what the violent person perceives a justice, for himself or for whomever it is on whose behalf he is being violent, so as to receive whatever retribution or compensation the violent person feels is 'due' him or 'owed' to him, or to those on whose behalf he is acting, whether he or they are 'entitled' to have a 'right' to; or so as to prevent those whom one loves or identifies with from being subjected to injustice. *Thus the attempt to achieve and maintain justice, or to undo or prevent injustice, is the one and only universal cause of violence.*[54]

The difficulty with inserting a 21st century reality into the Biblical story is the lack of concrete social and familial history we have about Moses. We can only hypothesize about perceived injustices. But that shouldn't stop us from trying to piece together factual antecedants from our modern studies.

"To prevent those whom one loves or *identifies* with from being

subjected to injustice." The reason I open this defense of Moses with Gilligan's hypothesis is because I believe this is the core issue affecting Moses' decision that fateful day. Now, one may argue, that to place an early 21st century psychiatrist in examination of Moses is far fetched. However, the rabbis and commentators often use later laws and interpretations to defend Moses' actions. Moses' actions were based on certain predications for violent behavior – shame, guilt, possible poor impulse control, and if the commentators are to be accepted, an overwhelming need to right the injustice of the Hebrew slaves.

The slaying of the taskmaster is an account in a religious text. Its morality is also of importance. The simple nature of the narrative leaves room for both psychological and moral exegesis. Nahum Sarna in his work *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* presents the argument that the scarcity of moral examination is to create a picture of Moses as a person. Sarna writes,

> The narrative does not relate to the moral questions that may he raised concerning Moses' fatal blow against the Egyptian oppressor, because the function of the story in the present context is to illustrate prime qualities of Moses' character and personality – his intolerance of oppression and his wholehearted identification with the plight of his people. In any case, the facts are too meager to permit any valid moral judgment. For instance, we do not know whether the Egyptian seemed to he actually beating his victim to death, in which case Moses' intervention was in accordance with the elementary human duty of going to the aid of one whose life is in peril. Significantly, the same Hebrew verb, *hikkah,* 'to strike,' is used for the action of the tormentor as for the reaction of Moses. Certainly the story does not lend itself to any interpretation that seeks to find in the incident a justification for the use of violence as

> an instrument to achieve what may be viewed as a desirable end. There is no ideology of protest at work in the story, and Moses is not praised for his deed. There is only a tale about an isolated event, an impetuous and spontaneous outpouring of righteous indignation in response to a specific situation. The counter-assault was directed against the perpetrator of the atrocity, not indiscriminately aimed against anyone who is perceived to lie a symbol of be coercive power of the state.[55]

The role of shame and guilt is very complicated. As previously explored in this chapter, the duality of Moses existence could be an impetus to conflict. Again the Torah is of not help. Commentator Nehama Leibowitz writes,

> The Torah does not relate to us how Moses, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, came to the resolve to ruin his chances of following a 'brilliant career' as a member of the Egyptian royal house, and throw in his lot with his persecuted brethren, whose very customs and habits were foreign to him. We are not told whether he arrived at this decision suddenly or gradually. The Torah is not a psychological novel and is not concerned with satisfying biographical curiosity. All that is said on the subject of Moses transition from Egyptian prince to champion of his stricken people is the following verse:
>
> > ...when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren, and looked on their burden. [2:11]
>
> His 'look' was no mere external glance with his eyes. For to which Egyptian was the spectacle of Jewish slaves being maltreated by their taskmasters not a familiar sight? But we must understand the 'looking' as Rashi interprets it: He directed his eyes and heart to share their distress.[56]

How was this distress shared? And how did Moses come to know the Hebrew's as brethren? One can only imagine what had been going on during Moses' time in Pharaoh's palace. Leibowitz is correct that the mistreatment of slaves, Hebrew and others, was probably rampant in and around the palace.

But for this man Moses, writers and commentators hypothesize the interjection of a Hebrew consciousness. Perhaps this connection was born of palace gossip and whispers as novelist Sholem Asch alludes to in his work *Moses*. Asch writes,

> He knew that what the priests, his enemies, whispered among themselves, was not merely inspired by malice: that he was the child of a Hebrew slave woman of Goshen, who had saved him from the decree of an earlier Pharaoh condemning to death all the male children of the Hebrews...And there was something more: there was the secret messenger – if he could call a 'messenger' someone who had never uttered a message, who had only haunted him – the messenger who could only have come, it seemed to him, from his own family: this was the mysterious girl – and she did, in fact, turn out to be his sister – who by hidden and devious ways found a kind of access to him even in Pharaoh's guarded and surrounded court.[57]

Stories and fears about Moses could have led to his own internal struggle within the palace walls. Mordechai and Miriam Roshwald in their book *Moses: Leader, Prophet, Man* believe that this internal conflict must have caused Moses' great pain. They write, "This duality must have turned into an agonizing conflict when Moses realized that he must choose between loyalty to the persecutors and loyalty to the persecuted."[58] Not well documented, Moses' life in the palace leaves many questions. From the story of his adoption to his young adulthood one must assume that Moses possessed the rights and privileges of an Egyptian prince.[59]

Although the Midrashists attempt to create legends about Moses' supernatural precocity, this Sephardic idealization is tempered by the fact that

until Moses meets up with God the text will show little interest with him.[60] The taskmaster's slaying serves two purposes. The first is to indoctrinate poor, sheltered Moses into what the real world is like for his Hebrew brethren. The violent act which sets him free, at least metaphorically, is comparable to other similar folklore and mythologies in relation to a naive hero to be.

Commentator William H.C. Propp comments on these similarities, in the *Anchor Bible* of Exodus 1-18,

> Like the tale of Moses' exposure, 2:11-15a seems to adapt a common folkloric pattern: a naive prince ventures outside the palace to witness the common life and is permanently transformed. One thinks of various monarchs who, in fact or legend, traverse their realms incognito (Thompson 1955: motif P 14.19) – though Moses is not a prince masquerading as a commoner, but a slave masquerading as a prince. We especially recall Siddhartha, who like Moses leaves his royal estate to view human misery and subsequently undergoes a spiritual transformation.
>
> The differences between the two stories are telling. Siddhartha's tale is always recounted dramatically, with emphasis on his soft life prior to enlightenment. The Yahwist, however, scarcely hints at this, and spares barely a dozen sentences for the entire incident. Unlike Siddhartha, Moses does not meet misery by accident but seeks it from the start. Moreover, the suffering that moves him is not the unfairness and pain of the entire human condition, but a specific situation of social injustice. He is therefore initially drawn to violence.[61]

Moses, even in his sheltered life style, is consistently defended. As I will prove, in every generation, Moses is given the benefit of the doubt. The assumptions always seem to side with creating a paradigmatic model of goodness and compassion. Even in recent works, Moses is sermonized as the

prince with the extraordinarily passionate drive for social justice. Rabbi Levi Meier writes in his book *Moses: The Price and the Prophet*, "We can assume that in the pharaoh's court Moses was exposed day and night to a litany of complaints about the enslaved Israelites. He heard that they were no good, they were different, they were not the same race as the Egyptians – probably not even really human – and their lives were cheap and expendable."[62]

Moses's normal, natural reaction would have been to identify totally with his adoptive family rather than his family of origin. An ordinary person would have experienced at least some self-hatred about his 'foreign' roots, choosing to identify solely and completely with the privileged, superior people who had taken him in.[63] But Moses was no ordinary man. The first thing we learn about Moses when he reached mature understanding – 'when Moses was grown up' – is that 'he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens.' Moses got involved!"[64]

The murder of the Egyptian is definitely the turning point in Moses' life. Roshwald comments that this point was seen as a confusing reality for the later generations. He writes, "This act by the future law-giver and prophet, the founder of a strictly moralistic code of conduct, was puzzling and embarrassing to later generations. The legend, perhaps in an endeavor to prepare us for the shock, builds up a magnificent shield around Moses by ascribing to him a character that is not only just but also compassionate."[65]

This shield supported strongly by the Midrashic texts will create a conflict in the honest assessment of the nature of Moses' violent side. Even previous to Moses' killing of the taskmaster, the Midrash weaves in stories of his compassionate connection to the Hebrew slaves. In one such story as presented in *The Legends of the Jews, Volume II* by Louis Ginzberg, Moses speaks to the Jews of their promising future – to alleviate their sufferings.

> The sight of his enslaved people touched Moses unto tears, and he spoke, saying: 'Woe unto me for your anguish! Rather would I die than see you suffer so grievously.' He did not disdain to help his unfortunate brethren at their heavy tasks as much as lay in his power. He dismissed all thought of his high station at court, shouldered a share of the burdens put upon the Israelites, and tolled in their place....
>
> Moses continued to do all he could to alleviate the suffering of his brethren to the best of his ability. He addressed encouraging words to them, saying: 'My dear brethren, bear your lot with fortitude! Do not lose courage, and let not your spirit grow weary with the weariness of your body. Better times will come, when tribulation shall be changed into joy. Clouds are followed by sunshine, storms by calm, all things in the world tend toward their opposites, and nothing is more inconstant than the fortunes of man.[66]

This compassion was also expressed in the Midrashim of Exodus Rabbah 1:27-28 in which Moses went to Pharaoh and fought for the slaves to get rest. This legend also shows that Moses' actions were connected to God right from the start.

> 'And he went out unto his brethren, and he looked on their burdens' [Exodus 2:11]. How did he feel as 'he-looked on'? As he looked on their burdens he wept, saying, 'Woe is me for your servitude! Would that I could die for you!' Since no work is more strenuous than that of handling clay, Moses used to shoulder the burdens and help each worker.

> R. Eleazer son of R. Yose the Galilean said: He saw heavy burdens put upon small people, and light ones upon big people; men's burdens upon women, and women's burdens upon men; the burden that an old man could carry on a youth, and that of a youth on an old man. So he would from time to time step away from his routine and rearrange the burdens, making believe that his intention was to be of help to the Pharoah. The Holy One said: You left your own concerns and went to look with compassion at the distress of Israel, behaving like a brother toward them. So, I, too, will leave those on high and those below, and speak [only] with you.
>
> Another comment on 'He looked on their burdens.' He saw that they had no rest whatever. So he said to Pharaoh, 'When a man has a slave and the slave does not rest at least one day during the week, the slave will die. These are your slaves. If you do not let them rest one day during the week, they will surely die.' Pharaoh replied, 'Go and do with them as you say.' So Moses went and ordained the Sabbath day for them to rest. [Exodus Rabbah 1:27-28][67]

The connection created between Moses and his "people," Ramban, in his commentary, attempts to explain the motives of Moses' behavior and thus understand the feelings and conditions that led him to commit the deed.[68] Ramban explains that Moses went forth to see his brethren after he had been told he was a Jew. Witness to their sufferings, he was unable to bear the sight and killed the Egyptian who was beating the Jews.[69]

Our "defense dream team" isn't denying that Moses killed a man, but what type of man did he actually kill? The tact many writers use is to attack the character of the taskmaster. Now a taskmaster by his very job description is not the kindest of men. But this was possibly (according to our tradition) one of the worst taskmasters ever. Philo – historian, theologian, philosopher – in his work *The Life of Moses* describes the despicable nature of this

particular character. He writes,

> For some of the overseers were exceedingly harsh and ferocious, in savageness differing nothing from venomous and carnivorous animals, wild beasts in human shape who assumed in outward form the semblance of civilized beings only to beguile and catch their prey, in reality more unyielding than iron or adamant. One of these, the cruelest of all, was killed by Moses, because he not only made no concession but was rendered harsher than ever by his exhortations, beating those who did not execute his orders with breathless promptness, persecuting them to the point of death and subjecting them to every outrage. Moses considered that his action in killing him was a righteous action. And righteous it was that one who only lived to destroy men should himself be destroyed.[70]

The Midrashists in Exodus Rabbah take this man's basic nature one step further. In Sefer Haggadah, a collection of Jewish legends and Midrashim, the taskmaster's crime exceeds just brutality. It is evil.

> 'And he saw an Egyptian' [Exodus 2:11]. Who was this Egyptian? The father of the blasphemer, 'whose mother was Israelite and whose father was Egyptian' [Leviticus 24:10]. The verse in Exodus goes on: 'Beating a Hebrew' – the Hebrew was the husband of Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri. [Leviticus 24:11]
>
> What preceded the Egyptian's beating the Hebrew? [The account that follows will explain]: The taskmasters were Egyptian but the foremen were Israelite, one taskmaster over ten foremen, and one foreman over ten Israelites. The taskmasters used to go around early in the morning to the foremen's homes to get them out to work at cockcrow. Once an Egyptian taskmaster saw an Israelite foreman's wife, Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, who was beautiful -- free of

any blemish -- and he cast his eye upon her. So the next day at cockcrow, he went to that foreman's home and quietly said to him, 'Go, gather your team of ten men.' Then he hid himself behind the staircase. The moment the husband left, the Egyptian got into the bed chamber and defiled the woman. It so happened that the husband turned back and saw the Egyptian as he was leaving the house. The husband reentered his house and asked his wife, 'Did the Egyptian touch you?' She replied, 'Yes, but I thought it was you!'

When the taskmaster became aware that the husband had found him out, he put the husband back to heavy labor and beat him all day, saying, 'Work harder, work harder,' trying to kill him.

'And he saw what had happened and what was now happening' [Exodus 2:12]. Through the holy spirit, Moses saw what the Egyptian had done to the Hebrew in his home and what he intended to do to him in the field, and said: It is not enough for this wicked one that he defiled the wife -- he is also determined to kill the husband.

'And when he saw that there was no man' [Exodus 2:12] – saw that there was no one who would be zealous for God and slay the Egyptian – 'he smote the Egyptian'. Taking a shovel used for mixing clay, [he split the Egyptian's skull so that his brain spilled out. [Exodus Rabbah 1:28-29; Leviticus Rabbah 32:4; Tanhuma, Shemot, §9, and Emor, §24][71]

The case against Moses is based upon the killing itself. Moses has

been provided with motive by the defense team – now they must deconstruct the killing – proving his moral character. The actual killing of the taskmaster took place in three segments. The first is that Moses looked this way and that way, and he saw there was no man; the second is the slaying itself; and finally Moses hides the body in the sand.

In his *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Umberto Cassuto supports Moses' actions as a predictor of *future leadership* potential. He writes,

> On one of the visits that Moses paid to his brethren, an incident occurred: *and he saw an Egyptian* – one of the taskmasters, a captain of the labour-gangs (i 11) – *smiting a Hebrew*; not any Hebrew slave (see above, on i 15), but actually *one of his brethren*, an Israelite. *He looked this way and that, and seeing no one* that might testify (this is mentioned here in order to explain why Moses was surprised when he discovered that the incident was known, v.14), or, no one that could come to the Hebrew's aid (compare Isaiah 1xiii 5: 'I looked but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath upheld me'). So Moses arose and *he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand*. The Egyptian smote, therefore justice demanded that he, too, should be smitten. However, the verb *smite* is repeated with a somewhat different nuance: when first used it means 'to beat', the second time it signifies 'to kill'. Nevertheless, the repetition points to the principle of measure for measure.
>
> By this act Moses showed the qualities of his spirit, the spirit of a man who pursues justice and is quick to save the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor, the spirit of love of freedom and of courage to rise up against tyrants. A man possessed of these attributes was worthy to become God's messenger to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt and to *smite* their oppressors with ten plagues [literally, '*smitings*'].[72]

The way in which Moses acts is also seen with an eye toward leadership potential by philosopher and theologian Martin Buber in his work *Moses*. Buber believes that the killing provides a picture of Moses as a future

emancipator and political leader. "Then he sees a single incident; an Egyptian taskmaster beats a Hebrew man, one 'of his brethren.' Now he looks round, yes, he actually looks round, driven to action, yet clear-headed. He aims not at becoming a martyr but a liberator; and he slays the Egyptian. That 'beating' and this 'slaying' are conveyed in precisely the same word in the Hebrew; Moses does what he saw done to the one who did it."[73]

This eye for an eye vengeance is supported by the use of later Biblical laws and commentators. In Leviticus 24:17, 21 it reads, "And he that kills any man shall surely be put to death." Ramban in his work Rozeah 1,5 comments, "Who pursues his fellow with intent to kill...every Jew is obligated to rescue the victim from the pursuer even at the expense of the pursuers life."

Benno Jacob in *Exodus* does a fantastic job breaking down the difference between striking a victim and killing a person. Jacob believes that these verses have been misinterpreted and remain a prime basis for anti-Semitic attacks on the Bible.[74] He believes that accusations of assassination, steeped in treachery and secrecy, are certainly exaggerated interpretations of a simple event. An event which unintentionally points to Moses redemption. Jacob writes, "Moses did not intentionally kill the Egyptian, nor did he lie in ambush for him. Rather, Moses dealt with him exactly as the Egyptian with the Hebrews. The same word was uses to describe both acts – *strike*."[75]

Jacob then continues by explaining that although corporal punishment was common in ancient times – even supported by our own text, that the case of this Egyptian taskmaster was of a different nature.

> Grave distinctions between types of beatings exist and Mosaic law recognizes them: lashes of punishment imposed by law, in contrast with the illegal beatings associated with a quarrel or personal enmity. Until recently the former were widely permitted, and the poet of Proverbs considered them an educational tool. If then, as has often been assumed, the Egyptian *foreman* beat the slave under his supervision in order to induce him to work properly, it would have been justified according to Israelite thought. No one would have considered it cruel or dishonorable. An Egyptian proverb even asked: 'Why does a man possess a back? He only obeys when beaten upon it.' The stick was an essential tool for all projects. 'It is the stick which built pyramids, dug canals, and permitted the conquerors to be victorious. It belonged to the daily routine of life. Even members of the upper classes did not escape entirely but were inevitably beaten by some official. The unusual circumstances of escaping this fate were sufficiently significant to enter on the tombstone.' Moses was therefore not concerned about an ordinary, everyday affair.
>
> Here we were not dealing with such an innocent beating, but with one administered during a quarrel of enmity; *it threatened the life of the Hebrew.*
>
> According to later Mosaic law, if a beating resulted in unintentional death, the defense that the accused did not wish to kill was not allowed as a mitigating factor. Anyone who beat another man and killed him shall himself be killed. Our slaying fell into this category, as the Torah explicitly noted. Moses saw that heavy labor could not be undertaken without beatings; that alone would not have impelled him to action. Rather, he saw an assault motivated by personal enmity; this aroused him. It was administered by an 'Egyptian man' and received by '*a Hebrew man from his brothers.*' This clearly indicated that an Egyptian was beating a Hebrew; therefore Moses felt himself involved and his anger was aroused. The word for 'beat' is the same in both cases, as force must be met by force. The Torah does not describe the result of the Egyptian's beating, but we know that Moses' blow unfortunately led to the death of the Egyptian.[76]

The question that seems to truly incriminate Moses is whether this

was a premeditated murder. The concept of him both looking around to see if anyone was watching and his hiding of the body seems to suggest planning and stealth. Naphtali Hertz Weisel writes,

> It looks very much like an unlawful act. Did merely striking a blow warrant killing? Surely the shedding of blood was forbidden to all mankind even prior to the Giving of the Torah. What difference does it make whose life was involved – Egyptian or Hebrew? What advantage would he gain for his people by killing him in secret? It surely savoured of unlawful vengeance and anger.[77]

Jacob feels that it is incorrect to make the assumption that Moses "looked this way and that way" to assure himself that no one had seen him as he killed the Egyptian.[78] Jacob believes that elsewhere in text there are clear parallels to Moses looking both ways. As it is written in Isaiah 59:16-18, "The Lord saw and he was displeased that there was no justice; and He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no intercessor. Therefore, His own arm brought salvation unto Him and His righteousness sustained Him." [Isaiah 59:16-18]

Moses looked to see if someone would step in to provide justice, and only upon no one's acceptance of the challenge did he step in. Louis Ginzberg shares the following legend in support of this position.

> Moses wanted to see if someone would step forward, and, impelled by zeal for the cause of God and for God's law, would declare himself ready to avenge the outrage. He waited in vain. Then he determined to act himself. Naturally enough he hesitated to take the life of a human being. He did not know whether the evil-doer might not be brought to repentance, and then lead a life of pious endeavor. He also considered, that there would perhaps be some among the descendants to spring from the Egyptian for whose sake their wicked ancestor might rightfully lay claim to clemency. Tile holy

> spirit allayed all his doubts. He was made to see that not the slightest hope existed that good would come either from the malefactor himself or from any of his offspring. Then Moses was willing to requite him for his evil deeds. Nevertheless he first consulted the angels, to hear what they had to say, and they agreed that the Egyptian deserved death, and Moses acted according to their opinion.[79]

Seeing no one who could protect the Israelites, Moses kills the taskmaster. Leviticus Rabbah 32:4 states, "R. Yehudah said: He saw that there was no one ready to champion the cause of the Holy One Blessed be He." Yet Moses decides to hide the body in the sand. Why? Jacob comments on Moses' panic and secrecy,

> Naturally, Moses was frightened by the unfortunate result of his intervention, so he hid the corpse in order to escape detection and its consequences. One should also remember that Moses was young and this was his first public act. Discretion has never been characteristic of youth. His intention – not his deed was noble. This might be classified as homicide, and Moses soon atoned for it through flight; like the patriarch Jacob, he had to live in a foreign land for a decade. The God of the Torah was just and holy.[80]

What is God's role in this killing? Moses doesn't seem to handle himself well in this situation. He comes upon a situation he knows nothing about – kills a man and hides his body. *The New Interpreter's Bible* offers the following scenario to explain Moses actions.

> Moses gazes around, either in hopes of finding someone else to save the Hebrew or, failing that, to ascertain the absence of witnesses. Then he kills (hikkâ) the Egyptian. Lexically, we might say the Egyptian gets his just deserts, blow for blow (Cassuto 1967:22). But the beating he receives differs from the beating he was dispensing, and Moses' act is morally wrong.
>
> Lamech once boasted he would "kill a man for wounding

> me, and a child for hitting me" (Gen 4:23). If this is unacceptable, how much less entitled is Moses to kill for the wounding of a stranger! By biblical law, moderately drubbing a slave is permissible (21:20-21). Thus, for all Moses or we know, the Hebrew deserves his punishment.
>
> It is not killing per se that disturbs the author; the Torah is no pacifist tract. There are military victories and bloody executions; the Levites (32:26-29) and Phinehas (Numbers 25) are even rewarded for (justifiable) homicide with sacred offices. There is, however, a world of difference between killing in obedience to Yahweh and killing to avenge a beating. Aud Moses does not even sin boldly. The Levites and Phinehas do not peer this way and that before striking.[81]

Yerushalmi comments that God, not Moses, is the hero of the Exodus. The slaying of the taskmaster is proof of Moses' inability to make it on his own. He comments,

> Despite a wealth of legend glorifying Moses in rabbinic literature and in Jewish folklore, the major thrust of the biblical narrators as well as the rabbis was to emphasize that, great as he was, Moses was all too human and merely an instrument of God. No aura of divinity or any cult was allowed to develop around him, no descent is claimed from him, and, he plays no discernible role in the messianic vision of the Hebrew prophets. Though the three biblical patriarchs are mentioned in the '*amidah*', the core of every Jewish liturgical service, Moses is not. In the Passover Haggadah, whose many-layered recital is orchestrated around the exodus from Egypt, the name of Moses never appears. That there is in all this a conscious attempt to prevent any confusion of the roles of Moses and God has been commented on by many. How deliberate this has been may be seen in the Passover Haggadah itself: '*And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt* [Deuteronomy 26:8]: not by the hands of an angel, and nor by the hands of a seraph, and not by the hands of a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself, in His own glory and in His own person.'[82]

There are those on our Moses' defense team who will see God approving of Moses' actions. Coote and Ord comment that the episode

shows that Moses was God's instrument of justice. They believe that the killing was done with divine approval.

> People are often shocked by Moses' violent behavior. In personalizing their evaluation of Moses, they tend to reverse the meaning of this episode. 'If God could choose Moses,' who killed somebody and therefore was a great sinner, the explanation goes, 'then I guess God can put up with me and maybe even use me.' This approach to the text has God bending over backward, against God's principles, to pick out Moses. The opposite is the case. God reacted to Moses not with shock but approval. Moses acted not against God's principles and passion but wholly in line with them.[83]

The legends also abound with the retelling of the murder story with an alternative ending. In these scenarios, Moses doesn't even strike the Egyptian. He just utters God's name and the Egyptian drops dead.

Each generation sought to defend Moses. Each generation culled Midrashim and creative interpretations of these two lines of Biblical text. But perhaps most telling is the Midrash known as Petirat Moshe (the Passing of Moses). As Moses lay dying there are a series of Midrashim which describe his battle with the Angel of Death. Moses begged to see the Land as an ordinary Israelite and then implored God to let him live. According to the Midrash one act above all others not only kept Moses out of the Promised Land but also sealed his pact with mortality.

> Said the Holy One Blessed be He to him (Moses): 'Moses the son of whom art thou?' Said he to Him: 'The son of Amram'. Said the Holy One blessed be He: 'And Amram, whose son was he?' Said Moses: 'The son of Yitzhar'. – Said (God): 'And Yitzhar, whose son was he?' Said Moses: 'The son of Levi'. Said the Holy One blessed be He: 'And all of them, from whence came they forth?' Said Moses: 'From Adam'. Said the Holy One blessed be He: 'Did anyone of them remain alive?' Said Moses: 'All of them died'. Said the Holy One...: 'Notwithstanding thou desirest to live!' Said

> Moses: 'Lord of Universe! Adam did steal and ate of that which thou didst disapprove of whereupon Thou didst punish him by death, but as for me have I stolen aught from thee!? Yea Thou hast already written of me (Numbers 12, 7): 'My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all My house, wherefore then should I die?' Said the Holy One...: 'Art Thou, in any wise, better than Noah?' Said Moses: 'Yea! As for Noah, Thou didst bring upon his generation the deluge; yet Noah besought not mercy for his generation. But I said (Exodus 32, 32), 'If Thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, erase me from Thy book which Thou hast written'. Said the Holy One: 'Art thou, in any wise, better than Abraham whom I proved with ten trials?' Said Moses: 'As for Abraham, there did come forth from him Ishmael who will cause to perish his sons and Thine'. Said the Holy One: 'Art thou, in any wise, better than Isaac?' Said Moses: 'As for Isaac, there will come forth from his loins him who is destined to destroy Thy Temple and his children will slay Thy children, Thy priests and Levites'. Said the Holy One: '*Did I in any wise tell thee to slay the Egyptian*?' Said Moses to Him: 'But Thou didst slay all the firstborn of Egypt, and shall I die for the sake of one Egyptian?!' Said the Holy One blessed be He to him: 'Canst thou liken thyself to Me who causeth to die and bringeth to life? Canst thou, in any wise, bring to life like Me?'[84]

Nechama Leibowitz offers the following interpretation of this Midrashim in her book on Shemot.

> The view expressed above regards the slaying of a person without trial, witnesses and due warning, by taking the law into one's own hands as a serious crime. No man may take a leaf out of his Creator's book who in the course of history brings death and oblivion to many. They afford no parallel for the taking of human life by another human being no matter how deep and sincere are the considerations of justice and morality involved. Such a parallel is implicit in the words that the author of the Midrash puts in Moses' mouth. 'But Thou didst slay all the firstborn of Egypt and shall I die for the sake of one Egyptian?!' The answer of the Midrash is explicit and unequivocal: 'Canst thou liken thyself to Me who causeth to die and bringeth to life?' In other words: Only He who gives life can take it away but not man who though having the power to cause death cannot bring back to life. According to this Midrash, had Moses been guilty of just this one sin of slaying the oppressor, which would then have been a case of spontaneous manslaughter which carried no death penalty by earthly court, this would have been sufficient to warrant the Divine penalty of death.[85]

The ultimate judge provides the verdict for our hero Moshe Rabeinu. Moses is portrayed as a hero. The fact is that our nature is to defend his decisions. However, is our defense doing the myth injustice? Especially if we as Jews ignore Moses' darker side and cover up his murderous ways with stories of "righting wrongs and vengeance", do we neutralize the purpose of his story altogether? If Moses is a man/myth that serves us as a role model, the aspects of his violent side should be examined closely and perhaps even acknowledged positively and openly. The tragedy may be in our choosing to ignore the lessons that Moses' murder of the taskmaster can teach us.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Gilligan, 76.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Arthur J. Hoyles, *Punishment in the Bible.* (London, 1986), 5.
[4] Fromm, 19-20.
[5] *Ibid.*, 20.
[6] *TANAKH – The Holy Scriptures.* (Philadelphia, 1988)
[7] Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel.* (Macon, 1999), 22.
[8] Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain.* (Chicago, 1999), 2.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*, 3.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] McEntire, 25.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Girard cited in McEntire, 28.
[15] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative.* (Bloomington, 1985), 92-93.
[16] James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred.* (San Fransisco, 1991), 38.
[17] *Ibid.*, 30.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Karen Armstrong, *In The Beginning.*(New York, 1996), 64.
[20] *Ibid.*, 20.
[21] *Ibid.*, 87.
[22] *Ibid.*, 94.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*, 95.
[25] Stone Chumash, (New York, 1993),185.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Armstrong, 96.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*, 118.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Williams, 77.
[32] *Ibid.*, 72.
[33] Emil Bock, *Moses.*(New York, 1978), 24.
[34] *Ibid.*, 26.
[35] *Ibid.*, 25.
[36] Freud, 31.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*, 32.
[39] Elias Auerbach, *Moses.* (Detroit, 1977), 21.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*, 22.
[42] *Ibid.*, 43.
[43] *Ibid.*, 23.
[44] *Ibid.*, 20.
[45] Dorothy Zeligs, *Moses: A Psychodynamic Study.* (New York, 1985), 3.
[46] *Ibid.*, 35.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Ibid.*, 36.
[51] Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot*, (Jerusalem, 1981),40.
[52] Gilligan, 11.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus.* (New York, 1986), 34.
[56] Leibowitz, 41.
[57] Asch, 6.
[58] Mordechai and Miriam Roshwald, *Moses: Leader, Prophet, Man.* (New York, 1969), 36.
[59] The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume I, 165.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] Propp, 166.
[62] Levi Meier, *Moses: The Prince, The Prophet.* (Vermont, 1998), 20.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Roshwald, 36.
[66] Louis Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews.* (Philadelphia, 1967-1969), 277-278.
[67] Leibovitz, 43.
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Philo, 43-44.
[71] H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitzky, Eds., *Sefer Haggadah: The Book of Legends.* (New York, 1992), 61:21.
[72] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus.* (New York, 1973), 22.
[73] Roshwald, 39.
[74] Benno Jacob, *Exodus.* (New Jersey, 1992), 36.
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid.*, 37.
[77] Weisel cited in Leibowitz, 43.
[78] Jacob, 36.
[79] Ginzberg, 280.
[80] Jacob, 38.
[81] New Interpreter's Bible, 167.
[82] Yosef Yerushalami,*Freud's Moses.* (New Haven, 1991), 123.
[83] Robert B. Coote & David Robert Ord, *The Bible's First History.* (Philadelphia, 1989), 221.
[84] Ozar Ha Midrash, part 2, cited in Leibowitz, 46.
[85] Leibowitz, 46.

Conclusion

Who is wise? The one who can learn from all.
Pirke Avot 4:1

As Jewish men transform and develop new ideals of Jewish masculinity, they have different terrain to traverse than men of dominant culture. Not the only, but perhaps a crucial difference may be the need to reclaim their rage, even to own their capacity to do violence.[1]

What can we learn from Moses? Idealized as a hero, he is the paradigm of the Jewish male role model. God chose him to lead the people from Egypt. God entrusted Moses with the law, the Torah, and the future of the Jewish people. Does this Divine confidence make Moses perfect, unflawed, a paragon of goodness? And what is the role of his story in ours as a people? Does the story of Moses teach us anything about ourselves?

There are those who believe that the Bible as literature mirrors ancient life and challenges. James Gilligan writes, "The classical myths and tragedies [serve] as attempts to describe – to cope with and make sense of – indeed to survive, emotionally and mentally – the actual crimes and atrocities that people have inflicted upon one another far back into history as our collective memories extend."[2]

The characters of the Torah are flawed individuals. This is to allow the myth to become accessible to all readers. If our Biblical ancestors were perfect, the identification with them would be strained and unattainable. Moses, in the text, is presented as a flawed individual. He is

unsure of himself as a leader. Moses has a possible speech impediment and has trouble communicating. He makes mistakes often. He is unappreciated by his own people. And the character trait, which runs through the entirety of Moses' story, is that he is angry and often violent.

Violence was a part of Moses' life and it does affect him as a Jewish male role model. Violence was part of the world in which the ancients lived. Battles, despots, genocide, holy war, slavery and persecution – these were common backdrops to daily life. The world surrounding these people was violent and so too often their private lives. We as Jews are not immune to the violent tendencies, passions, and outbursts that truly make us human. Yet Jews are also taught the sanctity of human life; that the shedding of blood is a mortal sin; and that we must learn to control our basic instincts. Rabbi Emanuel Rackman writes in his article "Violence and the Value of Life" in the Ozve Shalom Publication,

> Judaism, therefore, is more concerned with regulating the circumstances which would permit the exercise of violence – by individuals, by groups, and by states – than it is with the elimination of violence at all costs. Violence is at one and the same time an important way both to destroy and to conserve one of the most important values in the value system of Judaism – human life. Violent action usually endangers the life of the aggressor as well as the lives of those against whom the violence is directed. Generally one's own life is regarded as having the highest priority, but if one is to engage in violence it must by in accord with Jewish law and in behalf of the value of life or a value even higher than the value of life. Never is one to lose sight of the ultimate values to be achieved.[3]

The ultimate value judgement – whose life matters more – how does one make such a choice? We can turn to Jewish Law to find our answer. But who wrote those laws, what were their motivations? The

simplicity of the Biblical text led to a world of superimposition and value judgements created by later interpreters. All too often concepts of ideology, theology, and judgement don't really emerge from the Biblical writers at all. Whose story do we take as fact and whose as fiction? Was Moses truly violent for violence sake or was his slaying of the taskmaster justified? Later commentators attempt to justify his actions? Rackman expresses, as I also believe, that there needs to be a space to identify with and accept the violence in our lives.

Moses committed a murder. That is a fact. Moses slays another human being. How much can we read into the text before our own personal agendum overshadow the subtle simplicity of the Torah? I loved the slaying of the taskmaster story. Moses was the hero a young Jewish boy like myself could identify with. I was a tough Jew, or at least I wanted to be one. Into the Moses story I read my own struggle with the stereotype of the "Jew Boy". I found many of my Jewish acquaintances less "tough" than I. So I searched for a strong Jew to identify with, a leader with some clout.

I fought my way through life. Afraid of the softness and sensitivity of my true self I subjugated any gentleness with a veneer of increasing aggression and violence. Like Moses I was brought up in a good, kind family. I was given every opportunity. Yet when the opportunity would present itself I lashed out in violence – on the field or toward a bully or one who had wronged me. It was rage – one I didn't

understand. It frightened me. I was told that I wasn't really violent, that the fight was in self-defense, or that the other guy deserved it. So I spent years and years hating the violence inside me and trying to subjugate it. Did Moses suffer as I did before he killed the taskmaster? And was he ever held accountable to the murder by his people or his God?

I searched to find ways to come to peace with my violent past. Maybe this thesis is my penance. Maybe by helping Moses to be seen as a violent person who was too well defended by our history, I can free both him and myself from the feeling that this anger I felt was wrong and unnatural. As Dr. Gilligan writes, "Human violence is much more complicated, ambiguous, and most of all tragic, then is commonly thought by experts who study it...comes from the point of view of their own specialties which tend to preclude the tragic dimensions of violence."[4] Gilligan concludes that the tragedy of violence affects not only the victim but the perpetrator as well. What did Moses feel when the taskmaster fell to the ground? I am sure he didn't feel like a great hero.

After all this research I'm still not sure why Moses killed the taskmaster. Was it an instinctual kill? Did the instinct to destroy come forth in the downward strike of his arm? We don't know enough about Moses' early life to assess many of the scientific criteria for aggression and violence discussed in chapter two. We can infer from Midrash that Moses had either a benign childhood or one fraught with trials and tribulations. Moses' speech impediment could have led to the frustration

theories of the neo-behaviorists yet that also is an exegetical view of one Biblical verse. For all we know Moses could have been shy or not fluent in Egyptian after a long exile in Midian. Wilson's sociobiological hypotheses are also challenged by Moses' violent act. If violence is nurtured in a cultural or environmental chemical mix how does Moses' striking out in defense of the Jews prove Wilson's theory? Wilson sees violence as an offshoot of xenophobic and tribal loyalties. Wouldn't Moses be more loyal to the Egyptian culture that supported, nurtured and raised him?

Gilligan's work resonates more with me. He believes that our human emotions are the catalysts for violence. He writes, "one can turn to human emotions – specific emotions such as love, hate, shame, guilt, and so on, emotions which act as motives, or causes of behavior."[5] Again what we know of Moses' life is from Midrash. We can only hypothesize about his emotional constitution. So we must either believe the rabbis and commentators psychological profile of Moses or each of us must create our own justifications or understandings of our Biblical ancestors.

As I concluded in chapter one, I believe that there is a sense of aggression inherent in our genetic make-up. We are caught between our drive to protect what is ours – our self, our soul, our loved ones – and the inherent need of humans to destroy. Even in the most well adjusted healthy individuals these needs, urges, and violent feelings live just beneath the surface.

How does Moses serve as a role model to Jewish males? Free from the rabbis and commentators need to protect him at all costs from his natural instincts, Moses could help many Jewish men come to grips with their own internal struggles. But whitewashed and protected, Moses' killing of the taskmaster is so defended that it's hard to cull any deep meaning from it at all. I realize that our potential for violence scares us. Perhaps even more so for Jews, who have been the victims of it for so many years. But the lessons we can learn from Moses are from his flawed nature, not his perfection.

What have I learned from Moses? I have learned that one moment can set in motion the rest of one's life. If Moses hadn't slain the taskmaster, then he wouldn't have fled to Midian, seen the Burning Bush, married Zipporah, returned to Egypt, and redeemed the slaves. He probably would have stayed, although uncertain of his identity, in the comfort of the palace.

Moses was not perfect. Yet it is his very *human* nature that I have learned most from. Like Moses I know that I carry within myself the capacity for violence. As I take my place as Jewish leader I hope I can learn from this inherent potential – to come to respect its power and struggle to accept it as part of who I am.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Barbara Breitman, *Jewish Masculinity in a New Light: A Mensch Among Men.* (The Crossing Press. California, 1988), 107.
[2] Gilligan, 58.
[3] Emanuel Rackman cited in Ozve Shalom, 29.
[4] Gilligan, 5-6.
[5] *Ibid.*, 213.

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