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THE IMAGE OF GOD AS PARENT AND ISRAEL AS CHILD IN THE AGGADAH

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. Overview.....	1
II. Methodology.....	3
III. The Biblical Background.....	4
THE IMAGE OF GOD AS PARENT.....	13
I. Introduction.....	13
II. God as Father: The Beneficent Aspect..	14
III. God as Father: The Punishing Aspect....	39
IV. God as Father: Some Conflicting Aspects	69
V. Conclusion.....	74
VI. God as Mother.....	81
THE IMAGE OF ISRAEL AS CHILD.....	94
I. Introduction.....	94
II. Israel as Problem Child.....	106
III. Israel as Daughter.....	122
IV. The Developmental Image.....	130
CONCLUSION.....	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	144

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INTRODUCTION

I. Overview

The ways in which a people describes its relationship to God suggests many things about its conception of God and its conception of itself. The Jewish tradition reflects several different kinds of relationship to God. Sometimes that relationship is described in political terms where God is the king and Israel is the subject. Other times the relationship is described in familial terms, with God as husband and Israel as wife or God as parent and Israel as child. The purpose of this discussion is to focus on the latter relationship--God as parent and Israel as child as it appears in the aggadah.

There are several important questions that this enterprise must consider. What are the psychological and social implications of this metaphor of God's relationship to Israel? What is the nature of God's parenting? Is this a monolithically masculine image of parenting as it is commonly assumed to be? What do we learn about the Jewish image of God through the vision of God as parent? The other side of the metaphor suggests other sorts of questions. What is the self image of Israel that emerges through its view of itself as God's child? Is the child status a static position or does the child Israel grow in its relationship to its parent, God?

This discussion focuses on the two sides of the

parent-child relationship. In order to set the rabbinic image of the relationship in its proper context, a brief investigation of how the metaphor was used in the Bible begins the study. Then, in chapter one, the rabbinic image of God as parent is described. In chapter two, the rabbinic image of Israel as child is explored. In the conclusion, attention is directed to the significance of this metaphor and the ways it might differ from other metaphors of God's relationship to Israel.

It is important to keep in mind that any discussion of religious metaphor is, at its roots, a discussion of religious language. No metaphor can totally catch the complex phenomenon of religious imagination, no form of language can adequately describe the religious consciousness of a people. Any metaphor is, by definition, symbolic; it describes through implicit comparison or analogy.

The rabbinic use of the metaphor of God's relationship to Israel as parent-child relationship teaches that God acts toward Israel as if he were a parent. The Rabbis did not want to suggest that God was the biological parent of Israel, that God had in fact sired Israel or given birth to Israel. This was a form of anthropomorphism unacceptable to the Rabbis.

Consider the passage from Kohelet Rabba 4:8:

"There is One and there is not two." "There is One."--this is the Holy One, Praised be

He, as it is said about him: "The Lord our God, the Lord is One." (Deut. 6:4) "There is not two"--that is, he has no partner in his world. "Also he has no child or brother." From where would he have a child? Rather, God loved Israel and called them 'children' as it says: "You are children to the Lord your God." (Deut. 14:1) And he called them brothers' as it says, "For the sake of my brothers and friends." (Ps. 122:8)¹

This passage explains that God is uniquely apart in the world. He has no partner, no spouse and no children. He has no family at all. But God loved Israel and therefore called Israel his 'children'. The appellation 'children', then, is a sign of God's love. The metaphor of God's relationship to Israel as a parent-child relationship serves to describe the nature of God's love for Israel. It suggests a way of describing what is in reality not fully describable--the relationship of God to Israel and Israel to God.

II. Methodology

The major problem in any research in rabbinic literature is to find a way into the material, a process to retrieve the sources that deal with a particular issue. Many of the indexes to rabbinic literature are organized around key words, but the problem of this enterprise was to find a word that would lead to the sources dealing with God as parent and Israel as child. First, the references in Gross' Otzar haAggadah under Av and Banim u'vanot were

checked. Unfortunately, most of these entries dealt with human fathers and human children so they were not very useful. Next, the indexes to the English translations of the Midrash Rabba, Midrash on Psalms, Pesikta de Rav Kahana and Pesikta Rabbati were checked for entries like God as father. From the texts that were suggested by this method, several biblical verses emerged rather consistently. These verses, and several others that seemed to indicate the parent-child metaphor, were traced through Heineman's Torah haKetuva v'haMasora.² Several secondary sources suggested additional material: Moore's Judaism, Montefiore and Loewe's Rabbinic Anthology, Marmorstein's The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God and Schechter's Aspects of Rabbinic Theology.

III. The Biblical Background

The image of God as father has its roots in pre-biblical sources. That God is the father of all humankind or of certain individuals is a common Near Eastern idea. Two major characteristics are illuminated by this ancient metaphor: first, that God has unconditional and irrevocable authority, and second, that God is tender and loving.³

Both of these aspects of God as father are characteristic of the biblical image. God as father has absolute authority to order behavior and he expects obedience.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;

for the Lord has spoken: "Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand." (Isa. 1:2-3)⁴

The other aspect of the image is God as tender, loving father.

As a father pities his children so the Lord pities those who fear him. (Ps. 103:13)⁵

The image of God as father often carries with it the sense of God as creator.

Is he not your father who created you, who made you and established you? (Deut. 32:6)⁶

The biblical image of God as father/creator differs from its Near Eastern background. The biblical God as father/creator is not the God as biological ancestor or progenitor that we find in Accadian or Summerian sources.⁷ The biblical God is not described as having sired Israel or individual people.⁸

God is called 'father' in the Bible only fifteen times.⁹ Five of those instances describe God as father to the king of Israel.¹⁰ One describes God as father to the fatherless.¹¹ The other nine times God is understood as father to Israel.¹² The relative paucity of occurrences where God is actually called 'father' may explain why some

Christian biblical scholars choose to argue that the father-child image is rare.¹³ Their difficulty with the image seems either to be a discomfort with any suggestion of God as the generative parent, or a suspicion, supported by their ideology, that it was only in the New Testament that the image became fully developed. These arguments seem to ignore the fact that the image of God as father exists more often than in those specific instances where God is actually called 'father'.

Before we turn to those passages which describe the fathering relationship of God without the use of the term 'father', let us first examine those nine cases where God is actually described as father of Israel. All of those instances are found in prophetic literature except Deuteronomy 32:6. There God as father is described as the creator of Israel. In Isaiah 63:16 the word 'father' appears twice:

For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father, our redeemer of old is your name.

The context of this passage is a petition of Isaiah that God should have compassion on Israel. Central to his claim is that because God is Israel's father, he should restore Israel to their former position as protected children. The petition continues with an acknowledgement of Israel's sins

which have caused God to hide from them. Then Isaiah says:

Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you are the potter; we are all the works of your hand. Be not exceedingly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, consider, we are all your people. (Isa. 64:8-9)

It seems, then, that Isaiah understands God's parenting to imply that God should not maintain his anger against his children forever. One aspect of the biblical idea of God as father is, therefore, that God as father should accept his children when they return to him. The child's sin does not break the relationship with the father.

We see this again in Jeremiah 3:4-5.

Have you not just called to me, "My father, you are the friend of my youth--will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?" Behold, you have spoken, but you have done all the evil that you could.

Here Israel is described as imagining that God's fathering relationship to them means that he cannot maintain his anger against them forever. This anticipated protection suggests to Israel that they will not be totally destroyed for their sins. These descriptions of God as father serve to point out the discrepancy between Israel being God's child and yet ignoring his will.

In Jeremiah 3:19 God says to Israel:

I thought how I would set you among my sons
and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most
beautiful of all nations. And I thought you
would call me 'my father' and would not turn
from following me.

Here we have an image of what God's fathering means to God according to the biblical author. It means that he has a special relationship to one people to which he gives a special land and a special heritage. It also means he expects acknowledgment in that his children would obey him. The context of this passage is that God is inviting Israel to repent; he wants to welcome them back after they have admitted their guilt. This passage suggests that as a father, God loves his children and wants to be compassionate to them. Note that the next verse turns to the relationship between God and Israel as a husband-wife relationship. This image is a major one in the prophetic literature. We will discuss the differences between the parent-child image and the husband-wife image in the conclusion of the study.

God's parenting, then, implies that God has a special relationship with Israel which is based on love and a desire for reunion with the penitent child.

That God is Israel's father means that Israel has a special responsibility to God.

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If, then, I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you...
(Mal. 1:6)

And again, in Malachi 2:10:

Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Israel's responsibility as child is to honor their father through being attentive to his commandments.

We also see proof of God's parenting even when the word 'father' is absent. For example:

And you shall say to Pharoh: "Thus says the Lord: 'Israel is my first born son, and I say to you--Let my son go that he may serve me.'
(Ex. 4:22, 23)

God chose Israel to be his first born son from among all the peoples in the world. In the Bible God is, in the creation stories and for the first twenty generations, the universal God. The Bible then concentrates on God's relation to Israel, but it does not generally deny that God is, of course, the God of all humanity. One of the metaphors for this special relationship between God and Israel is the father-child relationship in which God chose Israel to be

his son. It is important to emphasize that God's fatherhood reflects a historical choice; it is not, as we pointed out above, a biological relationship. The historical referent for God's choice is the Israelite experience culminating in Egypt and the exodus from Egypt.

Another example of God's parenting without the 'father' word is Jeremiah 31:20:

Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still.

The biblical image of God as father shows us that God loves Israel and expects Israel to respond to that love by observing his commandments and doing his bidding. It also suggests that God will be merciful and forgiving to his children when they sin.

While most of the parent-child images between God and Israel are father-child images, there is at least one example where a mother-child image is used in relation to God and Israel. It is found in Isaiah 49:15:

Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

Here too, the dominant motif seems to be parental love and compassion.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. There are several clear examples in which God acts as a parent to Israel even though he is not their real father. This may be understood to reflect the symbolic quality of God's parenting. One example, from Sh'mot Rabba 46:6 describes Israel as an orphaned girl who is raised by a good man. When she is about to marry, the scribe who is writing her ketuba inquires as to her father's name. She says to her guardian, "I know of no father but you. The one who raises the child is called 'father' not the one who begets the child." God, then, is the one who raises Israel, not the one who has begotten Israel. It is because of God's role as 'raiser' (*שׂוֹמֵר*) that he is called 'father'.
 Devarim Rabba 14 describes God as the one who cared for the babies of Israel during the Israelite captivity in Egypt. Here too God is called the ' *שׂוֹמֵר* ', the one who raises the child. (*וְשׂוֹמֵר הָיָה*)
 Both of these texts seem to point to the notion that God's parenting is not to be taken literally to mean that he is the begetter of Israel. This distinction between the literal and symbolic sense of the parent-child relationship is important to keep in mind throughout the discussion that follows. Even though God is described in parenting terms, it seems clear that the Rabbis intend the metaphor to be taken symbolically.
2. Numbers 11:12; Deuteronomy 32:6,18; Isaiah 40:3; 49:15; Ezekiel 16:4,7; Hosea 11:1; Psalm 2:7.
3. The first characteristic is commonly known, while the second is less expected. Regarding the second aspect, consider the Sumero-Accadian hymn called "Prayer to Every God":
 Remove my transgressions and I will sing thy praise.
 May thy heart, like the heart of a real mother,
 be quieted toward me. Like a real mother and
 a real father may it be quieted toward me.
 See Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts. Princeton: Princeton U. Press 1969 p.392.
4. cf. Mal. 1:6; Deut. 14:1 ff.
5. cf. Ps. 68:5.
6. cf. Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10.
7. See "Hymn to the Moon God" in Pritchard. op. cit. p.385.
8. Even those instances in the Bible where God is said to have

'begotten' do not seem to be intended as literal begetting. See Ps. 2:7 for example. It appears to be an adoption formula. See De Vaux, Ancient Israel. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 1961 p.51-2 and Jeremias, The Prayers of Jesus. Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, Naperville, Ill: Alec R. Allenson, Inc. 1967 p.11.

9. Deut. 32:6; II Sam. 7:14; I Chron. 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps. 68:5; 89:26; Isa. 63:16 (twice); 64:8; Jer. 3:4; 3:19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10.
10. II Sam. 7:14; I Chron. 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps. 89:26.
11. Ps. 68:5.
12. The remainder of examples.
13. See De Vaux, op. cit. p. 51 and Vriezen, Outline of Old Testament Theology. Oxford: Blackwell 1958 p.145.
14. cf. Hos. 11:1,3,8.

THE IMAGE OF GOD AS PARENT

I. Introduction

As we have seen, the image of God as parent and Israel as child exists in the Bible. Before we explore how the Rabbis use this metaphor, it is useful to speculate on its psychological significance. The parent-child relationship seems to carry with it a sense of closeness, security and love. This is highlighted in a passage from Pesikta Rabbati¹:

"Return, O Israel" It is like a prince who came before his father for judgment. They said to him: "Plead before your father while he is still in his palace, before he sits on his dais and releases the full force of his judgment on you." So Hosea said to Israel: "Return, O Israel, while your God (יְהוָה) God as Judge) is the Lord (יְהוָה) God as father); return in repentance while he gives judgment from his merciful aspect. Because the Holy One, Praised Be He is merciful, gracious and wants repentance before he lets forth the full range of his anger upon you."

The contrast between God as parent (in this case, father) and God as judge suggests there is a tension between the judgmental and merciful attitudes of God toward Israel. As a parent, God is inclined to be merciful toward his child, Israel. This image of parental love must have been very comforting to the people; during moments of security it supported them and during moments of suffering it allowed them the comfort of believing that things might have been

worse were it not for their parent's love. It is a metaphor that allows for a wide range of experience. The people understood parent-child relationships; it is an image close to home. Parents love their children; they also punish them for wrong-doing. Parents protect their children, but there are limits to that protection. Parents also expect certain things from their children. Therefore, any discussion of the rabbinic image of God as parent needs to be set in the context of what we know about the rabbinic notion of the relationship of human parents to their children. Only then can we understand where the divine relation converges with and where it differs from the human relationship.

It is important to note that the father in this parable from *Pesikta Rabbati* is a royal father, the king. We learn, therefore, that kings judge their children, but we do not necessarily learn whether non-royal fathers do. We find that God's relationship to Israel as a father-child relation is described in terms of a king-child relationship in roughly half of our texts. Let us keep this distinction in mind, and after we have examined all the material we will speculate on the ways the common parenting metaphor is modified by the royal one.

II. God as Father: The Beneficent Aspect

Let us begin by describing some evidence that the Rabbis saw the father-child relationship in the interaction

between God and Israel. Commenting on the verse "My beloved is mine and I am his", the Rabbis explain in Shir haShirim Rabba 3:34 "He is to me God and I am to Him a nation....He is to me a father, and I am to him a son." Their prooftext for these statements are, respectively, "Because You are our father" (Is. 66:16), "Because You are to Israel as a father" (Jer. 31:9), and "My first born son is Israel" (Ex. 4:22), "You are children to God" (Deut. 14:1). Another example from Avodah Zarah 3a describes the other peoples coming before God to ask him whether Israel fulfilled the whole Torah. When God begins to testify that they did, the other peoples say, "But a father cannot testify regarding his son". God then finds other witnesses, thereby acknowledging that he is indeed their father. We can see from this example that one element of the relationship of God as parent and Israel as child is the special relationship that God has to Israel as opposed to the other nations. This contention is developed in the following example from Devarim Rabba 5:7. God is compared to a king who had many sons but who loved the youngest best. He also had one orchard that he loved more than all his other orchards. So he gave his favorite orchard to his favorite son. The youngest son is Israel and the orchard is ל' 7 , law. The text continues with a discussion of Israel's responsibility to guard ל' 7 which we will discuss in another context. The significant issue for us here is the assertion that while God has

other sons, the other nations, Israel is in a unique relationship with God because he is the favorite son. While other texts do describe God's relationship to the world in parent-child images,² our enterprise here is to concentrate on the rabbinic vision of God's relation to Israel as it is depicted through the parent-child metaphor.³

The special status granted to Israel by virtue of God's position as father of Israel is a common theme in the Midrash. In one case from Sh'mot Rabba 30:9 God is compared to a king who gives each of his legions one slaughtered animal, while to his son Israel he shares that which he had prepared for himself. In another case from the same source God gives to each of his servants one portion of food while to his son Israel he gives all kinds of food. We also find a similar description in Shir haShirim Rabba 1:16 where God as a king pours one glass of wine for each guest, but when it comes to his son he gives all the wine. An example from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 28:9 shows us the king's son busy with the king's guests at a public festival, but after the public part of the celebration, the king and his son, God and Israel rejoice together alone. Another example of this special status from Sh'mot Rabba 30:6 describes God as a king with an orchard which he gives to his children when they reach maturity. Here Israel is contrasted with the other nations which receive nothing. In Shir haShirim Rabba 1:17, we have the image of God providing for his son Israel directly, while he provides

for others only indirectly. In each of these examples, Israel is contrasted to other nations in so far as God is Israel's father. Whether the parable speaks of son vs. guest, son vs. legion or son vs. servant, the point is the same: God is Israel's father and therefore God treats Israel differently from the way he treats other peoples.

The Rabbis believed that it was important for God that he be called father and thereby honored by Israel. We see in Sh'mot Rabba 32:5 that it was so important that God performed all the miracles and all his mighty deeds only so that Israel should call him 'father'.

We learn from all these examples that the Rabbis do use the father-child relationship as a metaphor of God's relationship to Israel. The implicit and explicit implication that immediately emerges from this relationship is that God has a special relationship to Israel. To understand the connotations of this special relationship, we now need to turn to an investigation of the role human fathers have in relation to their children to determine how this related to God in his father role.

We know from the legal literature⁴ that fathers are required to circumcize their sons, redeem them, teach them Torah, find them a wife, teach them a trade, and some say, teach them to swim. Do we see God in his role as father fulfilling these responsibilities to his son Israel?

As one might predict, the image of God circumcizing Israel nowhere appears in our sample texts. One might

speculate that a description of God as father making a covenant with Israel as son could be loosely interpreted as an act of circumcision, but it is difficult to argue this point. We do, however, see God redeeming Israel. In Aggadā Bereshit 5:3 we learn that all Israel is precious to God as a first born son and that no matter how much Pharaoh might have asked for, God would have paid it to redeem Israel. Just as a father pays to redeem his first born son, God would have paid to redeem his first born son.

In Tanchuma Bamidbar 20, the Rabbis begin with the verse: וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכַּח אֶת־עַמּוּל. They picture God as saying to Israel: "Because of loving you, I changed the measure of the world. I wrote in my Torah that the ass would be redeemed with the lamb, but I did not do this. Instead, I redeemed the lamb at the expense of the ass." This is a reference to Exodus 34:20: "The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb..." The lamb in our homily refers to Israel while the ass refers to Egypt, and because God redeemed Israel but did not redeem Egypt, it is as though God changed what he had written in Torah. Both of these examples are clearly connected to the redemption of the first born son. In the first case, the connection is made because Israel is called God's 'first born son'. The connection in the second case is made clear because the biblical text which serves as the point of departure is the text which is the basis for אֶת־עַמּוּל. In both cases, God redeems

Israel because he loves him. So we learn that one aspect of God's parenting is redemption of his first born son, Israel.

In other cases, God's redemption of Israel is understood to be a function of his role as protective father. These cases do not see Israel as first born son, but rather as son or daughter.⁵ One example of this from *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 12:11 describes God in terms of a king whose son is captured. The king rescues his son and proclaims that from that moment on, time will be reckoned from the moment of his son's redemption. Here, too, the redemption spoken of is the exodus from Egypt. The royal metaphor here suggests additional power; not only is the king powerful enough to redeem his son, but he also can reorder the calendar to record the significance of that redemption. God's power to redeem, then, is a function of his power to protect. An additional dimension of God's parenting, then is his ability to protect his child.

Does God teach his son Israel Torah? The Rabbis answer to this question is emphatically yes. First of all, God gives Israel Torah because Israel is his child. In a text mentioned above,⁶ God is compared to a king who had an orchard which he tended because he was its keeper. When his children reached maturity, he gave it to his children, asking them to look after it just as he did. God prepared the Torah before the creation, and when Israel

responded, 'we will do and we will obey,' (Ex. 24:7) an indication that they had reached maturity, God gave the Torah to them. As we pointed out above, this is contrasted to the heathen peoples who only received part of the commandments. The image of the father giving the son an orchard is an important one, one that we see many places. It suggests that a good father not only provides his child with food, but also provides him with the mechanism to grow his own food. An important aspect of parenting, then, lies in preparing the child to assume some measure of autonomy and self-sufficiency. In this context, Torah is the analogue for the orchard. God's giving Israel Torah suggests that God gives Israel the mechanism to provide for their own needs through the guidance offered in Torah. Torah therefore is understood as a means to facilitate Israel's ability to provide for itself.

In Shir haShirim 2:26, God is compared to a king who dotes on his son, giving him everything that he asks for. When the son says of precious stones 'Give me!'", the king responds, 'They are yours.' So when Israel said: (Ex. 15:2) 'וְעַתָּה הַצֵּלנוּ מִיָּד הַיָּם' (Ex. 15:2) 'וְעַתָּה הַצֵּלנוּ מִיָּד הַיָּם', the Rabbis understand that Israel is requesting סִיח . What is סִיח but Torah, the proof being the phrase $\text{וְהָיָה הַיָּם לְעַמּוּלָהּ}$ (Ps. 29:2) which the Rabbis translate as, 'The Lord will give Torah to his people.' It seems that part of being a father involves spoiling one's son a little, giving him everything he asks for. Here

again, the royal metaphor adds a different dimension; because the father is the king, he has in his power to give his son precious stones. That a father spoils his son in this regard is a tribute to the father's love--he wants to make his beloved son happy.

In another example from Sh'mot Rabba 30:9, God is described as a king who provides for his son from that which he had prepared for himself. This means that God explained each precept of Torah separately to Israel, explaining both the punishment for its transgression and the reward for its fulfillment. This understanding comes from the rabbinic rendering of the verse "His statutes and ordinances to Israel" to mean that God gave Israel God's own statutes and ordinances. A good father, then, not only provides for his son, but gives something of himself as well. Other texts show God as a father giving all the Mitzvot to Israel⁸ or God in his fathering role urging Israel to observe all the commandments just as a father cautions his child not to stumble and fall. The mitzvot here in Sh'mot Rabba are understood as protection against stumbling, a metaphor for sinning. So a good father not only teaches his son Torah, but through this instruction gives him religious and moral guidance as well. Not only does God give Israel all the mitzvot, but also he gives them in a special intimate way. Shir haShirim Rabba 1:17 teaches that as a father feeds his son directly from his own mouth, God provides meat for Israel directly from his

own mouth. The meat that God gives Israel is wisdom, knowledge and understanding. God gives these to Israel directly, mouth to mouth as it were. Part of God's function, then, of teaching Israel Torah also involves providing spiritual food; Torah is as important as food for sustenance. A good father teaches his son Torah as these texts show and he teaches in such a way as to provide moral guidance, spiritual sustenance and through this instruction, he himself acts as a role model for his son.

A good father also provides for his son's education in a more general way. We learn from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 14:5 that just as a king gives his son to a tutor, God assigns Moses to be Israel's tutor. It is important to God that the education be conducted along certain lines; the tutor must never treat the son with disrespect, he must never call the son a 'moron'. We learn from this that part of the father's role in educating the son is to endow him with a certain kind of self-respect, and his education should encourage this development. Here again, the royal metaphor adds an important dimension. Only a king or a very wealthy man would send his son to a tutor, but we might generalize from this to say that even a common man should provide for the general educational needs of his son. While one might speculate that it is only because the son in this homily is a prince that he is not to be treated with scorn, it seems plausible that self respect

is one universal goal of the study of Torah.

The image of God as father teaching Israel Torah differs in certain ways from the human paradigm of a father teaching his son Torah. In an example mentioned above⁹ God gives Israel /'r as a king gives his most favorite orchard to his favorite son. It is not enough for Israel to simply take /'r as a son might simply study the Torah which his father teaches. Rather, Israel has to fulfil certain requirements to justify the trust placed in him through the educational process. Israel must guard /'r because through this guarding, God is exalted. As long as Israel exalts God by cherishing /'r, God will do justice and his holiness will remain within Israel. As soon as Israel guards justice and law, God will redeem Israel immediately. It seems, then, that the proper result of the process of God teaching Israel Torah is for Israel to cherish Torah and thereby exalt God. From Seder Eliahu Rabba 10:14 we discover that Israel should model himself after his father. God withholds nothing from his children, and he asks very little; only that just as God examines himself and finds his divine attributes, he expects his children to find their proper human attributes. And these are, from Psalm 15:2, to walk blamelessly, to do right and to speak truth. Here again we see that a good father serves as a role model for his son.

The underlying motive for God's giving Israel Torah is God's love for Israel--Israel has done nothing to deserve it; Israel is simply God's son so God loves him. And one expression of this love is that God provides Torah and teaches it. While we will discuss God's parental love in greater detail further on, let us give one last example of the relationship between God's loving Israel and God's giving Torah. In Shir haShirim Rabba 2:27 God is compared to a king whose son has been sick. When the son's tutor suggests that the time has arrived for the son to go back to school, the king argues that the child is still sick, still pale. He wants to give his son a little extra time to relax and recuperate, to eat and drink and rest. God tells the tutor, the angels, that Israel is still sick from slavery. So God provides food and drink for them for three months until they recover, and then he gives them Torah. A father, then, not only teaches his son Torah, but he also provides for those basic needs of his child that are prerequisites for his being able to learn.

Does God find Israel as wife? Most of our examples of God preparing a marriage for his child relate to the relationship between God as father and Torah as daughter.⁹ We do occasionally find a description of God preparing a marriage for his son. In several occasions¹⁰ which we will discuss in detail below, God is compared to a father who builds and decorates a chuppah for his son. Elsewhere, in

Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:19 God is described as a king who recognizes that his son is ready to marry, but he does not have vessels for a wedding chest. The king realizes that if he waits to give his son a wedding until new wedding vessels can be prepared, that would delay his son's happiness. On the other hand, if he only gives his son old vessels, that would not be in the son's honor. So he calls an artisan to repair the old vessels and make them appear new. Similarly, when Israel came out of Egypt, God wanted to give them the Torah. But there were blind, lame and deaf among them so that God wondered whether he should give the Torah which is perfect to this generation which was blemished. If God had waited for a new generation to grow up, he would have been delaying Israel's nuptials with Torah; if not, he would have given the perfect Torah to an imperfect blemished people. Instead, God healed all who were blemished and then gave Israel the Torah. In this parable, the son and his trousseau are one entity, so to speak. Israel is God's marriageable son while the blemished within Israel are the old vessels. The point that emerges is that not only is it a father's responsibility to find a wife for his son, but also to make the necessary arrangements for a proper marriage befitting the son's honor to take place. It is important to notice that this is for the son's honor. We normally accuse parents of doing this for their own needs.

Does God teach Israel a trade? We have many

instances where God provides for Israel, but a clear vision of God teaching Israel a trade does not seem to be a part of the rabbinic conception of God as father. We do have one example from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 5:13 where God delivers to Israel certain kinds of tools. God is compared to a king, who, when his son reaches maturity, gives his son a timepiece. This is a response to the biblical text "This month will be for you" (Ex. 12:2) which the Rabbis seem to understand as "The reckoning of time shall be up to you." By delivering this timepiece to Israel, God gives Israel control over the calendar. The text continues with other examples. God is like a king with locked treasuries. When his son comes of age, the king gives the son the keys and therefore some control over the treasuries. God is compared to a carpenter who gives his son carpentry tools when the son reaches maturity. And again, God is compared to a doctor who had a medicine cabinet filled with medicine which he delivered to his son when the latter came of age. It is probable that in each case, the tools delivered are connected to Torah, the most precious thing which God has to give to his son Israel. But it is interesting that in certain of the examples, the specific things delivered relate to the tools of a trade. This implies that one aspect of parenting is to give the child the tools by which he can fend for himself in the world. God, as a good father, gives these tools to Israel.

Finally, does God teach Israel to swim? We have

nowhere found specific reference to this final obligation of father to son. But then, not all the sages agree that this is part of a human father's responsibility.

The legal obligations described above that a father has toward his sons show us only one aspect of the father-son relationship. The legal literature does not legislate the emotional quality of that relationship, nor does it describe the obligations that a father has to his daughters or a mother to her children.¹¹ So now let us turn to the non-legal relationship of parents to children to clarify the rabbinic image of God as parent. It is important to point out that one can have aggadic obligations which, while they are not legal, are authoritative, as well as aggadic recommendations which are meant to be taken seriously.

We begin with a text from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 19:4.

Rabbi Shmuel said: "It is the way of a father to have compassion, as it says 'Like a father has compassion on his children'. (Ps. 103:13) And it is the way of a mother to comfort, as it says: 'As one whom his mother comforts.' (Is. 66:13) The Holy One, Praised be He said: "I will act like a father and I will act like a mother. I will act like a father: 'Like a father has compassion on his children.' I will act like a mother: 'As one whom his mother comforts.'" And God said: "I, even I, am the one who comforts you." (Is. 51:12)

The Rabbis use the proof text from Isaiah to prove that God acts as both father and mother. Their evidence for this is that the word 'אב', 'I', appears twice in the verse. Their translation would be: I am the father and I am the

mother who comforts Israel. We learn from this passage that just as human parents have compassion for and comfort their children, so also does God. Compassion and comforting would seem to be a function of loving. Just as human parents love their children, so also does God. We see from this that God's parenting is not passive; he does not simply love his children--he acts in such a way as to show compassion and to give comfort. Parenting, then, is an active relationship.

Somewhat similar imagery is used in Seder Eliahu Rabba, Chapter 31. "I testify by heaven and earth that I sit and hope for them (Israel) more than a father for his son or a woman for her daughter that they do tshuvah, repentance, and fulfil my words." In this case, as in the above, God compares himself to both the paternal and the maternal parent. While the reason for his behavior is not explained, it seems clear that it is because God loves Israel that he hopes Israel will repent. By hoping that Israel does tshuvah and fulfils his words, God is hoping that his child Israel will grow up to be a good person. So we see that the goal of parenting is to raise one's children to be good people. A good person is clearly one who observes God's commandments and repents for his sins.

God's love for Israel, then, seems to be the dominant theme of the parent-child metaphor. Consider the following passage from Pesikta Rabbati 44.

"Return, O Israel, unto the Lord your God." (Hosea 14:2) It is like the son of a king who was far away from his father, the distance of one hundred days' journey. His friends said to him: "Return unto your father." He said to them, "I cannot." His father sent word to him, saying, "Go as far as you are able according to your strength, and I will go the rest of the way to meet you." So the Holy One, Praised be He said (to Israel): "Return to me and I will return to you." (Mal 3:7)

The image of a king moving from his place to go to meet his son is a very powerful one. The fact that the parenting metaphor here is a royal one suggests the tremendous significance of the father's love for the son. For who else would a king offer to leave his kingdom and embark on a journey to meet except one that he loves very much, his own son. A good parent, then, exerts energy to take care of his child. Yet we also see that an aspect of parenting is to encourage the child to work to get what he wants. The king does not offer to go to the place where his son is and bring him back. Instead, he encourages the son to do as much as he can, and his father will do the rest. Good parenting, then, involves a balance between protecting and comforting the child and encouraging the child to work for the satisfaction of his own needs.

This image is sustained in another text coming from the same source.¹² Beginning with the same biblical text, the Rabbis open by stating that even though God had no alternative but to absent himself from Israel because of Israel's sins, he still says: "Behold, I will return." It

is compared to the son of a king who became sick. The doctor said: "If he will take this medicine he will be cured." But the son was afraid to take the medicine. So his father said to him "To prove there is no danger, I will take some of your medicine." Similarly, God said to Israel, "You are embarrassed to do tshuvah, to return in repentance. Behold, I will return first." As it is written: "Behold, I will return." (Jer. 30:18) The powerful image of the royal father taking the first step is, at its roots, an image of love. This text points out that one way that a parent manifests that love for his child is by working toward healing him. In this case, one might argue that the parent even takes risks for his son; there are inherent dangers in taking some of his son's medicine. The analogy between sickness and sinning is a very interesting one; Israel's sinning is described in terms of a sickness. And, like a good father, God takes some risks to help his child become well again.

This image is developed in a passage from Pesikta Rabbati 21. In it, the word 'אֲהַב' is described as the language of love.¹³ It is like a king who had sent his son to a distant land where the son learned the language of the country. When the son returned home, the king began to speak with him in the son's language. Similarly, when Israel was in Egypt, they learned the language, so when they stood at Mr. Simai, God began to speak with them in Egyptian. The point is clear: God loved his son Israel

so much that he began to speak in the language Israel could understand. This text points out the fact that communication between parent and child is an important aspect of their relationship. A good parent not only speaks with his child, but he sees to it that his child understands.

This suggests that parenting involves a kind of self-limitation. The parent cannot always stand on his status if he is to properly raise his child. He needs to come down to the child's level, as it were. Even God imposes this kind of limit on himself, and it is through this self-limitation that his relationship with Israel is possible.

Communication is the theme of Shir haShirim Rabba (6:5). Beginning with the verse: "His speech was sweet." (Song of Songs 5:16), the Rabbis draw a parallel to a king who spoke against his son and frightened him so much that his soul fled. When the king saw this, he embraced his son and kissed him and said, "What's the matter? Aren't you my only son? Aren't I your father?" In the same way, when God began to speak to Israel at Mt. Sinai, immediately the souls of Israel fled. The angels began to hug and kiss them and said: "Don't be afraid! 'You are children to your God.' (Deut. 14:1) God sweetened his words, saying, "Aren't you my children? I am your God. You are my people, and you are beloved to me." Even though a good parent might become angry at his son and scold him,

he communicates to his son that he still loves him. In this parable, the very fact of the parent-child relationship is taken as a sign of love. Because God loves his child, even though he scolds him he sweetens his scolding by proclaiming his parenthood. Parental communication serves several ends. Not only does a good parent communicate his love to his child, but also he communicates his displeasure when the child is bad in such a way that the child can deal with it. This communication has a purpose--to improve the child, not merely to punish him.¹⁴

In another example, this from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 17, the Rabbis explain why God mentions Israel five times in Numbers 8:19: "And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting, and to make atonement for the people of Israel that there may be no plague among the people of Israel in case the people of Israel should come near the sanctuary." This constant mentioning of Israel is described as an expression of how much God loves Israel. It is compared to a king who, after he had given his son to a tutor and had given the tutor specific instructions, still continued to ask the tutor about his son. "Has my son eaten? Has my son had something to drink? Has my son gone to school?" In the same way, God wants to mention Israel all of the time, which is an indication of how great is God's parental love. This text points to the fact that

even in the royal metaphor, the king remains intimately involved with his son's life. A good parent provides for his son's education, but his involvement should not stop there. He should follow his son's progress to make sure that the child is receiving all that he needs. The constant mentioning of Israel's name is an indication that God is involved with the details of Israel's life.

One of the most definitive descriptions of God's love for Israel is found in Pesikta de Rav Kahana 1:3.¹⁵ While the context for this passage seems to be a polemic against Christianity,¹⁶ it is interesting for our purposes as a description of God's parental love. The text begins with the biblical verse Song of Songs 3:11: "With the crown that Solomon's mother crowned him on the day of his wedding." Since the Rabbis understand Song of Songs as a description of the love between God--the king of whom peace is his¹⁷-- represented in the biblical text as Solomon, and Israel, the Rabbis must explain how God could have a mother. The explanation is found through a parable. It is compared to a king who so loved his daughter that he called her 'my sister.' At the beginning God loved Israel so much that he called her 'my daughter' as we learn from Psalm 45:11: "Hear oh daughter and consider." He loved her so that he could not help but call her 'my sister' as we learn from Song of Songs 5:2: "My sister, my beloved." He could not stop calling her loving names until he had called her 'my mother', as it says: (Is. 51:4)

"Listen to me, oh my people and give ear to me, oh my nation." In this biblical verse 'my nation' is written defectively- 'N/Cf-which could be translated 'oh my mother'. So the rabbinic rereading of the initial biblical verse would be: "The crown with which he crowned himself by calling Israel his mother." Her God's love for Israel is simultaneously described as the intense love a father has for his daughter and as the source of motivation for God's speaking of Israel as daughter. We learn from this that the intense love that a parent has for a child leads the parent to elevate his child, to find a means for expressing his love which in some senses even leads him to raise the child to a status that demands honor and respect. A person is obliged to honor his mother; this text indicates that through loving his child, a parent also honors him. The metaphor is striking; here we have a king who not only elevates his daughter to the position where she has somewhat equal status, but also to a position where he honors her as well.

We have seen in some general ways what a good parent does for his child. He teaches, redeems, makes a marriage, communicates with, scolds, and honors his child, to name a few of the aspects of parenting that have emerged from our discussion. What else does a good parent do for his child, and by extention, does God do for Israel?

First, God protects Israel. From Tanchuma, Netzavim 8, we learn that God guards Israel like a father guards his

son. The proof for this contention is the Psalm verse (121:4): "He who guards Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." In Mechilta, Beshallah on Exodus 14:19, God is compared to a man who is walking with his son in front of him. Robbers appear, intent on capturing the boy, so he puts his son behind him as a way of protecting him. Then a wolf comes out behind him, so he puts his son in front of him. When both wolves and robbers confront him, he picks up his son. The boy complains of the sun's heat, so the father covers him with his cloak. When the son gets hungry, his father feeds him and when he gets thirsty, he gives his son something to drink. The Rabbis bring proof texts to demonstrate how God protects Israel in the same ways. It is important to note how explicit the parenting activities have become in this example. A parent not only protects his son in general ways, but also in quite specific ways. He puts himself between his child and danger. He gives up his own security to protect his child. He also feeds and provides drink for his son.

In Pesikta Rabbati 31 we have a similar image. Here God is compared to a strong man who is crossing a river with his son. The man holds his son's hand to prevent him from being swept away, and when the flood waters cover his son he continues to hold fast to his son. With the water over his head, the boy calls to his father, "It is no use for you to hold on to me if I am going to drown in the water! Lift up your hand that I may stay alive!"

Similarly, when David complained to God that the nations were drowning Israel,¹⁸ God lifted up his hand so Israel could survive. Parental protection, then, takes specific forms. It requires in some instances a strong parent who exerts effort to protect his son from all manner of threats to him.

A very different expression of protection is found in Mechilta, Bakodesh of Exodus 19:4. Beginning with the verse: "And how I bore you on eagles' wings", the Rabbis ask in what way eagles are different from other birds. All the other birds carry their young between their feet because they are afraid of the eagle which flies above them. The eagle on the other hand is only afraid of the arrows of human beings, so it carries its young on its back. While this image carries with it certain difficulties²⁰ it is clearly an image of protection. The rabbinic interpretation of the biblical verse would seem to be: I bore you on eagles' wings as a means of protecting you from harm. This image differs from our other examples of protection in that it is an animal image. It seems to suggest that one aspect of parental protection is an almost instinctual sense that the parent must protect its young because the young are helpless to protect themselves. Again we see the parent putting himself between his young and the source of danger; there is a price for parenting and God can be counted on to pay it.

God also provides for Israel. We have seen many examples of the range of parental providing. Besides providing Torah, God also provides food, drink and the means for sustenance.²¹ A few other examples of this providence will suffice. In Shir haShirim Rabba 7:5, God is compared to a king who had an orchard which had all kinds of fruit which he gave to his son.²² This is a motif we have seen many times before.²³ In each case, the point of the parable is to explain some aspect of God's behavior toward Israel, but it is important to notice the context of the parable. Since so often the setting shows us the father or the king providing, we can learn from it that God provides for Israel. It is important to recognize that there are many levels of parental providing suggested here. On the most basic level, the parent provides food and drink to the hungry or thirsty child, thereby satisfying his basic immediate needs. But we have also seen that a good parent provides his child with the opportunity to eventually satisfy his own needs by giving him the training or the mechanism through which he can grow his own food or make his own living. So good parenting implies providing on a multi-level way.

Up to this point we have described the beneficent aspect of parenting. A good parent provides, protects, teaches, acts with compassion, comforts, and expresses his love through a range of different interactions. But parents also scold, punish, judge and sometimes withhold

love from their children. What are the limits to God's providence and love? This question occupies a central place in the rabbinic discussion of God as parent.

III. The Punishing Aspect

In our discussion up to this point, God's love for Israel is a given; love seems to be the *sine qua non* of the parenting relationship. But certainly there must be some limits to the parent's love for his child. We get a hint about those limits in the following passage from *Pesikta Rabbati* 26. The context of the passage is God's calling Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jeremiah responds that he is not able to go out for the sake of Israel because he does not know anything, "because I am still a child." (Jer. 1:6) God answers him saying, "It is because you are a child that I love you, as it is written: 'When Israel was a child then I loved him,' (Hos. 11:1) because they had not yet tasted the taste of sin. When I redeemed Israel from Egypt, I called him my child. When I think of the congregation of Israel with love, I think of it as a child, as it is said: 'I remember the devotion of your youth.' (Jer. 2:2)" This passage begins to suggest that this spontaneous parental love might begin to change when the child sins. As a parent, God wants to prevent Israel from sinning, so he provides a prophet to give Israel guidance. A good parent, then, recognizes that as the child grows up his relationship to his parent will change and he therefore provides a mechanism to remind the child not to do the wrong thing.

Consider the passage from Sifre, Piska 40, God is compared to a human king who had many sons and servants. They were sustained and supported under his control and the keys to his treasuries were in his power. When they did his will, he opened the treasuries and they ate and satisfied themselves; when they did not do his will, he locked the treasuries and they died of starvation. So also with Israel. When Israel does God's will "The Lord will open to you his good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season." (Deut. 28:12) When Israel does not do God's will, "and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you and he shut up the heavens so that there be no rain and the land yield no fruit and you perish quickly off the land which the Lord gives you." (Deut. 11:17) This statement focuses attention on the range of interaction which God manifests toward his son. Whether Israel is good or bad, God remains his father, but the quality of the relationship is affected by Israel's behavior. God not only loves his children, he also becomes angry at them. God's anger can be harsh--in this case they die of starvation when they do not do their father's will. So parents not only provide for their children, but they sometimes withhold important things from their children as a way of instructing them as to the proper way to live. The threat of this kind of withholding is in itself an important element of parental discipline.

A similar example can be found in Eicha Rabbati 1:1. Here God is compared to a king who had a son. When the son did his father's will, the king dressed him in fine clothes. But when the son did not do his father's bidding, the king dressed him in exiles' garments. When Israel does God's will, God dresses him well, as it says: "I clothed you with richly woven work." (Ez. 16:10) And when Israel does not do God's will, God dresses him in the clothes of the exiled. The proof for this contention is the rabbinic interpretation of Lamentations 1:1: הָאֵלֹהִים יָדָהּ

יָדָהּ . The Rabbis play on the word 'יָדָהּ' and understand it as 'יָדָהּ יָדָהּ', 'garments of the exiled.' So they would translate the verse as "How she sits in the garments of the exiled." This text points out several important things. First, we see that a parent dresses his child. That we are confronted here with a royal parable adds an important dimension. A king has the power to dress the prince in fine clothes; one might even argue that one reason to dress the prince up is to show off the king's wealth. So for a king to choose to dress his own son in rags is an indication of extreme parental disapproval and anger. Here again we see the tension between the providing and withholding aspects of parenting. A parent provides to a good child but withholds from a bad child. Second, we see that even when the parent is most angry, even when the parent punishes, he remains the parent. And even if he only provides rags to cover his son, he is still providing

something while withholding something else. Even though God punishes Israel, he is still Israel's father. This constancy of the parenting relationship is a key element in the rabbinic notion of God as parent. Because God is parent, Israel can always acknowledge his sins and return in repentance and be elevated to his former status as protected child. And because God is parent, even in the worst of situations, the child can take comfort in knowing that his father is still there and in some sense still providing for him. The fact remains that even as Israel sat in the clothes of the exiled, they were still sitting in clothes provided by their father.

This contention is borne out in a variety of other sources. Consider a passage from the supplement to Pesikta de Rav Kahana labeled 'מה נאוו עתה רבים'. The biblical starting point is: "The voice of them that wait for you, they lift up the voice." (Is. 52:8)

Rabbi Akiba said: There are none who wait on your behalf except the prophets who wait for Israel's redemption. Even though the prophets rebuked Israel, they turned and brought good news and comfort. It is like a king's daughter whose father appointed a guardian for her. When she did the king's will, she was allowed self governance. But when she rebelled, self governance was denied her. Similarly, when Israel did God's will, the prophets praised them and allowed them self governance. But when Israel rebelled, the prophets rebuked them.

Here again we see the constancy of the parent-child relationship.

Even when Israel rebels, she is still considered God's daughter. The text also points out some interesting aspects of parenting. We see here, as we have seen before, that a parent provides for his child. The royal metaphor indicates that in the case of a king, he provides a guardian for his children. But here we see that the goal of parental providence or education seems to be to encourage the child to achieve a measure of autonomy. This is particularly impressive in that the child of the parable is a daughter, and the goal toward which she is being trained is self-governance. Parental punishment, then serves as a way to redirect the child on the proper path toward an intelligent, responsible autonomy.

A similar theme emerges in Shir ha Shirim Rabba 6:6. Here God is compared to a king who had an orchard in which he planted all kinds of fruits and then gave the orchard to his son. When the son did the king's bidding, the king would find the best plants in the world and plant them in his son's orchard. But when his son would not do his bidding, the king would rip out the most beautiful plant in the orchard. So when Israel does God's bidding, God finds a righteous person from among the nations of the world like Jethro or Rachav and brings them to Israel. But when Israel does not do God's bidding, God takes a righteous person out of the midst of Israel. Again we see the tension between the providing aspect of parenting and the withholding aspect. The parent encourages some measure

of autonomy on the part of the child by providing him the means to support himself and he rewards the son by helping him along in the process. But when the child's independence gets out of control in that he does not follow his parent's wishes, the parent punishes by withholding the means by which the child can be independent. Here again, both the providing and withholding aspects of parenting demonstrate that even while withholding, the parent remains parent. Even when Israel is bad, God is still his father. This point is made clearly in Vayikra Rabba 10:2. Here God says to Isaiah: "My children are troublesome and rebellious. If you are willing to be insulted and beaten by them, you can be my messenger; if not, you cannot be my messenger." From this we learn that even when Israel is rebellious, God thinks of them as his children. We also see that a proper parental response to bad children is to provide a mechanism to mediate their rebelliousness. It is because God is a good parent that he wants to send a messenger to his children. A good parent instructs his children as to what is right and wrong, and when they do wrong, tries to encourage them to stop, and if they do not, he punishes them.

There is some evidence that suggests the opposite conclusion, that God only sees himself as father when Israel behaves as son, that is, when Israel does God's will. While we will discuss this more completely from Israel's perspective in the next chapter, it is important to mention it in this

context. A primary statement of this tension can be found in Baba Batra 10a. There we find a debate between Rabbi Akiba and Turnus Rufus, a non-Jewish critic. Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiba: "If your God loves the poor, why doesn't he support them?" Akiba's response was that the poor are important because by supporting them, we can be saved from Gehinom. Turnus Rufus argued that it was just the opposite. He offered a parable to support his claim: It is like a king who was angry at his slave so he threw him into prison and ordered that no one should feed him or give him something to drink. If a man were to feed him or offer him drink, the king would certainly be angry at the man. His proof that Israel are called slaves comes from Leviticus 25:55: "For to me the children of Israel are slaves." Rabbi Akiba disagreed. He told another parable. He compared God to a king who was angry at his son and therefore imprisoned him, ordering that no one should offer him food or drink. In this situation, if a man were to come and feed him, the king would really be happy and would send the man a present. Akiba's proof text for his contention that Israel are called children comes from Deuteronomy 14:1: "You are children of the Lord your God." Turnus Rufus responded that Israel are called both children and slaves, children when they do God's will and slaves when they do not. He pointed out: "And now you are not doing God's will." Akiba still disagreed. He pointed to Isaiah 58:7: "The fast that I require of you 'is it not to share your

bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house?" The proof text indicates that because Jews are commanded to feed the hungry, God must want them to feed the poor just as the king in the parable really wanted someone to feed his son. From Akiba's perspective, then, God remains the father of Israel even if he is angry with them for not obeying him. While in this instance, the view represented by Turnus Rufus is here to be refuted, we do find that his argument echoes through other passages.

Consider the passage from Sh'mot Rabba 24:1.

Commenting on the verse: "Is he not your father who acquired you?" (Deut. 32:6) the Rabbis ask a question. If it says 'your father', why does it say 'who acquired you' as one might acquire a slave? The explanation offered is that when Israel does God's will, God has mercy on them like a father on his children. But when Israel does not do God's will, he rules them as though they were slaves.²⁴ This text, then seems to come to the opposite conclusion to the one described above. It seems to challenge our contention of the constancy of the fathering relationship. Additional evidence for this opposite viewpoint can be found in Pesikta Rabbati 27:

"Listen to your father." (Prov. 23:22) Your father in heaven, of whom it was said, 'this is my God' who begot you, and would treat you as an only child. If you do not listen, He will treat you as a slave. "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your father who acquired you?" (Deut. 32:6)

(The verse is here understood as: Is he not your father? Be careful or he will treat you as one who acquired you.) When you do his will, he is your father and you are his son. But if you do not do his will of your own choice he will force you under threat of pain as though you were a slave, as it is said: "Is Israel a servant? Is he a home born slave?" (Jer. 2:14) Therefore, listen to him and it will be well with you. Listen to your father. "Hear the word of the Lord, oh house of Jacob." (Jer. 2:4)

This image of Israel as God's slave when they do not do his will forces us to ask whether the slave motif is different in substance from the son motif or only in form. It seems that God's treatment of slaves is not substantially different from his treatment of recalcitrant children, but the form is different and it is an important difference. The difference between owning a slave and being a parent is considerable. The end product of the relationship is different. The purpose of owning a slave is to have your wishes carried out regardless of what it might do to the slave. The end product of parenting is to raise a good child who will do the parent's will because that will is the right thing to do. The point of encouraging a son to do what is right is that it is a part of his moral education.

While there is, therefore, evidence to support the claim that God is father to Israel only so long as Israel performs God's will, it seems that the weight of material indicates that the dominant motif is the opposite--that God is always father and Israel is always child. The majority

of the sources maintain that while God in his fathering role does become angry at his child, it is the anger of a father toward a bad child which has as its goal the redirection of the bad child's priorities.

Consider a passage from Pesikta Rabbati 29/30:2. Here God is compared to a king who loved his son and therefore made him a golden necklace which he hung around his son's neck. Then the son angered the father, so the king ripped the necklace from his son's neck and instead, put chains around his feet. The necklace is the letters of Torah which God made into a necklace for Israel.²⁵ When Israel abandoned Torah, God rearranged the letters so that they would symbolize punishment in the acrostic of Lamentations. Here again we see the tension between parental providing and withholding. In each of these parental interactions, there is a purpose. The king gives the precious necklace so the child will understand its importance, and when the child does not understand, the king takes it away and in punishment replaces it with chains. Through this punishment, the child is intended to learn what to value. Again we see the additional dimension that the royal metaphor offers. Because the father is a king, he has within his power to give a tremendously valuable necklace. When his son abuses it, the king as the power to throw his son in chains.

The Rabbis believed that even as God punished Israel, he continued to display his paternal love. This is clear

from Pesikta Rabbati 23:1,

"Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy."
 (Ex. 20:8) Here it is written 'Remember'
 זכור and there (in Deut. 15:12) 'Guard
 or 'Take care' שמר. Rabbi Yudan and
 Rabbi Abu said in the name of Rabbi Simon
 ben Lakish: It is like a parable of a king
 who sent his son to the store after he had
 given him a coin and a flask. The boy broke
 the flask and lost the coin. His father pulled
 his ear and plucked his hair. And then he
 gave him another coin and flask a second time,
 saying, "Take care that you do not lose
 these as you lost the others. Similarly,
 after Israel lost the commandment beginning
 זכור in the wilderness, God gave them
 the one beginning שמר. Therefore it
 says זכור in Exodus and שמר in
 Deuteronomy.²⁶

The interesting aspect of this text is the nature of parental punishment described here. God as father entrusts something of value to his son. When Israel misuses it, God punished them--but gently--and then returns a thing of equal value. The purpose of the punishment is to impress on the child the need to take care of the thing of value. So one purpose of punishment is education; the parent must teach the child that he must pay attention to certain things. The fact that the father gives the child these valuable things a second time is an indication that the purpose of punishment is to educate the child to change his behavior.

The purpose of parental punishment was an important issue to the Rabbis; it was a way for them to deal with the issue of theodicy. A passage from Siphre 73²⁷ suggests two explanations of the purpose of parental punishment

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: "It is written: 'For the Lord reproves him who he loves like a father the son in whom he delights,' (Prov. 3:12) He interprets this to mean that suffering this parental reproof causes a son to cause his father delight. The implication of this statement seems to be that punishment encourages the child to be good. Rabbi Meir, on the other hand, starts with another verse: "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, the Lord you God disciplines you." (Deut. 8:5) He argues that people know how bad their deeds have been and the suffering they merit for the seriousness of their offenses. Rabbi Meir's claim, then, is that God does not give Israel the punishment it deserves. The reason for this restraint seems to be God's parental love.

The first opinion is mirrored in another passage from Yalkut Shimoni.²⁸

"Take the rod." (Numbers 17:17) This is what is written: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child." (Prov. 22:15) This is Israel, as it says: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and I brought him out of Egypt and called him my son." (Hos. 11:1) They angered God all the time. And what will cause them to be far from foolishness? "But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." (Prov. 22:15) Therefore, God said to Moses: "They are rebellious. This child sins and needs the scribe to hit him and bring him to life. So it is written: "Take the rod."

God punishes Israel, according to this view, to bring Israel life. It seems that what is really being said is

that when Israel is punished, they repent, and therefore merit continued life. A somewhat similar idea can be found in Eicha Rabbati 1:60. Beginning with the verse, "Zion stretched out her hand," (Lam. 1:16) the situation is compared to a king who had a son whom he struck. When the king hit his son, the son admitted that he had sinned. Each time he was hit, the son admitted his guilt, until finally he spread out his whole hand for punishment. God punished Zion until she also spread out her whole hand. Here the function of punishment seems to be to cause the child to admit his guilt. So suffering makes the child more attentive to doing what is right.

The second opinion, that of Rabbi Meir, is that God tones down his punishing out of his parental love. This concept represents a fundamental idea in the rabbinic notion of God as father.

We have learned, then, that there are two aspects to parental punishment. The purpose of parental punishment seems to be that through punishment, the child acknowledges his sins and repents. The end result of this process is that the child becomes a better person. The second aspect of parental punishment does not describe its purpose but rather its quality. Parental punishment is considerably less harsh than the sin of the child merits. Because the parent loves his child, he punishes more gently than the child deserves. It is clear that this notion of punishment is an aspect of rabbinic orientation to theodicy. The

suffering that the people of Israel undergo can be explained in terms of their father God punishing them. On the one hand, the people can believe that their suffering is for their own good. It causes them to examine themselves for the cause of the punishment--their sinning--and it causes them to repent from their sinning. On the other hand, there is a certain comfort in understanding that their suffering is more gentle than that they really deserve to receive. Their sense that God is their father helps them put their suffering into a useful perspective.

That God's position as father puts limits to his manner of punishing Israel emerges from Sh'mot Rabba 46:4. A parable is told of a senator whose sons got mixed up with bad company so he threw them out. When the sons found themselves in trouble they asked some important people to intercede with their father on their behalf. The senator asked the important people on whose behalf they were pleading for mercy and they responded: "For your sons, that you should be reconciled with them." He replied that he had no sons, that their mother was a harlot when she bore them. But the important people argued with him saying, "You cannot deny them. Everyone knows that they are your sons. They resemble you!" The senator in the parable is God and the important people are the prophets. The children are Israel who became involved with idol worship. God said: "They are not my children; when they do my will they are my children, but when they do not, they are not!"

The prophets argues with God, "They are your children. Everyone knows it! 'All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.' (Is. 61:9) Just as it is the way of a father to guard his son, even though he sin, so must you be merciful to them because you are their father."

This last statement is very enlightening. It would almost seem that God has no alternative but to be merciful to Israel because of the nature of their relationship--God is their father. By accepting the prophetic dictum, God acknowledges that he is Israel's father and that he must take them back when they return in repentance and they beg for forgiveness. Here the prophets know what being a good parent means; they have to remind God.

An interesting aspect of this text is the comparison between God and a senator. One might argue that a senator is either a gentile or certainly a very assimilated Jew. It is very uncommon to find God compared to this kind of a person. We also see in this text a very realistic picture of what a parent might say at the height of his anger at his children. While it might be uncharacteristic to compare God to a parent who in his anger makes a statement that begs to be refuted, it is possible to speculate that because God's analogue in the parable is the gentile or assimilated senator, it was easier for the Rabbis to put words in his mouth that demanded refutation. Again, here the prophets teach God what it means to be a

good parent. Notice how God plays the opposite role in the following two cases.

In Pesachim 87 a&b, God tells Hosea, "Your children have sinned." Hosea should have responded, "But they are you children, favored children, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!" Instead he responded "Master of the Universe, the whole world is yours! Choose another nation!" God was upset with Hosea's response, so he told Hosea to take a harlot for a wife and have children. If Hosea would be ready to send his children away, then God would send Israel away. When the time came that God told Hosea to leave his wife, he pleaded, "How can I do that? I have children with her!" God responded, "If you cannot leave your wife who is a harlot and your children who are offspring of harlotry so that you don't even know if they are yours, how do you expect me to leave Israel, my favored children?" Hosea realized his sin, and pleaded on behalf of Israel before God.

This text is a fascinating example of the constancy of the parenting relationship. God does not want to give Israel up even though they are bad. He wants Hosea to plead for them so as to justify his continuing relationship with them. He wants to be merciful to them. In this example, as opposed to the one above, it is God who understands what being a parent means; Hosea doesn't, until he too becomes a father. In the previous text, God wanted

to give up on his parenting role while here Hosea wants him to. After Hosea becomes a father, he understands the constancy of his love for his children, even though they are of doubtful paternity. It seems that the text makes a distinction between marriage bonds and parent-child bonds. Hosea is unable to give up his wife because of his children. We are left with the impression that he could have given her up had there been no children. So while marriage bonds seem to be breakable, parent-child bonds are constant.

A similar example is found in Shabbat 80b.

"Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonathan: As it is written: 'For you are our father though Abraham does not acknowledge us and Israel does not know us; you oh Lord are our father, our redeemer of old is your name.' (Is. 63:16) In the future to come, God will say to Abraham: 'Your children have sinned.' He said before him, 'Master of the Universe, destroy them for the holiness of your name.' God said, 'If I say to Jacob who had trouble with his own children, perhaps he will beg for mercy for them. God said to Jacob, 'Your children have sinned.' He said, 'Master of the universe, destroy them for the holiness of your name.' God said, 'There is no reason in old men and no counsel in children!' He then said to Isaac, 'Your children have sinned.' Isaac responded, 'Master of the Universe, my children, not your children? At the hour when they stood before you at Mt. Sinai and said, 'We will do and we will listen', you called them 'My first born son.' (Ex. 4:22) But now, my children, not your children? And how much have they sinned? How many years are in a man's life? Take away twenty for which you

do not punish,²⁹ there are fifty remaining. Take away twenty-five, for the nights are occupied with sleeping, you are left with twenty-five. Take away twelve and a half for praying, eating and personal cleanliness, are you are left with twelve and a half. If you will suffer that, good; if not, consider half on me and half on you. If you want to say 'It should all be on me', I have offered myself as a sacrifice before you. The people Israel open and say to Isaac, 'Because you are our father.' Isaac responds to Israel, 'Instead of praising me, praise God.' Isaac showed them God with their own eyes and they lifted up their eyes and said, 'You, oh Lord, are our father, our redeemer of old is your name.'

Here too the theme is the constancy of the fathering relationship. God wants Israel's sin to be negotiated down so he can lighten their punishment. God wants to be merciful toward Israel because, on the most fundamental level, it is the way of a father to be merciful toward his children. Here, as above, God knows what it means to be a father. So also does Isaac. Abraham and Jacob no not understand like Hosea in the text above. A basic attribute of a parent is being merciful toward his child and this conditions the way the parent punishes.

A classic statement of this theme can be found in Pesikta de Rav Kahana 9:5. There God is described as preparing to argue with Israel. This makes the other nations glad because they are convinced that God will obliterate Israel from the world. When God realizes the other nation's glee, he decides to turn his case against Israel into an occasion for good will. So God said: "Though your sins are

as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." (Is. 1:18) The other nations were astonished because there was no fierce reproach. They concluded, therefore: "He has come to do nothing but be indulgent with his children." This text shows us God being merciful to his children, but it adds a new dimension to our image of parenting--God takes into consideration 'what the neighbors think'. It appears that the motivation for God's merciful behavior toward Israel is not only that he is being indulgent with his children, but also because he wants to make a point to the other nations. The message he wishes to convey is that Israel are his children.

These text fortify our description of the second aspect of parental punishment: because the parent loves his children, he punishes more gently than the children deserve. Parental punishment then is categorically different from objective punishment. In the text above, Israel seems to have merited destruction, or so the other nations would argue, but instead God chooses to be indulgent with his children. They do not receive a punishment that they deserve.

We see this again in Midrash on Psalms 9:4. The verse: "יָדָה אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ" is understood to mean: A psalm on the death of a son.³⁰ The Rabbis interpret it to mean: On the death that a father decrees for his son, but after the son returns in repentance, the father whitens his sins. They are playing on the word 'יָדָה' which can be translated as 'white'. The son here is Israel, the father of course, God.

God knows that Israel's sins merit the decree of death, but he lightens their sins when they repent, making possible a more gentle punishment. This text seems to indicate that an aspect of the parenting role includes judging the son and ultimately determining that the son's sins merit his death. But as we pointed out above, parenting implies being merciful toward the child, and therefore punishing him in a manner which is less harsh than he deserves.

The parenting role, then, seems to demand the reduction of the child's punishment. Consider this passage from *Pesikta Rabbati* 44. A parable is told concerning a prince whose friend says to him, "In the future your father will smite you. He will imprison you and deliver you to slaves. And afterwards, you will repent and he will receive you. If you listen to me and repent first, he will receive you before all the punishment." So Hosea said to Israel: "In the future God will smite you.³¹ Afterwards you will come to him and plead with him. Listen to me and repent first so that he will not punish you." This text adds a new dimension to our discussion about parental punishment. Here the emphasis is not on the tendency of the parent to lighten his son's punishment but rather the responsibility of the son to encourage his parent to be lenient, that is, the responsibility of the son to repent and therefore to enable the parent to avoid punishing him. Here we see the two aspects of parental punishment merged. By anticipating the punishment, the child may repent,

thereby fulfilling the purpose of parental punishment. And this enables the parent to reduce his punishment, fulfilling the second aspect of the nature of parental punishment.

Another text from the same source makes a related point.

"Return, Oh Israel." It is said of the prophets Hosea and Elijah that they were cruel. God forbid! They were not cruel. Would a cruel person save others? To what is it compared? To a prince whom the king judged to deserve death by burning. What did the associate do? He said to the king, "Keep him in prison, starve him and then burn him." He thought to himself to delay the execution until the king's anger would turn. Similarly, when Elijah saw Israel go astray after Ahab, he said: "It is better that there be three years of famine rather than they fall into the pit of destruction." It was from love that Elijah did this."

While the text does not explain exactly why the king's anger will abate, it seems probable that the implication is that a father cannot sustain the intensity of his anger against his son over an extended period of time. The prince deserves to be burnt to death; instead he suffers imprisonment and starvation. It seems important in this text that the father is a king. We do not see clear examples of a common father sentencing his son to die; that power was only in the hands of the king. So the royal metaphor enables a level of intensity to be lent to the parenting role. A king does have the power to order his own son's death. In this case it seems as though he would have carried through with his

threat had the associate not intervened. But it is equally possible to argue that the associate was playing off the unstated parental concern of the king, knowing that he really would not be able to immediately carry through with his son's execution. Israel as well deserves total destruction; instead, through the intercession of Elijah playing on God's unstated parental concern Israel receives only three years of famine. Again we see that while a father punishes his son, the punishment is considerably less than that which the child deserves. A parent can become angry but it is not his normal state. When his normal state returns, he loves and forgives.

This is demonstrated in a passage from Eicha Rabbati 4:15. The Rabbis ask why Psalm 79:1 begins a song of Asaph, when it continues: "Oh God, the heathens have come into your inheritance." Instead they argue, it should read 'the crying of Asaph' or 'the dirge of Asaph' or perhaps the 'lament of Asaph'. To explain this seeming contradiction, they tell a parable. It is like a king who made a chuppah for his son. He plastered it and decorated it, and then his son got involved with bad company. Immediately the king went up to the chuppah and tore it down, ripping the curtains and breaking the reeds. The tutor took a broken piece of rod and began to play on it. They said to him, "The king has just destroyed his son's chuppah and you sit there playing. Why?" He responded, "I am playing because the king took out his anger on the son's chuppah but not on his son."

Similarly they asked Asaph, "God destroyed his Temple yet you sit there and make music?" He answered, "I sing because God poured out his anger on wood and stones and not on Israel!"

This passage gives one the impression that the reason God took out his anger on the Temple rather than on Israel is because Israel is his son. While his son might have deserved destruction, the parent's proclivity to lessen his anger provided another outlet for the anger. That the father here is a king suggests the special quality of the father's love. One might expect that a king would order his slaves to build his son's chuppah, but his love for his son was so great that he carried out his responsibility to prepare for his son's wedding himself.

We see the lessening of parental anger again in the passage discussed above from Aggadat Berashit 5:3. There we are told that God would have destroyed Israel when they made the golden calf but Moses interceded by reminding God of his promise to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham, then, is one reason that God does not execute his anger on Israel. But another reason is given as well: "לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה חֲרוֹן אַפִּי" וְלֹא אֶמָּוֶה? שֶׁהוּא בְּנִי יְחִידִי, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: "הִבֵּן יִקְרֶה אֶפְרַיִם." "I will not execute my anger." (Hos. 11:9) Why? Because Israel is my only son, as it says: "Efraim is a precious son to me." (Jer. 3:19)

The father-child relationship, then, sets the stage for the lessening of punishment. It also enables the

parent to be easily reconciled with the son. This is clear from Mechilta Beshallach 4 on verse 14:15. The context is a discussion of why God split the sea for Israel. Several solutions are offered; to fulfil his promise to Abraham, because of the merit of Abraham and because of the merit of observing circumcision. Commenting on the situation of Moses' pleading before God to save the people, Rabbi Abshalom the Elder offers a parable. It is compared to a man who is angry at his son so he throws him out of his house. His friend comes to beg the man to allow his son to return. The man responds: "You are only asking for my son, but I am already reconciled with him." Similarly God said to Moses, "Why are you pleading regarding my children? I am already reconciled with them."³²

Here it seems that almost as soon as the father becomes angry at his son, he is reconciled with him. So parental anger is controlled through the ease of reconciliation. Moses' task is not to convince God to take Israel back because God has already forgiven them, but rather to lead them forward.

We have described the nature of parental punishment as it emerges through these examples. Its purpose is ultimately to educate the child as to what is right and what is wrong and to cause him to change his behavior. Its style is to be more gentle than the sins of the child merit. But we have also been discussing a correlary to parental punishment--parental anger. Punishing is a response to the child's wrong doing; anger is an aspect of that response.

We have pointed out that at the height of his anger, a person might throw his child out of the house, but we have seen how parental anger has a tendency to abate over time. In this last text, we have seen that sometimes the anger disappears almost immediately. The Rabbis recognized that even while parents love their children, they could get intensely angry at them, but a good parent learns to moderate his anger or work it out on an object other than his child.

Several other different kinds of images emerge in the context of parental anger. One appears in Aggadat Berashit 5:1. There it says: "Just as a man's son, if he sins while he is a little baby, the father will not discard him because he is little. But if he is grown and acts with knowledge, if he sins his father will discard him." Likewise with Israel. If they sin accidentally, God remembers that they are but a little child. The implication of this statement is that because Israel is a little child, they are not responsible for their actions and therefore their father will not punish them. The text is as interesting for what it leaves out as for what it includes. The human parallel describes not only the protection of the little child but the punishment of the grown up child. Yet in connection with Israel, only its status as a baby is described. Surely there must be the intention to suggest that as Israel becomes an adult and therefore responsible for his actions, God's relationship to him changes as does the

kind of response to Israel's sin. We will discuss this below in Chapter Two, but it is interesting to note that this text does not articulate this theme in relationship to Israel. We learn from this that it is difficult to be angry at your child if the child is a baby.

A different image can be found in Devarim Rabba 7:11. Reflecting on the death of Moses, God tells a parable. It is like a king who had a son who was always making his father so angry that he wanted to kill his son. Each time, the boy's mother would intercede for the son and the boy would be saved. When the mother died, the king cried not only for his wife, but also for his son who now would have no one to protect him. The mother in the parable is Moses who continually interceded with God on behalf of Israel. This parable suggests, contrary to many others, that God needs someone to intercede on behalf of Israel because God is afraid of the extent of his own anger at his son Israel. It is also interesting in that it describes the different role of mother and father in relationship to the child. Here the mother is pictured as the protective parent acting to calm her husband down. Good parenting, it seems, provides a balance between anger and protection.

Another text, this from Sh'mot Rabba 30:5, shows us that the observance of the commandments help to assuage God's anger.

"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless

child.' (Ex. 22:21) Rabbi Jose said: Why does God love orphans and widows? Because their eyes are raised to none but Him, as it says: "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows." (Ps. 68:6) hence he who robs them is like one who robs God, their father in heaven, who becomes incensed against him, as it says" 'My wrath shall wax hot and I will kill you.' (Ex. 22:23) It can be compared to a princess who sinned against her father and was driven from home, leaving her children with her father; whenever he looked upon them, he imagined his daughter stood before him, with the result that he would punish anyone who dared touch them. Israel likewise was in Zion, where God dwelt in their midst, as it says: "This is my resting place forever." (Ps. 132:14) When they sinned, he thrust them away, while Zion too cast her children on them, as it says: "We are become orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows." (Lam. 5:3) When he beholds Israel fulfilling commandments, he repents of what he has done to Zion and tries to find some redeeming feature in her, as it says: "I return unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." (Zech. 8:3)

It seems that the widow of the parable is Zion, and her children, for the purposes of the biblical text, are Israel. Israel's observance of the mitzvot encourages God to reevaluate his anger toward Zion and therefore toward them. Here it is God in his fathering role who is predisposed to protect Israel because Israel reminds him of Zion, his daughter. Again we see that good parenting involves a balance between anger and protection. We also see that the child, in this case the grandchildren, have a responsibility to bring about this mediation--through observing the father's commandments.

Our major contention, borne out by the majority of

our sources, is that there is a constancy to the parent-child relationship of God and Israel. We turn to one more text to document this, Shir ha Shirim Rabba 8:14. The Rabbis begin with the text: "My vineyards, my very own, is for myself." (Song of Songs 8:12) It is likened to a king who is angry at his son so he delivers him to his slave for punishment. After the slave beats him, he tries to convince him not to listen to his father. The son responds, "You fool! It is because I didn't listen to my father that I am here in the first place!" Likewise, when Israel's sins caused the Temple to be destroyed and their being exiled, Nebuchadnezzar told them not to listen to the Torah of their father, but instead to worship idols. Israel replied: "You fool! It is because we worshipped idols that we are here in the first place." At that moment God said, 'My vineyard belongs to me.' The thrust of this parable is that Israel, God's children, belong to God and no one else. This text emphasizes the purpose of parental punishment--the son in this parable understands why he is being punished and has learned not to repeat his mistake. There is a sense in which a child really comes to be his parent's child totally when he understands the purpose of his parent's punishment.

A corollary of the theme of the constancy of the father-child relationship is that God wants to be acknowledged as father. In Pesikta de Rav Kahana 3, God is compared to a man who carries his child to market and buys him everything he wants. When his son asks someone, "Where is my father?"

the father gets angry and drops him. This text adds a new dimension to our understanding of parenting. Not only does a parent provide for his child, but he wants to be acknowledged as the provider. We see this again in Pesikta Rabbati 21 where God is compared to a king whose son is born while he is away. When the king returns, his son goes to a reception for him and asks of the other high officials, "Are you my father?" The king says to him, "Why do you look at these others? You have no profit from them. I am your father." So, again, an aspecting of parenting is to provide to the child, to enable him to profit in some way because of the parent-child relationship. The parental reward for providing for the child is the acknowledgement and implicitly the thanks that should come from the child. On a very basic level, the parent wants his love for his child to be returned.

Another example, from Sh'mot Rabba 46:3, raises an important connected point. Children often only acknowledge their parent when they are in trouble. It describes a parable of the son of a doctor who calls a quack doctor 'my father'. But when the son gets sick, he calls his real father to take care of him. His father, in spite of his anger at his son for acknowledging a quack doctor as father, immediately feels merciful toward his son and goes to him. But he says to his son, "You only recognize me as your father in times of trouble." Even in times of anger, a parent feels merciful toward his child. We see that one

cause of parental anger is the lack of acknowledgement from the child. Similarly, Israel only acknowledges God when Israel is in trouble. Even though God realizes this and it angers him, he still responds when Israel is in trouble. Parental love seems to be the stronger force in the struggle between love and anger. This position, however, is contested in Sh'mot Rabba 46:5. Here God says to Israel: "You only call me father when you are in trouble, but I do not want to show myself as father to those who do not do my will." In this last text, God seems to be describing a view of parenting which suggests that children have to earn their parent's concern. Whether or not God wants to show himself as father to those who do not do his will, it seems that in most cases he does. The parental proclivity to respond to the child's needs seem to be stronger than the rational experience of only responding when he is acknowledged as parent. Again, we have described how parental response carries with a range of different behavior from comfort to punishment. But the desired end result in each experience seems to be a better, more responsible child.

IV. Some Conflicting Aspects

The final image that supports our claim of the constancy of God's fathering relationship is the image of God mourning over his dead child. The classic statement of this image can be found in Eicha Rabbati 1:1.³³ In it God asks the angels how a human king mourns. As they outline each mourning custom, God says that he will do the same. While the text never specifies for whom God is mourning, the implication is clearly that he is mourning for his child. The picture of God turning over his bed³⁴ and walking without shoes³⁵ and finally, sitting alone and crying is a very powerful image. The effect of it is to emphasize God's fathering relationship in perhaps its most fundamental dimensions, mourning over his dead child.

A similar image emerges in the Petikta to Eicha Rabbati 2. There the Rabbis compare God to a king who has twelve sons. Two die, but he consoles himself with the other ten. Eventually they all die, and he is left mourning for them. The final proof text is Lamentations 1:1, interpreted to read, "How he sits solitary!"

The image is clarified in another text from the same source.³⁶ Here God is compared to a king who had two sons. He became angry at the first, so he beat him and exiled him, saying "Woe unto him that he is banished from such comfort!" Then he became angry at the second, and again he beat him and exiled him. This time he said, "It is my fault. I must have brought them up badly!" When God

exiled the Ten Tribes, God said, "Woe to them that they strayed from me." (Hos. 7:13) But when he exiled Judah and Benjamin, God said, "Woe is me for my hurt." (Jer. 10:19) This source shows us an important movement--first the exile is described as totally Israel's fault, but then God accepts some responsibility for it because he raised his children badly. Here we see God in his fathering role punishing his sons, feeling responsible for their wrongdoing, and finally missing them when they are gone. The image of God sharing responsibility for his sons' transgressions is a powerful fathering image.

This text is different from the first two in that it is clearly God who exiled his children. The other texts speak of the king's children dying, but the responsibility for their death is not attributed to the father. Here the father's punishing of his children is severe, leading him to exile them. We also learn an important thing about parenting from this example. Ultimately, the parent is responsible for the way the child grows up or at least the parent takes the responsibility upon himself. Israel's sinning reflects back to God's inadequacy as a father. God himself admits "I must have brought them up badly!"

In Petikta of Eicha Rabbati 24, we see God in the same circumstance. Here he said to the angels, "Let us go and see what the enemies have done to my house. When God saw the Temple, he began to cry and said, "Woe to me for the sake of my house!" My children, where are they? I warned

them, but they did not repent." Then God compared himself to a man whose only son, for whom he had built a chuppah, died under the chuppah. The image of God comparing himself to a father in this ultimate state of loss over his son describes his fathering relationship to the exiled Israel. The text continues with God telling the angels to go and call Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses because they all know how to cry. That God can experience this profound sense of loss is a tribute to his role as father.

It is interesting to point out that God's calling Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and gathering the angels seems to be a way of creating a community to help him mourn. Just as a human parent mourns for his child within a community, God seems to need a community to help him mourn.

Here again, while it is obviously God who allowed the Temple to be destroyed and the people exiled, it is not emphasized in the text. The parable describes a king's son who dies under the chuppah, not who is killed by his father. In the next example, the father is described as responsible for the son's death.

Finally, it is interesting to note in passing that in this example as in several others already discussed, the Temple is described as a chuppah. God, therefore, provides for the marriage of his son by causing the Temple to be built.

We see this again in the Petikta to Eicha Rabbati 2.³⁷

"Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, 'It is compared

to a king who had two sons. He became angry at the first so he took a stick and beat him until he writhed in agony and died. Then he began to mourn over him. He became angry at the second so he took a stick and beat him until he writhed in agony and died. He said, 'Now I don't have the strength to mourn over them, so call the mourning women to mourn over them.' When the Ten Tribes were exiled, he began to mourn, 'Hear this word which I take up over you in lamentation, oh house of Israel.' (Amos 5:1) When Judah and Benjamin were exiled, God said, as it were, 'Now I no longer have strength to mourn over them, as it is written: 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Consider and call for the mourning women to come; send for the skillful women to come; let them hurry and wail over us that our eyes will run over with tears and our eyelids rush with water. For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: How we are ruined! We are shamed because we have left the land because they have cast down our dwellings.' 'Over them' is not written here, rather, 'over us'--mine and theirs. 'Their eyes fill with tears' is not written here, rather 'our eyes'--mine and theirs. 'Their eyelids rush with water' is not written here, rather, 'our eyelids'--mine and theirs."

The significant idea that comes out of this passage is that God not only mourns over his children but he mourns for himself. In a sense, God seems to die with his children. Even though it is God who punishes and God who exiles, he empathizes with his children's exile to the point of sharing their pain. Being a parent involves a certain identification with one's child, in evil as in good. It is perfectly clear from this that God's fathering relationship with Israel is a constant relationship that does not end when the child Israel is bad; instead it is maintained even after the child is exiled and symbolically dead.

As we pointed out above, the significant addition in this example is that the father himself kills his sons. While the human parallel is exile and not death, the image in the parable of the king killing his own sons indicates how seriously the Rabbis understood the punishment of exile. That God seems to die with his children after he exiled them, or symbolically killed them, might suggest for a parent to be so angry at his child as to kill him is to somehow kill himself as well. If parents are ultimately responsible for the way their children turn out, as we saw above, then children so bad as to deserve death carries the implication that the parents also die with their children.

Berachot 3:1 conveys a similar idea. The context of the passage is God's lamenting the destruction of the Temple.

"At the time when Israel enters synagogues and houses of study and respond, 'May his great name be blessed', The Holy One, Praised be He nods his head and says: Happy is the king who is thusly praised in his house. Woe to the father who exiled his children and woe to the children who were exiled from the table of their father."

Here again we see the connection between the child's exile and the father's sense of loss. God seems to share Israel's pain in some way. Both the exiled child and the father who exiles deserve pity. God has not forsaken Israel at all even though he has punished them. Instead he reacts like a father bereft of his son.

Elsewhere in Eicha Rabbati (3:7) we have another example of God missing his child Israel. Here God is compared to a king who went out to battle with his sons on his side. They quarreled, so the next day the king went out to battle alone. He said, "Would that my sons would be with me even though we quarrel!" In a similar way, at the time when Israel goes out to battle God is with them. But when they anger God, he does not go with them and they lose the battle and leave the land. Even though it is because God did not fight on their side that Israel was exiled, God still says, "Would that Israel were with me even though they anger me."³⁸ Again we see the constancy of the father-child relationship. Even though Israel angers God and God finally punishes Israel severely, God still misses his son, wishes they were together and ultimately still loves him.

V. Conclusion

It is obvious from the discussion of God mourning for his exiled children that the Rabbis understood that God's fathering role in relationship to Israel was not always a pleasant role. While the common thread in all of God's fathering is love, the love sometimes is manifest through punishment or expressed as the love for a dead child. A classic statement of the difficulty of God's fathering is found in Seder Eliahu Zuta, Chapter 8. The text begins

with what seems to be a kind of folk wisdom which asserts that until a man is married and has children, he is happy, without sadness or sighing, and he has satisfaction in his home. But when he marries and has children and his children do not behave properly, he no longer has peace of mind. The text then turns to God. "So have we done to the One who lights up our eyes! Until he created man on the earth he had peace of mind. From the time he created man on the earth, they angered him. Like children, they made their father impatient with their ways and their deeds. They caused sadness and sighing to enter his heart, as it were, and he has no contentment in the whole world." The text goes on to document how Israel worshipped idols and angered God. The overall impression that one gets from the text is that being a father is not an easy proposition, and all the more so if your child is Israel.

The Rabbis balanced this sense of the difficulty of the fathering role with a positive sense of the relationship between God as father and Israel as son. For example, Sh'mot Rabba 34:4, commenting on the verse "They shall make an ark" (Ex. 25:10) attempts to explain the phrase "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst." (Ex. 25:8) After asserting that Israel is God's children and God is Israel's father, the text points out that it is an honor for the children to be with their father and it is an honor to the father to be with the children. Proof for this statement is found in Proverbs 17:6, "Children's

children are the crown of old men and the glory of children are their fathers." Therefore, we are told, they are to build a house for the father that he may come and dwell with his sons. This house, of course, is the sanctuary. Another example which focuses on honor can be found in the Mekilta, Piska Chapter 1.

"You will find that there were three types of prophets. One insisted upon the honor due to father as well as the honor due to the son; one insisted on the honor due the father but not the honor due to the son; and one insisted on the honor due the son but not due the father."

The first case refers to the prophet Jeremiah. By his statement "We have transgressed and have rebelled; you have not pardoned" (Lam. 3:42) the Rabbis interpret that he admits Israel deserved to be punished and yet is arguing that God ought to have pardoned them. By admitting Israel deserved to be punished he is taking God's side and therefore honoring God; by arguing that God ought to have pardoned Israel, he is taking Israel's side and therefore honoring the son. The text goes on to say that because he honored them both, his prophecy was doubled. The second case refers to Elijah. About him it is said, "And, he said, "I have been jealous for the Lord of hosts for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant..." (I Kings 19:10) This indicates to the Rabbis that he was only interested in God's honor, not that of Israel. God's

response to this is to inform Elijah that he is not pleased with his prophecy. The proof text for this is I Kings 19:15-16 where Elijah's appointing a new prophet to take his place is here understood as evidence of his falling from God's favor. The third case refers to Jonah. It is said, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:3) This is understood to reflect his concern for Israel but not his concern for God. Later it is written: "And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time." (ibid. 3:1) The text continues by pointing out that while God spoke to him a second time, he did not speak with him a third time. This is understood as a sign of displeasure that Jonah was not attentive to the honor of the father.

Several interesting things emerge from this text. The first is that Elijah seems to be penalized more than Jonah, indicating the regard ascribed to the honor of the son, Israel. While both are clearly negatively compared to Jeremiah who insisted upon the honor due to both father and son, focusing on honor due the father as opposed to that due the son seems to be more wrong than focusing on the son as opposed to the father. Perhaps the most important image that emerges from this text is the sense that the father-son relationship of God and Israel demands that both be honored. The implication ultimately seems to be that they both have a responsibility to honor the other; Israel must honor God as father and God must honor Israel as son.

And all others must equally acknowledge and honor God and Israel.

In this discussion of honoring father and son as in our earlier discussion, the image of God as parent is fundamentally grounded in God's love. It is because God loves Israel that God could reward a Jeremiah for arguing with him to pardon Israel. It is because God loves Israel that he would punish an Elijah for not being attentive to his son's honor. And it is because he loves Israel that he could reward a Jonah for honoring Israel even though he does not honor God. It is because God loves Israel that he acts as a human father would toward his child. It is because he loves Israel that he punishes Israel in the way a father punishes his child. God's relation to Israel as a parent-child relation is, then, most fundamentally, an expression of God's love.

Before we conclude our discussion of God as father, we need to return to an issue which has emerged through the discussion: the difference between the king-child image and the father-child image. It would seem that these are very different images and therefore different things are being said about God and Israel when each one is used. But instead we find that the choice of image seems to be a rather arbitrary one. For example, in Eicha Rabbati 1:60 there is an image of a king who strikes his son, while in Midrash on Psalms 78:9, God is also compared to a man who strikes his son. It does seem, however, that once the choice of image

is made, certain different kinds of imagery follow. The king-child metaphor allows for a wide range of images expressing power and wealth. The king father has the wealth to give his child vineyards or gold necklaces or to dress his child in rich garments. The king father has the power to go into battle to rescue his child, to distribute food to his legions and to sentence his son to be burnt to death. While the common father also provides for his son and has power to protect and punish his son, it is clear that the form these activities take will be less grandiose than with his kingly counterpart. So, for example, in *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 3, there is an image of a man who carries his son on his shoulders to the market place. Everything that the son wants, his father buys for him. Compare this to the passage in *Siphre* 40 where a king opens his treasuries for his sons. We would not expect a king to take his son to market; neither would we expect any but a rich man or a king to have treasuries which he could open for his sons.

In certain cases, however, even these distinctions break down. *Pesikta Rabbati* 23:1 describes a king who sent his son to the store with a coin and a flask. We normally would not think of a prince going to the store to do an errand for his father.

On the whole, then, there does not seem to be a functional difference between the metaphor of God as king father and God as common father. There does seem to be a

literary difference between the metaphors, however. All of the texts that describe God as king father introduce their comparison by means of a *ḥen*, a parable. The common introduction is: 'to what is it compared? To a king who had a son...' The texts that speak of God as father sometimes employ this parable form but often use more straight forward description. For example, Yalkut Shimoni on Isaiah 51 reads: "It is the way of a father to be merciful and the way of a mother to comfort...God said: I will act as father and mother..." Or, from Tanchuma Netzavim 8: "He (God) guards Israel like a father guard the son."

If there is in fact no functional difference between the king-son image and the father-son image, why did the Rabbis employ both? The king image seems to reflect an attempt on the part of the Rabbis to elevate the image of God as father to the most unique kind of father that they knew, the king. When God as father is not described as king father, he is often described as a person with special skill, such as a doctor or an artisan or a very strong man. On the other hand, the use of common father images describes an experience that cuts across class lines and that all people can identify with.

It is very possible that the significance of the difference between God as king father and God as common father is to be found in the literary structure of the Midrash. It would be interesting to determine which sages spoke in terms of king-son and which in terms of father-son

to discover whether the difference is one of literary form reflecting different historical periods or different geographical areas. But that is the material for another study.

VI. God as Mother

Do the Rabbis describe God as mother to Israel? It is not surprising to discover that this is not a dominant theme in rabbinic literature. We have already seen several examples where God is described as both father and mother to Israel³⁹ but the image of God as primarily the maternal parent does not appear with any significant frequency.

We do have several examples which suggest the image of God as mother. Although these are incomplete references they are worthy of attention. The first is the passage from Shir haShirim Rabba 8:1:

"I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother." (Song of Songs 8:2) I will lead you from the upper regions into the lower regions. "I will bring you to the house of my mother." This is Sinai. Rabbi Berechiah said: Why is Sinai called the house of my mother? Because there (Israel) became like a new born child."

The passage is rather complex. The first sentence is generally understood to refer to God's bringing the Torah into the world. It is the second part that is most interesting to us. Apparently, it is Israel who says to God "I will bring

you to the house of my mother." If Sinai is the house of 'my mother', then who is the mother? It seems that Sinai is God's house, so by extension, God must be Israel's mother. If the experience at Sinai is understood metaphorically as the experience of Israel's birth, "because there Israel became like a new born child", the unstated element seems to be God as the mother who facilitates that birth. If our interpretation is correct, we learn one aspect of God as maternal parent is to be the ground from which the people Israel are born. This analogy is also suggested in another incomplete metaphor, that of Shir haShirim Rabba 7:1. Commenting on the verse: "Your navel is a rounded bowl" (Song of Songs 7:2) the Rabbis interpret navel as the Sanhedrin. "Just as an embryo, all the time that it is in its mother's womb cannot survive without its umbilical cord, neither can Israel do anything without the Sanhedrin." Here again, part of the metaphor seems to be missing. If Israel is the embryo and the Sanhedrin is the umbilical cord, in whose womb are they located? It seems plausible to argue that this is a reference to God's womb, and therefore, God is the mother. The analogy again suggests that God as the maternal parent provides the environment for Israel to be born and to develop. Her umbilical cord, the Sanhedrin, is part of her, which provides the growing fetus the necessary life support to be born. So God as mother provides to Israel that which is necessary to emerge as a child.

We also find some clearer examples of God described in maternal images. One, taken from the Petikta of Eicha Rabbati 20, begins, "I have watched over you and I will be like a bird." (Ps. 102:7) "God said: I have watched and I cause my Shekhina to dwell in the Temple for ever." Then it continues:

"I will be like a bird." What is this bird?
When you take her young, she sits alone.
Similarly, God said, "I have burned my house,
destroyed my city, and exiled my children
among the pagans and I sit all alone--Woe!"

The image of God sitting alone and mourning the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel is a familiar one.⁴⁰ What is important here is that God is described through the comparison to the mother bird as a maternal parent. In a sense we are confronted with two opposite images. The first is that of a mother bird whose young are stolen from her and she is desolate. The second is that of a parent who actively exiled his/her children and yet is desolate. The sense that God is at the same time the one who exiled Israel and the one from whom his/her young were taken reflects the complexity of the Rabbis' understanding of the exile. God willed it because Israel had sinned, but in a sense it was against God's will. The image of God as maternal parent that emerges here is almost one that suggests she cannot adequately protect her young from being stolen from her; it is a considerably more passive image of parenting

than the one which emerges in Pesikta to Eicha Rabbati 2, for example. God as mother, then, seems to carry with it less of a sense of powerful control than God as father in the same context.

On two occasions, the Rabbis use the verse from Isaiah 49:15 "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" to describe God's relationship to Israel. The first one, Pesikta Rabbati 31⁴¹ reads:

"Then Zion said: The Lord has forsaken me." (Is. 49:14) What is written above? "Sing, O Heavens, and be joyful, O earth...for the Lord has comforted his people and has compassion on his afflicted." (Is. 49:13) When Zion saw that 'his people' and 'his afflicted' were mentioned, but Zion and Jerusalem were not mentioned, she began to say "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me!" Immediately God answered her: "Just as a woman cannot forget her sucking child, so I cannot forget you!" "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Zion then asked: How is it possible? There is no end to the evils I have done. I caused your holy Temple to be destroyed and I killed the prophets. Rabbi Berechiah Berabbi the Priest said: The Holy One, Praised by He said: I will forget your evil deeds and not forget your good deeds. "These I will forget, but 'Anochi' I will not forget." Your saying (of the golden calf) "These are your Gods, o Israel" (Ex. 32:4) I have forgotten but (your response to) "I am the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:2) I will not forget.

While God is not primarily described in terms of feminine images here, God uses a comparison to a mother who cannot

forget her child to his/her relationship to Zion. The significance of the maternal image seems to be that there is a special bond of love between a mother and a child which makes it impossible for the mother not to have compassion on her child. The nature of maternal parenting here is the dominating influence of maternal love that enables the mother to overlook the bad and only remember the good. Fathers love their children too, but here through the metaphor of mother love, the image is more intense.

The second one, from Berachot 32b, is very similar. There, when the community of Israel said to God, "You have forgotten me," God responds, "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" The Rabbis play on the word 'נדיח' which in the biblical text is translated as 'sucking child' and reinterpret it to mean 'sacrifices'. So God is in effect saying, "Can I forget the sacrifices you made to me in the wilderness?" The text continues very much like the earlier one, with God forgetting the people's response to the golden calf but remembering their response at Sinai. Again, the biblical image suggests that the nature of maternal parenting is that the mother loves her child in a most intense manner because of their physical relationship, and that this love almost forces the mother to have compassion on her child. Mother-love is seen in much of Western culture as overriding all else, even justice. It is interesting that the rabbinic reinterpretation of this

image is also a physical image--Israel gives God sacrifices and that physical offering sustains God's compassion toward Israel. Taken together, these texts suggest that maternal love is unbreakable and in a certain sense, indiscriminant. It does not matter what the child does; the mother cannot forget the child that she suckled.

Already we see some very basic differences in the image of God as mother from that of God as father. The maternal images are rooted in the physical relationship between mother and child. God's maternal relationship to Israel is described in terms of being a womb for Israel or suckling Israel. These explicit physical images are missing from the rabbinic description of God as father.

We see this clearly in Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:2.

"He delivered me (drew out for me) because he delighted in me." (Ps. 18:20) Rabbi Yachanan said: She drew out her breast to give me Torah."

The passage seems to mean: God drew out the Torah for me as a mother draws out her breast for her child. This is a fascinating image. Again we see the image of God nursing Israel; the milk that is provided is Torah. God as mother sustains and nourishes her child Israel with Torah. We see a new image of God's nourishing here--not only does God provide nourishment for Israel and not only does God provide for Israel from what belongs to God⁴²--but God provides from her body, as it were. Torah is God's milk.

Again we see the close physical connection involved in the image of God as mother.

We have a reflection of this image in the opening passage of Berashit Rabba,

"Rabbi Hoshia the Great opened: "Then I was by him as a nursling and I was daily all delight." (Prov. 8:30) What is Amon? 'A tutor! 'Covered! 'Hidden! And some say, 'Great.' 'Amon means 'tutor'. Even as you read in the scriptures: As an ^{JN'C} carried the suckling child." (Num. 11:12)

The word ^{JN'C} in the Numbers verse seems to mean 'nursing father'. This is a difficult text to analyze because it is expressed in a kind of shorthand. But it seems that we are presented here with the image of God carrying the nursing Israel. Here we have a view of God describing him in a masculine term - ^{JN'C}-doing what we would describe as a maternal thing--carrying a child who is nursing. Again it is a physical image--it suggests God nursing Israel. That it is described in a masculine word might suggest that the rabbis saw men as capable of nursing children or that God as mother/father was capable of interacting with Israel in both masculine and feminine, paternal and maternal ways. The parenting image here is one of carrying and nursing, protecting and nourishing.

Our final clear image of God as maternal parent is found in Midrash on Psalms 20:1.

"For the leader; a psalm of David. The Lord will answer you in the day of trouble." (Ps. 20:1-2) Elsewhere Scripture says: "He will call on me and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble." (Ps. 91:15) The Holy One, Praised be He said: When trouble comes upon the children of Israel, and they call on me, let them but share my glory with them and I will answer them immediately, as it says, "He shall call upon me and I will answer him." What is meant by "I will be with him in trouble"? Rabbi Yudan said: It is compared to a pregnant woman who was angry with her mother. Even as the woman was giving birth, she made her mother go up into an upper chamber. And as the woman below groaned with pain, the mother above, hearing her voice, groaned with her. The neighbors asked: "What is your nature that you are crying? Are you giving birth with her?" She answered: My daughter is in pain. How can I bear her cries? I am groaning with her for my daughter's anguish is also mine." Similarly, when the Temple was destroyed, a sound of weeping and wailing was heard in the whole world, as it is said: "In that day the Lord, the God of hosts, called to weeping and mourning." (Is. 22:12) Thereupon the angels asked: Can such things be in your presence? Isn't it written of you: Glory and Honor are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place." (Chron. 16:27) God replied: Is my Temple not destroyed, my children thrown in chains; shouldn't I be in anguish? Is it not written: "I will be with him in anguish"? (Ps. 91:1)

Here the image of God is the image of the mother upstairs, who, although she has been thrown out by her daughter, cannot help but empathize with her daughter's pain. The childbirth image is an interesting one. Although the text does not say it explicitly, we are given the feeling that one reason the mother empathizes so completely with the daughter is that she understands the pain completely because she once experienced it herself. Similarly, God

experiences the pain of the exile. It seems that the proper answer to the neighbors' question is: it is the nature of the mother to experience the daughter's pain. The image of the maternal parent then is more than one who empathizes with the daughter; it is rather one who experiences the same pain. God as mother shares Israel's anguish. While this is not an image of physical connectedness as in the mother nursing or the mother giving birth, it is closely connected to it--God as mother here does not give birth, but she shares her daughter's labor pains. At the time we would most expect distance between the mother and daughter--a time when the daughter was angry at her mother--the maternal bond is too close to sever. The rabbinic image of God as mother suggests a connection between God and Israel which cannot be broken.

The rabbinic image of God as mother to Israel, therefore, suggests several things. First, God is the ground out which Israel develops. God provides the necessary ingredients for Israel to be born and to grow up. God provides milk (Torah) for sustenance, the Sanhedrin to nourish Israel. Second, the process of God's giving birth to Israel creates a relationship which can never be broken. Because God experienced the profound physical closeness to Israel, that closeness implies the ability to experience Israel's anguish. No matter what Israel might do to God, God's love that is a result of her maternal experience can never be challenged. Third, God's maternal image is not an image

of overpowering protection. God as mother cannot prevent her children from being taken from her. God, it seems, cannot prevent Israel from sinning and therefore meriting exile. But the maternal love does not end when the children are exiled; instead God sits forlorn without her children.

The maternal image of God deepens the metaphor of God's parenting. As a father, God provides, protects, teaches and punishes his child. As a mother, God provides the necessary environment for her child to grow and develop. As father, God loves his children but the love has a certain element of distance. The father judges his child and sometimes punishes his child quite harshly. The mother does not have that distance from her child. Because of the physical experience of giving birth to her child, the mother is intimately connected with the child. That connection creates an intense love that cannot be challenged.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Pesikta Rabbati 44
2. Bereshit Rabba 27:7
Bereshit Rabba 28:6
Midrash on Psalms 1:11
Sh'mot Rabba 30:6
3. Sanhedrin 102b and its parallel passage Berachot 35b. These are examples of texts which see God as father and Keneset Israel as mother to individual Israelites. Our concern is to concentrate on God's parental relationship to collective Israel.
4. Kiddushin 29a
5. Shir haShirim Rabba 1 and 2:33
6. Sh'mot Rabba 30:6
7. Discussed in Chapter Two.
8. Sh'mot Rabba 30:9 and Shir haShirim Rabba 1:17
9. For a discussion of God as father and Torah as daughter, see Winston, Marriage. Unpublished manuscript, Hebrew Union College Library.
10. Eicha Rabbati 4:16 and Bereshit Rabba 28:6
11. The legal obligations of a father to a daughter or a mother to her children are not spelled out in much detail. See Gerard, Children in the Aggadah. Unpublished manuscript, Hebrew Union College Library.
12. Pesikta Rabbati 44
13. "אֱלֹהִים" which is here understood as an Egyptian word.
14. There is a parallel text appearing in the same source 2:7
15. There are parallel passages in Sh'mot Rabba 52:4 and Shir haShirim Rabba 3:11.
16. See Baeck, "Haggadah and Christian Doctrine". Hebrew Union College Annual Vol. 23, 1950-51.
17. Shlomo is understood to refer to the king of whom peace is his:
"שְׁלֹמֹה מִלְכָּא דְּפָקֵי" "

18. Isa. 17:12; 8:7; Ps. 69:3
19. Deut. 32:40
20. What is the referent for the arrows of man? What is God afraid of? It seems that the important point here is that God takes upon himself the danger that is directed against his children.
21. Sh'mot Rabba 30:7; Shir haShirim 1:17; Sh'mot Rabba 30:6
22. The text goes on to describe that all God wants in return is that Israel should bring the first fruits to him.
23. Sh'mot Rabba 30:6; Shir haShirim Rabba 6:6; Shir haShirim Rabba 7:5
24. The text continues: "Just as a slave serves his master whether he likes it or not, so Israel does God's bidding, either willingly or unwillingly."
25. Prov. 1:9
26. Israel violated the first Sabbath commandment by gathering Manna on the Sabbath.
27. אם יאמרו
28. עליו:ל with parallel in Yalkut Shimoni ספ"א:א.
29. This is a reference to Numbers 14:29 in which God does not punish those younger than twenty who accept the report of the spies.
30. This is usually rendered: "According to Muth-labben."
31. Hosea 5:10
32. The text continues: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." (Ex. 14:15)
33. There is a parallel passage in Eicha Rabbati 3:25.
34. This is a reference to Daniel 7:9.
35. This is a reference to Nachum 1:3. The biblical verse speaks of the clouds as dust on God's feet, thereby suggesting to the Rabbis that he was barefoot.
36. Eicha Rabbati, Petikta 1.
37. There is a parallel passage in Pesikta de Rav Kahana 19:4.

38. This is a reference to Jer. 9:1.
39. Pesikta de Rav Kahana 19:4 and Seder Eliahu Rabba 31
40. Examples of this image can be found in Eicha Rabbati 1:1 and the Petikta to Eicha Rabbati 2.
41. There is a parallel passage in Shir haShirim Rabba 30:9.
42. Sh'mot Rabba 30:9.

ISRAEL AS CHILD

I. Introduction

A classic statement of Israel's status as God's child is found in Avot 3:14:

Rabbi Akiba used to say: "How beloved is man that he was created in God's image. How much more beloved that it was announced to him that he was created in God's image! How beloved is Israel that they are called God's children. How much more beloved that it was announced to them that they are called God's children, as it says: 'You are children to the Lord you God.' (Deut. 14:1) How beloved is Israel that precious tool was given to them. How much more beloved that it was announced to them that the precious tool with which the world was created was given to them, as it is written: 'For I have given you a good doctrine; do not forsake my Torah.'" (Prov. 4:2)

This statement tells us several important things. First, we learn that the fact that Israel is called 'God's children' is an indication of God's love for them. Second, another manifestation of that love is that they are given Torah. Third, we learn that this love is made known to Israel; Israel is conscious of its position as God's child. We learn that Israel is in a special position; not only are they created in God's image by virtue of the fact that they are subsumed under the category of *ADAM*, but they are in a special relationship to God in that they are called 'God's children'. So the child status distinguished them from other people.

While we discussed the notion that Israel has a special

status by virtue of the fact that it is described as God's child above, it is important to pay more attention to it here. In *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 28:9, God is described as a king who has a celebration. For seven days of the festival, the king's son was involved with the guests. After the seven days, the king said to his son: "I know that for all the days of the festival you were busy with the guests. Now you and I will celebrate one day ourselves." The king continued by telling his son that he did not require much from him for their special festival, only one chicken and one liter of meat. Here we see that Israel's position as son separates and distinguishes him from the other nations. It enables him to share a special intimacy with God as manifest through their private celebration. But it also indicates that the status as son carries with it certain expectations. The son has the responsibility to busy himself with the king's guests, which here are reference to the special sacrifices that Israel must bring for the other nations on the festival of Sukkot.¹ The son also has a specific responsibility to his father--in this case to bring his own sacrifices as his father requested.

We see the two-sided nature of the special status of Israel as son again in *Devarim Rabba* 5:2. Israel is here described as the favorite son of the king, the youngest son. Because he is the favorite, God gives him his favorite orchard. As we have seen above, the image of being given an orchard seems to imply that the son has the responsibility to tend the orchard; through tending it we might imagine that

the son develops the means to provide for himself through what his father has given him. In this case the reference is made clear; of all that God has created he loves 'the law' best, so he gave it to the people he loves the best. By virtue of the special status Israel has as son, Israel has the responsibility to guard the law, and to the extent that Israel guards the law, God is exalted. In so far as God is exalted through Israel's guarding the law, God will do justice and his holiness will dwell within Israel. As soon as Israel guards justice and the law, God will redeem them completely. As it is said: "Thus says the Lord: Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed." The point of the text is familiar; Israel's special status, in this case as youngest and favorite son, is a reflection of God's love. And along with this special status comes special responsibility: to do justly and to uphold the law. If we take seriously the analogy to tending the orchard, then tending the law seems to imply that Israel develops the means to provide for itself. In this case, because the starting point for the text is the biblical verse: "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment." (Deut. 16:18) we see that God's gift of the law does enable Israel to cultivate justice among its own people. Israel becomes responsible to judge itself.

The orchard image appears again in Shir haShirim Rabba 7:5.

Here too, the king gives his son an orchard. The son is told that his responsibility to the king is to deliver the first fruits of the orchard so that the king can taste them. In a similar way, Israel's responsibility to God is to bring him their first born sons and to go up to Jerusalem during the festivals with all the males to show them to God. The analogy between the first fruits of the orchard and the first male children is clear; both essentially belong to God. Again we see the dual nature of Israel's status as son; they are given special favors--the orchard, their own children, and they are given special responsibility.

In Pesikta de Rav Kahana 21:3 we again see the special status of Israel vis a vis the other nations.

"For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light." (Ps. 36:10) Resh Lakish said: It is like a king who had a son. When the king invited guests, he said to his son: My son, do you want to dine with the guests? The answer was: No. Then the king asked: With whom do you want to dine? The son answered: With you. Similarly, God said to Israel: My children, do you wish to dine with the nations? They answered: Master of the Universe, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to gather gleanings of wickedness." (Ps. 141:4) God said: Is it because they are gleanings that you do not want to dine with them? They said: Master of the Universe, "Let me not eat even of their delicacies." (ibid) We do not even want delicious and beautiful portions of theirs. What do we want? ²Delicious and generous portions which are yours.

The king's son is clearly in a different position from that of the guests. By virtue of his relationship to the king, he

is given a choice. He chooses to reflect his close relationship with the king through an intimate setting, eating alone with him. It is apparent from the text that eating with the guests would imply a diminishing of that intimate relationship; the Psalms text points out that eating the food of the other nations is a kind of wickedness. Israel as God's son is fed by God in a setting that acknowledges the special relationship that Israel has to God. Israel chooses to acknowledge this special relationship with God not because the food of the other nations is not delicious, but because it is not from God in the same sense that they want their portion to be. Being son here means that they are provided for from that which belongs to God in a special and intimate setting which distinguishes them from other peoples. Because the food of the other nations is associated with wickedness, Israel's choice to acknowledge his sonship and separate himself from the other nations is a moral choice.

In what ways are Israel distinguished from other nations? We learn from Pesikta de Rav Kahana 1:3³ through a play on words that Israel are sons distinguished to God through circumcision, the prohibition against shaving the corners of the beard, and the wearing of tsitsit.⁴ It is in the nature of a son to be different to the father than other people. In Israel's case, this implies that Israel has the responsibility to distinguish himself from other peoples to merit being called 'son'. The path for this responsibility to be realized is, obviously, through observing Mitzvot. These are all visible

signs. Through these signs Israel shows that they are God's sons.

Other evidence that the special status as son involves a religious dimension can be found in Shir haShirim Rabba 1. There, Israel is talking to the other nations and says of themselves: to what can we be compared? To a prince who went out to the dumping grounds of the city and the sun beat down and darkened his face. He reentered the city and with a little bit of washing, he washed the darkness off his body and his former beauty was restored. Similarly, Israel says: "The worship of idols might have tanned us, but you were false even in the wombs of your mothers! When you were still in you mother's wombs, you worshipped idols. How? When a woman was pregnant, she would enter a heathen temple and worship and her son inside her would do the same!"

Because Israel is God's son, the quality of his sinning is different from that of other nations. His sin, described in the parable metaphorically as being tanned by the sun, washes off. The other nations, by virtue of their parentage, cannot wash off their sin. The parable itself, by means of the term ' *לבן* ' suggests that their sin can be 'whitened', an action that we have seen that God as father often does for his son. Here the son does it himself, but it is clear that he can whiten his sins because he is God's son. So Israel's being God's son implies two things: that they are different from other peoples and that their sins mark them only temporarily. When Israel sins by idolatry,

it is surface and occasional, hence reparable. Their essential status, their former beauty which can be restored through repentance, is their close relationship with their father. Israel is intimately linked with God by this familial tie.

We see this again in Tanchuma 58:19. In this case we have an example of a man whose son served him in gladness. The son served his father in gladness because he knew that if he upset his father a little, his father would not be angry at him because he loved his son. This is contrasted with a gentile slave, who serves the same man in fear. He knew, that if he upset the man, he would be angry at the slave because there is no protection of love. Therefore, the nations of the world serve God in fear, while Israel serves God in gladness. From this we learn that it is the son's responsibility to serve his father, but the quality of that service is conditioned by the recognition of the father's love. Israel might sin a little, but God will not become angry at Israel because God loves him. Being a son changes the nature of small transgressions.

Because God loves Israel, Israel should not be afraid to God's judgment. In Midrash on Psalms 118:10, this point is emphasized.

"The Lord is to me to help me." (Ps. 118:7)
To what is it compared? To the children of
a man whom they bring to the dais for
judgment, and they are frightened about the
judgment. They said to the children: Don't
be afraid of the judgment; instead strengthen
your hearts. Similarly, Israel in the future

will stand about to be judged in front of God and they will be afraid of the judgment. The angels will say to them: Don't be afraid of the judgment. Don't you recognize the judge? He is a fellow townsman, as it says: "He shall build my city and set my exiles free." (Is. 45:13) They returned and said to them: Don't be afraid of the judgment. Don't you recognize the judge? He is your relative, as it says: "The children of Israel are a people near to him" (related to him) (Ps. 148:14) And more than that, he is your brother, as it says: "For the sake of my brother and friend." (Ps. 122:8) And more than that, he is your father, as it says: "Is he not your father who acquired you?" (Deut. 32:6)

The development in this passage is significant. God is first described as Israel's neighbor, then as Israel's relative, then as brother, and lastly, 'and more than that', as God's father. Immediately we see how significant the status of child is in terms being protected; it is considerably more important than any of these other categories. What is the nature of the protection? It seems that if Israel is afraid of the judgment, they must have done something to be afraid of--they apparently have sinned. But because they are God's children, they have no need to fear. While the text does not say whether in fact they receive no punishment or a lighter punishment than they deserve, the point is clear: they are protected from the judgment they deserve by virtue of their status as God's children. It is interesting to point out here that part of the role of being 'child' seems to involve being judged by the father. Note that this is not a king-child parable; it is a regular father-child relationship

that seems to be described here. So parents judge and give punishment for failings and children stand under their judgment. But children have some protection against normal judgment.

From Israel's perspective, their status as God's children enables them to preferential treatment. We see this in Lamentations Rabba 1:38. There Israel complains that God enables the Egyptians to be buried, but he does not bury them. They refer to Psalm 79:3: "They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them." This, Israel complains to God, is not according to your law. They go on to point out that the earth swallowed up the Egyptians,⁵ and this constitutes burial. The passage is very interesting in that it shows us Israel complaining because they are not being treated like children, and they feel that this is unjust. Their experience of themselves is that they see themselves in a special relationship to God which should enable them to some kind of preferential treatment. They perceive themselves to be different from the Egyptians who are described in the text as 'asses'. They are God's children, and they are demanding that God acknowledge that. If God buries the Egyptians, they reason, all the more reason he should bury our dead because we are his children. Again we see the distinction between Israel and another nation--Israel are called 'children'; Egyptians called 'asses'. We also see the expectation of a special kind of treatment. Implicitly, Israel is saying to

God: it is a father's responsibility to bury his children. You must bury our dead for we are your children!

What is the image of Israel as child which has emerged up to this point? First, the fact of Israel's status as God's child is an indication of God's love for Israel. Second, that love is translated in a variety of ways. Israel experiences God's love in that they receive Torah, sustenance, and the means to provide for themselves. God's love enables Israel to the protection that children receive. By virtue of their child status, they are not given the full punishment⁶ and they are not punished to the extent that they deserve to be. They are also physically protected by God. We saw this above⁷ in Pesikta Rabbati 31 where Israel was compared to a boy who was crossing a river with his father. When the waters threatened to drown him, even holding on to his father's hand was not enough to save him, so he yelled to his father "Lift up your hand." The son was saved. Similarly, David cried to God: "The nations are drowning us!" so God lifted his hand and they were saved. Israel is protected in another way as well. God provides intermediaries to intercede on his son's behalf. This is clear from Tanchuma, Hiazinu 2. Moses pleads for Israel before God, and when he is about to die, he arranges other intermediaries to intercede on their behalf. Israel needs intermediaries and God provides them. Israel said to Isaiah, "Even though God called us his children, our souls fled when he spoke to us at Sinai." They asked him to do what Moses did and be their intermediary. The text is

interesting in that their acknowledgement of their child status would seem to imply that they did not need an intermediary; that they could communicate with their father directly. It seems, however, that they choose to have an intermediary even though their status suggests that they do not have to have one. In any case, because they are God's children, he provides that intermediary. So their status as child affords them all manner of protection; physical, moral and even protection from their father himself.

We have also learned that an indication of God's love reflected in their status as child is their special position vis a vis the other nations. They are separated and distinguished to God unlike any other people. This includes the distinction which we mentioned above; their sins are temporary while their other nations's sins are a permanent condition. Because of this special status, they also expect special treatment from their father.

Lastly, we have learned that their status as God's child carries with it special responsibility. They are expected to serve their father, through sacrifices, through Mitzvot, and through using the gifts that God has given them to provide for themselves.

God's love for Israel is the primary condition of Israel's position as child. Israel wants God to dwell with them because it is an honor for children to be with their father. So we learn in Exodus Rabba 34:4⁸ that Israel builds God a house, the tabernacle, so he can come and dwell with his

children. Out of love the children create a place for their father; out of love the father dwells in that place to be with his children.

11. Israel as Problem Child

As we indicated above, one implication of the child status of Israel is that Israel has special responsibilities to their father. The Rabbis were acutely aware that Israel often did not fulfil their responsibilities to their father, and therefore were bad children. The notion that Israel has been a bad child or a problem child is of major importance in interpreting the image of Israel as child.

It seems that the proclivity to be bad is part of the condition of being a child, according to the Rabbis. "Being bad" mostly centers around ignoring the wishes of the parent or making the parent angry. We have seen this in the Yalkut Shimoni text mentioned above.⁹ Commenting on the Proverbs verse: "Foolishness is tied up in the heart of a child" (Prov. 22:15) the child is understood to refer to Israel because Israel is always making God angry. It would seem from this that foolishness is the natural condition of the child, that children naturally do things which make their parents angry. According to the text, the child needs to be punished in order to be properly directed and eventually to live a good life. Their father provides for their punishment, as we discussed above, and because the goal of that punishment is to reorient their life in the proper direction, we can say that the punishment is a punishment which comes from their father's love. The important point to emphasize here is that foolishness and rebellion, terms for doing that which will

anger one's parent, seems to be the natural condition of the child. This natural condition suggests that the child, almost by definition, needs punishment to point out the right way to live. So the child needs a punisher as well; the child needs his parent for moral instruction.

Rebellion on the part of Israel means ignoring God's commandments. We see this in Exodus Rabba 30:5:

"Rabbi Samuel says: The Holy One, praised be He, gave injunctions having both a lighter and a more serious side. For example, 'He who smites his father'. God said: 'If Ham, the father of Canaan, who did not smite but only looked (at his father) was condemned to slavery, both him and his descendants, how much more so he who both curses and smites? To whom does this refer? To the Ten Tribes who refused to bear the yoke of God so Sennacherib came and captured them. It is like a king who had ten sons that rebelled against him and nullified his edicts, so he said to them: 'As you have nullified my edicts, I will call they fly to take vengeance on you.' Similarly, the ten tribes rebelled against God and disregarded the Torah, as it says: 'They have denied the Lord and said: It is not He.' (Jer. 5:12) there God brought the fly as it says: 'That the Lord shall hiss for the fly.' (Isa. 7:18)--this is Sennacherib. When Israel disregarded the commandments, it is as if they curse their parents, for God is our father, as it says: 'But now, O Lord, You are our father' (Isa. 64:7) and the Torah is our mother, for it says: 'Forsake not the teaching of your mother.' (Prov. 1:8) She brought us up at Sinai, as it says: 'I have taught you in the way of wisdom.' (Prov. 4:11)

For Israel to disregard God's commandments is almost to curse their parents, God and Torah. It is interesting to note that Torah here has the status of Israel's mother because Torah brought Israel up. Since Torah is given by God, God acts as mother through the Torah that God has given. Cursing one's

parents is a very serious offense, as the text points out. Israel is punished severely for this offense; they are captured by a foreign ruler. The punishment for being a bad child, for ignoring the father's commandments and the mother's teachings, is a severe one. The juxtaposition of the royal image of parenting in the parable and the general command against cursing one's parents in the conclusion is interesting. In the parable, the king's edicts are ignored by his son. So, with the total power of a king, he calls upon a foreign ruler to capture his sons. The second image is a more simple statement: to disregard the commandments is to curse your father and mother.

Cursing one's parents and ignoring the commandments are closely related in the image of Israel as child. The fact that Israel does not acknowledge their father is a common correlary of the 'problem child' motif. We see this most clearly in the beginning of the third chapter of Pesikta de Rav Kahana:

"Rabbi Levi said: What parable applies to Israel? The parable of a man who had a son whom he placed on his shoulder and took to the market. When the son saw something he wanted, he said to his father: 'Buy it for me,' and his father bought it. This happened one, two, three times. Then the son saw someone whom he asked: 'Have you seen my father?' The man said to his son: 'You fool. You are on my shoulders! Everything you want I buy for you, yet you say to this man, 'Have you seen my father!'' What did the father do? He threw his son from his shoulders and a dog came and bit the son. Similarly, when Israel came out of Egypt, the Holy One encompassed them with

seven clouds of glory, as it is said: 'He encircled him, He cared for him.' (Deut. 32:10) They asked for manna, he gave it; for quail, he gave it. After he gave all that they asked, they begin to think and said: 'Is the Lord among us or not?' (Ex17:7) The Holy One said to them: 'You wonder whether I am among you or not? As you live I will make you acknowledge me! Here is a dog to bite you!' And who was the dog? Amalek, for it says: (In the next verse) 'Then came Amalek.' Therefore it is said: 'Remember.' (Deut. 25:17)

Israel is a spoiled child in the classic sense of the word. His father gives him everything that he could possibly want, but he does not acknowledge his father. In this text, he seems to take for granted that all of his needs will be met, but he does not know who is providing for them. He angers his father by publicly not recognizing him, and the purpose of the punishment is to force the child to recognize who his father is and what his father has done for him. On his own, the son can not do much. He goes to market because he is carried there by his father; Israel comes out of Egypt because of God's efforts. Everything he wants his father buys for him; all of Israel's needs are provided for by God. The condition of childhood seems to imply that alone the child is helpless; he needs his father to provide for him in every sense. The responsibility that comes with that condition is to acknowledge the one who is providing--the father.

This is emphasized in Pesikta Rabbati 21.¹⁰ Here Israel is compared to a prince who was born while his father

was out of the country. After many years, the king came back and held a reception. The son went to the reception looking for his father. When the son saw a duke he stared at him; when he saw a governor, he stared at him, saying each time: This is he! This is he! The king watched him and said, "My son, why do you look at these? You have no benefit from them! You are my son and I am your father!" Similarly, when God came down on Mt. Sinai, Israel looked at the angel Gabriel and Michael saying, 'This is He! This is He!' God said to Israel, "Why are you looking at them? You have no profit from them! You are my children and I am your father!"

Israel here clearly does not recognize their father. Every important person seems to be their father. The royal image is especially powerful here; their father is the king, the most powerful person in the kingdom, yet the son can not distinguish him from lesser officials, the duke and the governor. The most significant element of the passage is that it tells us that to be a son means to get some kind of profit from the father. In a royal image, the potential profit is enormous; the son stands in line to inherit all the king's wealth. To be God's son also means the profit is enormous; Israel is about to receive God's greatest treasure--the Torah. One other important element which emerges from the text is the fact that even though the son's father, the king, was absent during much of his growing up, he still had a father who presumably provided for him in absentia. The fact that the son did not recognize his father does not mean

that he had not been benefiting from the relationship all along. Similarly, all the time Israel was in Egypt, to follow the metaphor, God was still their father, albeit an absent one perhaps. So they had been protected and provided for all along.

Connected to the important notion that Israel does not always recognize God, is the idea that Israel only recognizes God as their father when they are in trouble. While we discussed these texts above from the perspective of God, it is important to look at them again from Israel's vantage point. The clearest example is from Exodus Rabba 46:4. There Israel is compared to the son of a doctor who met a quack doctor and addressed him as 'my father'. Yet immediately after the boy becomes ill, he calls his own father to help him. When the son sees that he is really in trouble, he recognizes that he needs his father. We learn from this that while under usual circumstances the son believes he can function without his father, he really cannot; sons need their fathers even when they refuse to acknowledge that need. In the case of the doctor, the son needs the skill that only his real father can provide. Israel called idols 'my father'¹¹, but when they perceive themselves in serious trouble, they call God. This text also points out that even while the son has not shown his father proper respect, he still counts on his father to be with him in time of trouble. This is an extraordinary image of parental forgiveness. In Exodus Rabba 46:5, the same phenomenon occurs. There God

complains to Israel that they only acknowledge him as father when they are in trouble. But here God tells them that he will only show himself as father to those who do his will. Even though God's response is different in these two examples, the reality of Israel's perception is the same. In both cases, Israel only acknowledges God when they are in trouble. As son, their orientation is to ignore their father until they need him.

This same theme emerges in Exodus Rabba 46:3. Beginning with the verse "A son honors his father and a servant his master," (Mal. 1:6) God complains that Israel has neither honored him as their father nor feared him as their master. Rather, only when they see themselves in trouble do they call God their father. It is quite clear that a son has the responsibility to honor his father; by only acknowledging God in time of trouble, Israel is most certainly not honoring their father. The text points to a very important issue in the discussion of Israel as a problem child. If Israel does not acknowledge God as their father, will God continue to acknowledge Israel as his child? In this text, Israel is neither behaving properly as a child--they do not honor their father, nor behaving properly as a slave--they do not fear their master. There seem to be both these elements in Israel's relation to God, son and slave.

If Israel is bad, do they lose the status of son? This is the most serious question in the entire discussion of Israel as son. If we answer in the affirmative, then the child

status of Israel is a conditional status. If we answer in the negative, then whatever Israel does, they remain God's child, and therefore continue to reap the benefit of that relationship. The major statement found concerning this controversy comes from Kiddushin 36b.

"There is a dispute between Abaye and Rabba over how to interpret the verse: 'You are sons...' (Deut. 14:1) That is wanted for what was taught: 'You are sons of the Lord your God.' when you behave as sons, you are called sons; if you do not behave as sons, you are not called sons: this is Rabbi Judah's view. Rabbi Meir said: In both cases you are called sons, for it is said: 'they are sottish children' (Jer. 4:22) and it is also said: 'They are children in whom there is no faith'. (Deut. 32:20) It is also said, 'A seed of evil doers, sons that deal corruptly,' (Isa. 1:4) and it is also said: 'And it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, 'You are not my people', it shall be said unto them, 'You are the sons of the living God. 'Why all this additional quotations? Should you reply, they are only called sons when they are foolish, but not when they lack faith, then come and hear: 'They are sons in whom there is no faith.' And should you say, when they have no faith they are called sons but not when they serve idols, then come and hear: 'a seed of evil doers, sons that act corruptly.' And should you say, they are sons that act corruptly, but not good sons, then come and hear: 'And it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, you are not my people, it shall be said unto them, you are the sons of the living God.'"

For Rabbi Judah, Israel is only called sons when they behave as sons, that is, when they are obedient to their father. Rabbi Meir argues that this is not true; Israel is called sons no matter what they do, whether they are foolish, lacking in

faith or corrupt. The stakes in this controversy are very high. What seems to be at issue is Israel's position vis a vis God. For Rabbi Judah, Israel can so disrupt that relationship that they lose their protected status and, by implication, God's love. For Rabbi Meir, nothing they can do will challenge the primacy of their relationship to God as that of a son to a father. It is important to point out that the text only speaks about what Israel is called, not what they are in fact. It is a subtle distinction, but a real one. Again we are reminded of the importance of symbolic language in the relationship of Israel to God.

This debate continues in other sources. We find essentially the same argument between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Judah in Siphre 133. There as above, Rabbi Meir's position seems to be the more convincing. In the Jerusalem Talmud, Chapter 1, Halacha 8, Israel is called son when they do God's will, but when they do not do God's will they are not called son. But from Siphre 137, we learn that the verse from Deuteronomy 32:20 "They are children in whom there is no faith" proves that they are children of God even when they have no faith. In Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy 14:1, Rabbi Meir says: "Beloved is Israel for whether they do God's will or not they are still called children." When Israel does God's will, he argues, they unify God's name. He continues by pointing out that while the angels are also called God's children¹², Israel is still in a preferred position because they are called God's 'first born son'.¹³ This text makes it quite clear that Israel's position as God's son is an

indication of God's love for them. They have the responsibility to be good sons because through doing God's will they unify his name. God will be angry at his children if they do not do his will, but they are his children nonetheless. Sifre, in another place¹⁴, records more of the debate between Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Meir. Commenting on the verse from Deuteronomy 32:19, "The Lord saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and daughters," Rabbi Meir said: "If at the time that they anger him they are called children, all the more so when they do not anger him!"

This tension is focused even more clearly in the son/slave contrast that we discussed in Chapter One. The debate between Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Meir's teacher, and the gentile Turnus Rufus in Baba Batra 10a centers around Turnus Rufus' claim that when Israel is good they are called sons and when Israel is bad they are called slaves. Rabbi Akiba counters by arguing that Israel is always called son. In Pesikta Rabbati 27, we learn that if Israel does God's will, God will treat him as an only child, but if they do not do God's will, God will treat them like a slave. Further, we learn that if Israel does not do God's will of their own choice, he will force them to do it as though they were a slave. From Exodus Rabba 24:1, we learn that if Israel is worthy, God is their father. If they do God's will, he will do theirs. And, similar to the text above, we are told here that if Israel does God's will, they will be treated as a son, while if they do not, they will be treated as a slave. Just as a slave does

his master's will whether he likes it or not, so Israel will do God's will whether they like it or not.

These last two examples seem to support the position advanced by Turnus Rufus as opposed to that of Rabbi Akiba. While we see that there is evidence for the contention that Israel is only God's child as long as they behave as children should, it still seems that the weight of opinion suggests that Israel is always God's child. Therefore, when Israel is bad, they fall under the category of 'problem child'. As bad children, they deserve punishment, but it is the punishment that is meted out by a father to his child.

From Israel's point of view, their child-status should always ease the punishment. From God's perspective, however, when Israel does not behave, justice demands that they be treated like non-children.

What is the nature of that punishment? From Siphre, Chapter 40 God is compared to a king whose sons served him and they were provided for from the riches of the king's treasuries. When they did his bidding, he opened his treasuries and they ate and were satisfied; when they did not do his will, he locked his treasuries and they starved to death. In this case, Israel remains God's children even when they do not do his will, but their punishment is quite severe. One might ask whether there really is any difference here between seeing Israel as a son who can be so badly punished and seeing Israel as a slave. If God can let his children starve to death, of what value is the child status? This text seems to indicate

the most extreme form of punishment that the father can mete out to his child; it is a rather unique position. Most other examples show the child being severely punished, but there is usually some sense that once the child repents, they can reestablish their favored position to their father. Here we see that fathers can be harsh. But although God lets individual Jews starve he does not do so to the whole people.

A different example is found in Eicha Rabbati 1:1. There Israel is compared to the son of a king. When the son is good, the king dresses him in beautiful garments, but when he is bad, the king dresses him in the garments of the exiled. While the punishment is severe, it seems clear that it is only a temporary condition which can be changed as soon as the son begins to obey his father. Here tshuvah is emphasized rather than punishment. In both these examples, we again see that it is the condition of the son to be dependent on the father. All the more dependent in the royal relationship we have described here. The son feeds himself through that which the father provides; the son is dressed in the clothes that the father provides for him. In the royal relationship, this dependency is more exaggerated; the prince can aspire to be dressed in 'richly woven work',¹⁵ in 'purple garments' or 'embroidered garments'.¹⁶ For him to end up with the rags of exiled garments reflects the extreme displeasure of his royal father. In both these examples it is important to note that the son brings about his own punishment. There is no sense whatsoever of the father, the king, being

arbitrary about these punishments. The son consciously, it seems, did not do his father's bidding and therefore has earned these punishments.

Consider the passage from Lamentations Rabba 2:2.

"He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel." (Lam. 2:1) Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Acha in the name of Rabbi Hanina the son of Rabbi Abahu. It is like a king who had a son who cried, so the king picked him up and put him on his lap. The boy continued to cry, so the king held him in his arms. The son continued to cry, so the king put him on his shoulders. The boy messed on him and immediately the father threw him to the ground. And the throwing down was not like the lifting up! The lifting up was very gradual, while the throwing down was all at once! Similarly, "And I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms." (Hos. 11:3) And, after that, "I will make Ephraim ride..." (here understood as I will carry Ephraim) (Hos. 10:11) And, after that, "He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel."

This text points out several things. First, we see the protected status of the son. He cries, and his father, the king, picks him up to comfort him. That this is a royal parable makes it more significant. Who else would a king pick up in his own arms but one he loves very much, his own son. But the son takes advantage of his father's love and messes on him! The image of the son here is that of a spoiled child; he cries and cries and refuses to be comforted. And, to add insult to injury, he abuses his own father. There are limits to the father's patience, so he throws his son on the ground, roughly. Similarly, Israel misused God's patient love,

and they too were thrown down. Through this treatment, the son learns that he cannot abuse his father. So the punishment of the son has a purpose; the son learns not to abuse his father's love.

In Shir haShirim Rabba 8:14, we see the purpose of punishment. There Israel is compared to a king's son who is delivered over to a slave for punishment. When the slave tells the prince in the middle of his beating him that he should no longer listen to his father, the prince responds: "You fool! It is because I did not listen to my father that I am here in the first place!" When the Temple was destroyed and Israel was exiled as a result of their sins, Nebuchadnezzar told them not to listen to God's Torah and instead to worship the images he had made. Israel responded: "You fool! It is because we worshipped idols in the first place that we were punished!"

So the child understands why he is being punished. He admits his guilt. We are left with the sense that in the future, the child will have learned that he should obey his father. We also see that there is a difference between sinning and refusing to acknowledge one's sinfulness. It seems that the refusal to acknowledge one's sinfulness is the more serious offense.

Midrash on Psalms 78:9 points out that Israel longs for God's control.

"And though they still again tried God, they

set bounds for the Holy One of Israel." (Ps. 78:40) Rabbi Hanina said: It is like a man who said, 'I myself will strike my son'. Similarly, Israel said to the Holy One, Praised be He: 'Master of the Universe, don't give us to a human being to rule us. Instead, you judge us. Thus, 'They set bounds for the Holy One of Israel' means Israel longed for the control of the Holy One.¹⁷

Not only do we learn from this that children need control, but we also learn that at least in the case of Israel, they recognize that they need the control of their father, God. There is a sense from this text that Israel recognizes that the punishment that they will get from God is different from that which they receive from human rulers. Perhaps what is being intimated here is that because God is their father and he loves them, the punishment they will receive is a punishment that comes from love.

We have learned several important things from this material; taken together, we can understand Israel's self image as the child of God. First, it is in the nature of a child to rebel against his father, that is, to be bad. Children need control. They need punishment in order to direct them toward proper behavior and a proper orientation to the world. When the child is bad, when he disregards his parent, he in effect curses him and he deserves the punishment that is meted out to him. To be a child means to profit from the father, and yet the child is often spoiled and refuses to acknowledge his dependency on his father. A son often recognizes his father only in times of trouble, and while it is the son's

responsibility to honor his father, he often does not honor him. Finally, the status of child is an unconditional status; it is difficult to point to anything which can ultimately interfere with the constancy of the father's love for his child. Still, there are limits to what the father will accept, and his punishing the child is taken for granted.

Be seeing themselves as God's child, then, Israel first of all is affirming their sense that their relationship with God is a constant relationship defined by God's love. Israel recognizes that their suffering is brought about by their own rebellion against their father and their failure to acknowledge him except in times of trouble. They also recognize that they have responsibilities toward God: to obey him and to honor him. Finally, they recognize that ultimately all that they receive come from God and that without him they have no identity.

III. Israel as Daughter

In the previous sections of this chapter, Israel is described either specifically as son or with an unspecific gender term like 'child' or 'children'. We now turn to those occasions where Israel is described as a female child, a daughter of God.

The clearest example of the difference between the description of Israel as daughter from that of son is found in Shir haShirim Rabba 1:37.

"Rabbi Berechiah in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: Israel is compared to a female. What is a female? One who inherits one tenth of her father's property and goes out. So Israel inherited the land of the seven nations which is one tenth of the seventy nations. Because Israel inherited like a female, they said 'shira' (song) in the feminine, as it is said: "Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song (shira zot) to the Lord..." (Ex. 15:1) But in the future to come they will inherit in the future like a male who inherits all the property of his father. So it is written: "From the east side to the west, Judah one portion, Dan, one portion, Asher, one portion, and so on for each one." (paraphrase of Ez. 48:1ff.) They speak in the masculine, as it is said: "Sing unto the Lord a new song (shir hadash)." (Ps. 96:1) 'Shira' is not written here but 'shir' is."

Several things emerge from this text. First, we learn that children inherit from their fathers. Second, we learn that sons inherit more than daughters. An implication of this second point seems to be that sons are more valued than daughters. It would seem therefore that when Israel is

described as 'daughter', her relationship to her father is different from those occasions when Israel is described as son. We might suspect that her description as daughter indicates a position of less value or at least less status in this world than those times when Israel is described as son. The transformation suggested in the passage is interesting; in this world Israel interacts with God as daughter, but in the future Israel will interact with God as son. This seems to indicate a view of development and progress.

What are the implications of viewing Israel as daughter? Shir haShirim Rabba 2:27 suggests some interesting possibilities. The parable told here is rather peculiar. God is compared to a king who has an only daughter whose conversation he loves to hear. So the king organizes a public sports event where he has his daughter attacked. She begins to cry, "Father, save me!" He says to her, "If I didn't do this to you, you would not have called out to me!" So the Rabbis understand that if Israel was not oppressed in Egypt, they would never have called out to God. But God heard their prayers in Egypt and so he brought them out. The suggestion that God arranged Israel's suffering in Egypt is a way to explain their suffering; it serves as a hyperbolic theodicy. Is it significant that the child in the parable is a daughter? One might argue that the child here is particularly vulnerable. She does not even attempt to fight back. Her only recourse is to appeal to her father. Even though the whole situation

is a 'set up', as it were, she seems to be particularly vulnerable. We might conclude from this, then, that the image of Israel as daughter indicates a position of weakness. It is not, as we speculated above, that she is less valued than Israel as son; it is clear that her father, the king, arranged the whole situation because he loved her and loved to hear her talk, which suggests that she is valued. Instead, it is that she is especially vulnerable and dependent on her father, and he protects her. It also seems to be related to the previous theme that Israel only calls God 'father' when they are in trouble.

The suggestion that the image of Israel as daughter is an image of weakness is born out in Shir haShirim 1. Playing on the word 'שָׁמַטִּי' which in the biblical text means 'I have compared you', the Rabbis translate 'I have quieted you' or 'I have told you to be silent.' Here Israel is compared to the daughter of a king who is captured, and at the moment that her father is ready to rescue her, she motions to her captors that she will follow them. Her father says: "Don't you think I can rescue you? Be quiet!" The parallel is Israel encircled by the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Just as Israel signals to the Egyptians that she belongs to them, God says, "Do you think I can't rescue you? Be quiet!" The biblical proof text concludes: "The Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace." (Ex. 14:4) Here too Israel seems particularly vulnerable. Not only is she not capable of defending herself, but she also seems to have little faith

in her father's ability to rescue her. While we have seen Israel as son in a position of having little faith and being totally dependent on his father, there seems to be an escalation of Israel's vulnerability in these daughter images. As daughter Israel seems to have no power on her own; it does not even occur to her to try to protect herself. Again, she is protected by her father.

In Shir haShirim Rabba 6:18, Israel is compared to the daughter of a king who was working in the fields. When the king passed by and recognized her, he sent someone to take her from the fields and bring her back in a carriage. When her friends saw this, they were astonished and said, "Yesterday you were working in the fields and today you sit in a carriage with the king!" She responded, "Just as you are astonished about me, I am astonished about myself!" Similarly, when Israel was in Egypt they worked with straw and bricks and they were loathed and scorned by the Egyptians. But when they were made free people and redeemed and made primates of all who enter the world, the other nations were astonished and said, "Yesterday you worked with straw and bricks and today you are free and the primates of the world!" And Israel said to them, "Just as you are surprised, so are we!" This text is especially interesting in that Israel does not seem to know that she is God's daughter; she is as surprised about her change in status as the other nations are. When we compare this to Pesikta Rabbati 21, discussed above,¹⁸ where the king's son knows that he is a prince but does not recognize

his father, we immediately see the difference; here Israel does not even know that she is a princess. The terms in which Israel is described are relatively passive ones; she is recognized by the king and then she is elevated to her rightful status, but through her experiences she does not initiate any kind of change. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that her rightful status as the king's daughter enables her to be made the chief of all who enter the world--her new position is an extremely important one.

In Pesikta de Rav Kahana הווינום עס חלל נא, which we have discussed above¹⁹, Israel is compared to a king's daughter for whom her father appointed a guardian. When she did the king's bidding, she was allowed self-governance, but when she rebelled, self-governance was taken away from her. When Israel did God's will, the prophets praised her, but when Israel rebelled, the prophets rebuked her. This text is reminiscent of all the father-son texts we discussed above where God punishes his son when he does not obey his father's will. Like these others, here again we see the constancy of the father-child relationship; even when Israel rebels, she is still considered God's daughter. But because Israel is a daughter here, the text suggests some interesting observations. The function of the guardian, the prophets, seems to be to encourage the girl to be able to govern herself. The goal of this educational relationship is some kind of autonomy. The girl child is expected to be able to make choices herself and to choose to obey her father. The function

of this education, then, is moral autonomy. This is a startling image of the development of a girl child because we do not expect it. She is expected to grow up from her position as passive child into a position of moral choice.

The notion of development here is the theme of Shir haShirim Rabba 3:15.²⁰ While moral development is the topic of the next section, we will discuss this text in this context because Israel is described as a daughter.

"He made himself a palanquin." (Song of Songs 3:9) Rabbi Azzariah in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Simon interpreted the verse as applying to the tabernacle. 'A palanquin': this refers to the tabernacle. Said Rabbi Judah ben Illai: It is as if a king had a young daughter, and before she grew up and reached maturity he used to see her in the market and speak to her in public, in an alleyway or a courtyard. After she grew up and reached maturity, the king said, "It is not becoming for my daughter that I should speak with her in public. Make her therefore a pavillion and when I need to speak with her I will do so within the pavillion." So it is written: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." (Hos. 11:1) In Egypt, the Israelites saw God in the open, as it is said: "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians." (Ex. 12:23) At the Red Sea, they saw him in the open, as it says: "And Israel saw the great work (literally 'hand')," (Ex. 14:31) and the children pointed to him with the finger and said: "This is my God and I will glorify him." (Ex. 15:2) At Sinai they saw him face to face, as it says: "And he said: The Lord came from Sinai." (Deut. 33:2) But after Israel had stood before Mt. Sinai and received the Torah and said, "All the Lord has spoken we will do and we will obey" (Ex. 24:7) and they had become completely God's people, the Holy One, Praised be He, said: 'It is not becoming for my people that I should speak with them in the open. Let them therefore make for me a tabernacle, and whenever I require to speak with

them, I shall speak with them from the midst of the tabernacle." So it says: "But when Moses went in before the Lord that he might speak with him, etc." (Ex. 34:34)

This text describes how God's relationship to his daughter Israel changes as she grows up. When she is little he speaks with her everywhere, but when she reaches puberty, his relationship with her changes. Puberty is clearly a metaphor for receiving the Torah, an image we will discuss in detail in the next section. Israel is a daughter who grows up. When she becomes mature, her relationship to her father becomes more limited, but in a certain sense, more intimate. It is not seemly for the father to speak with his mature daughter in public; one senses that that might be construed as somehow sexually inappropriate. Her relationship with him must be more defined. The significant thing to note, however, is that as daughter, she can speak with her royal father. When it is no longer appropriate for her to speak with him in public, he creates the opportunity for her to speak with him in another setting. We see the specialness of their relationship; the facility for their communication must be established, so in the parable, the king has a pavillion built for the express purpose of enabling that communication. Similarly, God has Israel build him a tabernacle to enable their communication to continue. The status of daughter, then, involves a closeness with the father and a sense that communication between daughter and father is an important aspect of the

relationship. We also see that as daughter, Israel's need for communication is provided for by her father.

The image of Israel as daughter, then, suggests several things. First, we see that there are differences between Israel as daughter and Israel as son. As daughter, while she does inherit from her father, it is a partial kind of inheriting. As son, Israel inherits all the property of his father. Yet in both cases, Israel is provided for by their father. Both as daughter and as son, Israel is loved by their father. In both cases Israel is protected. Yet in the case of the daughter, there is some sense of extreme vulnerability; Israel seems somewhat more passive as daughter than as son. Yet at the same time, we are told that the goal for the daughter is to achieve some kind of independence and moral autonomy; she is trained to learn to choose to obey her father. Finally, we see that the underpinning of both Israel as daughter and Israel as son is God's love for his child. There is a recognition that communication is an important means to that end. Because Israel as a daughter is beloved to God, God wants to facilitate communication with her.

In sum, the image of Israel as daughter does not seem to be radically different from that of Israel as son. Perhaps the emphases are different but the underlying conditions are the same.

IV. The Developmental Image

The image of child carries within it the fact that the child grows up. Childhood is but one stage in the development of a human being. When Israel is conceived of as a child, does that also imply that Israel will grow up? If so, at what stage does Israel become an adult? The relationship between a human parent and a child changes as the child grows up; does the relationship between God and Israel change as Israel grows up?

We have already seen many examples of Israel as a child at different stages of development. We saw Israel as an embryo in Shir haShirim Rabba 7:6 and Israel as a new born infant in Shir haShirim Rabba 8:1. The second text is interesting in that Israel became a new born baby at Sinai. In this case, the giving of the Law, the act through which Israel was transformed from a rabble of unconnected individuals into a people, was like a day of birth for Israel. According to this text, it was through receiving the law that Israel came to life.

Because Israel is an infant, he is treated in a special way.

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him."
(Hos. 11:1) This is what the Scripture says:
"And he said to him before the eyes of all
Israel: Be strong and of good courage." (Deut.
31:7) And Moses said (to Joshua): The people
that I deliver to you are still baby goats;
they are still infants. Do not be strict with
them about what they do because even their

Master is not strict with them about what they do. Thus it is said: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and I called him out of Egypt 'my son'." Rabbi Judah said: I don't have this permission but I do have permission to enter them in the side of the shepherd's tent.²¹ You find that when they stood by the sea, they rebelled, as it is said: "They rebelled at the sea, at the Red Sea." (Ps. 106:7) The angels said: "They rebelled and angered you and yet you are quiet!" God said to them, "They are children! You shouldn't be strict with children! What is the way of a baby? He comes out dirty from his mother's womb and they wash him." Even Israel "I washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and shod you with leather."²²

Because they are still children, they are to be treated gently. Even God does not become angry at them for their transgressions because it is expected that children will make mistakes. It is in the nature of a baby to be dirty and to need washing; it is in the nature of a baby to transgress and to need gentle attention.

In what way are the people still children? This is explained in one of the parallel passages, Avot de Rav Nathan, version 1, section 17. "In that hour Moses said to Joshua: 'Joshua, this people which I am handing over to you, not goats but kids I hand over to you, not sheep but lambs I hand over to you, for they have not yet had much practice in the commandments and they are not yet goats and sheep.' A child, then, is one who does not have practice in the commandments, who does not know how to follow the rules. This is consonant with the legal tradition concerning maturity: when a boy

reaches the age of majority, thirteen years and one day, he is obliged to observe all of the commandments. The clear suggestion from these texts is that while Israel is now just children, they will grow up to a time when they do have practice in the commandments, they will grow up into a different stage. Their key to the movement from one stage to another seems to be their relationship to the Law and to the commandments.

The notion that babies and youngsters should not be punished for transgression also appears in Aggadat Berashit 5:1. There we learn that "When a man's son is an infant, if he sins, his father does not discard him because he is little; but after he has grown and he has the ability to reason if he sins his father discards him." The text continues to point out that Israel is still a baby. Clearly, however, the implication is: at some point Israel will grow up and have the ability to reason and then Israel's sins will be a serious matter.

We see this again in Exodus Rabba 43:9.

"...whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt." (Ex. 32:12) Why is the going out of Egypt mentioned here? Rabbi Avin in the name of Rabbi Simon ben Yehotzadak said: To what can this be compared? To a king who had a barren field. He said to the tenant farmer: Go and cultivate this and make it into an orchard. The farmer went and cultivated it and planted an orchard. The orchard grew and he made wine which soured. When the king saw that the wine had soured, he said to the farmer: Go and cut it down! What do I need with an orchard that makes vinegar? The farmer

responded: My Lord king, how much produce came from the orchard before it existed? And now you want to cut it down? If you say: because it produced sour wine, it is because it is young that it produced vinegar instead of good wine. Similarly, when Israel did the same deed, God wanted to destroy them. But Moses said: Master of the Universe, didn't you bring them from Egypt, from a place of idol worship? And now they are young, as it is said: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." (Hos. 11:1) Be patient a little and go with them and they will do good deeds before you. But Moses besought the Lord his God and said: 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent he brought them forth, to slay them...' Turn from your fierce wrath and repent of this evil against your people." (Ex. 32:11-12) Rabbi Hanina bar Aba said: Let there be regret before you. God said to Moses: What you say--repent of this evil against your people--by your life I will, as it is said: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." (Ibid. 32:14)

It is interesting to notice here that it is Moses who reminds God what a parent is supposed to do. God is angry and wants to destroy Israel because of their sins, but Moses points out that the people are still children and as children they should not be punished. Israel as children needs God to be patient with them and to be with them until they learn to do good deeds. Just as one should expect that the first crops from a new field will yield sour wine, deeds from a child will not be good deeds.

In Shir haShirim Rabba 8:8 we have the image of Israel as a girl child, although not necessarily as God's daughter. Commenting on the verse "We have a little sister" (Song of Songs

8:8), the text tells us that the little sister is Israel. It continues: "What is a little one? One that all that he does you do not hit him, why? Because he is little. Similarly, all that Israel dirties with their sins all during the year, Yom Kippur comes and atones for them." This image is considerably different from the others in that Israel's sins are washed away by Yom Kippur. But again we have the sense that because Israel is a child, his sins do not merit the same kind of punishment that they would merit if Israel were older. It is interesting to note that the Rabbis seem to have no difficulty in switching the sex of the child almost arbitrarily.

The image of Israel as a girl child, but again, not necessarily a daughter of God, figures in the Mechilta on Exodus 12:6.

"And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month." Why did the scripture require the purchase of the paschal lamb to take place four days before its slaughter? Rabbi Matia ben Heresh used to say: Behold it says: "Now when I passed by you and looked upon you and behold, the time was the time of love." (Ez. 16:8) This means the time has arrived for the fulfillment of the oath which the Holy One, Praised be He, had sworn unto Abraham, to deliver his children. But as yet they had no religious duties to perform by which to merit redemption, as it further says: "Your breasts were fashioned and your hair was grown, yet you were naked and bare" (ibid) which means bare of any religious deeds. Therefore the Holy One, Praised be He, assigned them two duties, the duty of the paschal sacrifice and the duty of circumcision, which they should perform so as to be worthy of redemption. For thus it is said: "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing

in your blood, I said to you, In your blood, live!" (ibid 6) And again it is said: 'As for you also, because of the blood of the covenant I sent forth your prisoners out of the pit from wherein there is no water,' (Zech 9:11) For this reason, Scripture required that the purchase of the paschal lamb take place four days before its slaughter. For one cannot obtain rewards except for deeds."

The issue being addressed here is: why was Israel redeemed from Egypt? Did Israel merit redemption by some action or did God gratuitously choose to redeem Israel? This section argues that Israel did nothing to merit redemption. The time came when God had promised to fulfil his oath to Abraham to redeem his people, but the people had no religious duties, Mitzvot, which they were doing so as to merit redemption. Therefore, God gave them two commandments to fulfil: the purchasing of the paschal lamb and circumcision. By doing these commandments, Israel would be worthy of redemption. This explains why Scripture required the purchase of the paschal lamb several days before its slaughter--so that through this purchase, the people could observe a commandment before the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

The images used to describe Israel's condition are the images of puberty. The physical signs of puberty described in the Ezekiel text (16:4-8) are translated into metaphors for religious maturity. The child is physically mature, she has breasts and pubic hair, but she is religiously naked, naked of Mitzvot. This allegory is central to the developmental

image of the child; the signs of physical maturity are connected to signs of religious maturity--mitzvot. This equation is emphasized over and over again. In Shir haShirim Rabba, breasts are consistently understood in reference to fulfilling mitzvot. In one instance,²³ Moses and Aaron, the exemplars of Torah, are described as the breasts of Israel. In another example,²⁴ the verse "We have a little sister" is taken to refer to the patriarch Abraham. The text goes on to explain that although Abraham was little, he occupied himself with religious observance and good deeds. It continues with an explanation of the verse: "And she had no breasts"--that means that as yet Abraham was under no obligation to observe the commandments. Here again, the signs of physical maturity are understood as metaphors for religious and moral maturity.

In Shir haShirim Rabba 30:6, God is compared to a king who had an orchard which he kept. When his children came of age, he gave it to them, instructing them to guard it as he had guarded it. The orchard is the Torah, and when Israel responded "We will do and we will obey", God gave them the Torah. The signal of Israel's reaching maturity, then, is their saying "we will do and we will obey". In other words, when they agreed to follow the Torah, they reached maturity. This image enriches the image where Israel came to life at Sinai. Here, the text indicates that they became a mature person at Sinai.

In the Shir haShirim Rabba text that we discussed above,²⁵ (3:15) we see the same image. When Israel said 'we will do and we will obey', they became a complete people, an *אדם אחד*.

Before Israel reached maturity, before they became a complete people, God would talk to them in public, but after they reached maturity, God had them build a tabernacle so he could speak with them in a manner befitting their status. The thrust of this homily seems to be that a mature nation needs a formalized structure, the tabernacle, to insure a continuing relationship with God. There is still an intimacy between God and the now mature Israel, but it is an intimacy mediated by law.

In conclusion, we see that there is a vision of development implied in the image of Israel as child. The child Israel begins as an infant who cannot take responsibility for himself. As the child grows up, his relationship with his parent changes. At first, the parent is lenient with him because he is still a child. As the child grows, he is expected to observe the parent's commandments, and the implication is that if the child fails to observe the commandments, the parent will no longer be gentle with him. The dominant image that emerges is that the child Israel is mature when he is capable of observing the mitzvot. Maturity, then, consists of observing the Mitzvot.

Notes to Chapter II

1. The text continues: "As Rabbi Phinehas said: All those seventy bullocks which Israel offer during Sukkot on behalf of the earth's seventy nations are offered so the world will not be depopulated because of them (in punishment for their sins.)"
2. The word 'לד'ל' is sometimes translated 'to be occupied in deeds' but we read with Braude 'לד'ל' -- 'gleanings'.
3. There is a parallel passage in Sh'mot Rabba 52:4.
4. The word play comes from Song of Songs 3:11: "ל'א'נה יורא'נה בנוג'ל" which is interpreted as "ל'א'נה יורא'נה בנוג'ל".
5. Ex. 15:12
6. We see this again in Pesikta Rabbati 44 and Midrash on Psalms 9:4.
7. Discussed in Ch. 1, p. 35 .
8. Discussed in Ch. 1, p. 75 .
9. From Yalkut Shimoni ע'ל'ע with a parallel passage in ע'ל'ע, discussed above in Ch. 1, p. 50.
10. Discussed above in Ch. 1, p. 67 .
11. Jer. 2:27
12. Job 1:6
13. Ex. 4:32
14. From Siphre, H'azinu.
15. Ez. 16:10
16. These are terms which are employed in the discussion in Eicha Rabbati 1:1.
17. The Midrash works on the basis of a word play. "ל'א'נה יורא'נה בנוג'ל" becomes "ל'א'נה יורא'נה בנוג'ל".
18. Discussed in Ch. 2, p. 67 .
19. Discussed in Ch. 1, p. 42 .
20. This text has several parallels: Yalkut Shimoni ע'ל'ע and ע'ל'ע; B'midbar Rabba 12:4 and Pesikta de Rav Kahana 2.

21. This is a confusing image. From parallel passages it seems to be a reference to Song of Songs 1:8.
22. This text is from Yalkut Shimoni שדמ"א. It has several parallels: Avot de Rav Natan 1:17; Siphre, Netzavim 31; Yalkut Shimoni ילנ"א:ל and שדמ"א:א Siphre B'midbar נ"ד and ילנ"א:א Sh'mot Rabba 4; Tanchuma, Pinchas and Shir haShirim Rabba 1.
23. Shir haShirim Rabba 8
24. Shir haShirim Rabba 8:1
25. Discussed in Ch. 2, p. 127.

CONCLUSION

The metaphor of God as parent and Israel as child enables the Rabbis to express two basic tensions in the God-Israel relationship. The first reflects the tension in God's relationship to Israel; the second, the tension in Israel's relationship to God.

The major image of God's parenting which we have found in the aggadah is God as father. Like human fathers, God loves his children and expresses that love by protecting, providing for, teaching and ultimately enabling his child to develop into a responsible person. But, as with human fathers, God expects certain things from his children. He expects to be obeyed, acknowledged and honored. When the child is bad and does not fulfil his responsibilities, God punishes him. A father's punishment is teliological; its purpose is not only to punish but also to instruct the child in the right way to live.

God is also described in mothering images. Like human mothers, God loves her children in an intense, all encompassing way. No matter what a child does, according to the Rabbis, a mother will continue to love her child. So we see two poles in the parental image of God--father love which is simultaneously protective and demanding, and mother love which is accepting and all-embracing.

How can one God at the same time be father and mother to Israel? It seems clear that this image is a reflection of

the basic dialectic nature of the aggadah. If God were to be totally father, and therefore forever punishing his child Israel, Israel could not be sustained. If God were totally mother, and therefore forever loving and accepting her child, Israel would never learn from his mistakes. So there must be a movement between the two poles of the dialectic. One could argue that the father image of God already reflects a middle point on the dialectic. The father never punishes as much as the child deserves; his love mediates his punishing. But a father's love seems to be teliological; there is an element in his providing, protecting, teaching that suggests that these are means toward an end. This end is the child's growing up to become a good person. A mother's love seems to be an end in itself. She simply unconditionally loves her child. Both of these aspects of parenting are crucial to the image of God as parent. The dialectic nature of the image enables God to be demanding yet loving, punishing yet protecting, challenging yet comforting.

The second tension illuminated by the parent-child metaphor is in some sense the opposite side of the first one. It relates to the image of Israel as child. On the one hand, the child needs to be protected and provided for because he cannot take care of himself. On the other hand, it is in the nature of a child to grow up and become self-supporting. Therefore, at the same time that a good parent provides for his child, he should also encourage the child to learn to

provide for himself.

Is Israel really expected to grow up and become an autonomous person? From Israel's perspective, the goal of childhood is to become an adult. From God's perspective, Israel will always be his child. Both of these are simultaneously possible because of the dialectic nature of the aggadah. Israel moves toward adult responsibility in the context of his relationship with his parent. He needs protection as he needs to learn to protect himself; he needs autonomy as he needs his parent's guidance.

The parent-child image encourages us to see the relationship between God and Israel as moving between the two poles of the dialectic. God is mother and father in relation to Israel; Israel is child and developing adult in relationship to God.

How does the image of God as parent and Israel as child differ from the image of God as husband and Israel as wife? Perhaps the major difference is that marriage is a contractual relationship while the parent-child bond is a more primary relationship. Faithfulness is the core issue of the marriage metaphor. When the wife Israel is unfaithful, she becomes estranged from her husband. While the aggadah never speaks of her as being in fact divorced, the possibility always exists that her infidelity will lead to the complete dissolution of the marriage bond. The parent-child relationship cannot be dissolved; the reality of mother-mediated father love is its constancy. Whatever Israel does, God remains his parent.

He may be punished very harshly, but it is ultimately the punishment of a parent, designed to better the child.

A second difference in these two images lies in the fact that the parent-child image allows for movement between male and female images. God is mother and father; Israel is son and daughter. The fluidity of the masculine and feminine images allows for an interplay of different roles and emotions. In the husband-wife image, God plays a masculine role to a feminine partner.

The common thrust of these images relates to their structural similarities. In both cases, God plays the dominant role to a weaker Israel. Power ultimately lies, for the Rabbis, in the father and in the husband.

It would be an interesting enterprise to examine the aggadic material that relates to the range of different familial metaphors which describe God's relationship to Israel in order to better define their similarities and differences. It seems clear that one cannot adequately explore one metaphor without seeing it in the full context in which it was set.

Our investigation has yielded some interesting results. It should sensitize us to the complexity of the image of God. God is not monolithically masculine in the Jewish tradition; God moves back and forth through the range of interaction that we would commonly label as paternal and maternal. It should encourage us to reexamine our notions of masculinity and femininity, of mothering and fathering.

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