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AGGADIC VIEWS ON PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

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requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

This thesis is concerned with the aggadic treatment of the subjects of pregnancy and childbirth. Each human being enters the world through the process of childbirth, and each is the result of a woman's pregnancy. Childbirth is, therefore, one of the most universal human experiences. The sensations of giving birth, however, as well as the experience of pregnancy, can only be felt by women. The authors of the aggadic literature, as men, could only indirectly experience these processes. This thesis examines their perceptions and views on these processes.

The material is organized into five chapters, representing five general areas of concern. The first chapter examines the aggadic treatment of the matriarchs and other barren women of the Bible. It explores the midrashic explanations which are offered for their barrenness and subsequent fertility, as a means of discerning the general view of the midrashic authors on these subjects. The second chapter presents the superstitions and folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy which appear in the rabbinic literature. The third chapter examines the aggadic views on the unborn child, both its physical formation as well as its metaphysical development in utero. The fourth chapter examines the aggadic treatment of the experience of labor and delivery, the physiological process and the meaning which was ascribed to this process. The fifth chapter presents the aggadic treatment of the subject of birth.

The midrashic authors present a less than realistic understanding of the physiology of pregnancy and childbirth as well as a limited perception of the psychological experience of women during these processes. Such areas did not constitute the midrashic authors' primary concern. They were far more concerned with issues of Jewish law and observance, and with encouraging those practices and beliefs which would aid Jewish survival. Such concerns emerge in the aggadic treatment of pregnancy and childbirth. These topics become a vehicle through which the authors of the midrash emphasize the importance of righteous behavior and careful observance of the mitzvot, and articulate their hope for a world redeemed in the time to come.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the aggadic treatment of the subjects of pregnancy and childbirth. These processes are among the most fundamental of human experience. Every human being is the result of a woman's pregnancy; every human being enters the world through the process of childbirth. Human physiology has not changed since the time of the composition of the midrash; however, much has changed in the areas of custom, superstition, scientific knowledge and technology, as well as in the attitudes with which the subjects of pregnancy and childbirth are regarded.

My point of view in examining this literature was affected to some extent by my motivation for undertaking the study. I was experiencing my first pregnancy, fascinated by the changes which were occurring within my body, and excited by the prospect of giving birth to my first child. I hoped to discover within the midrash passages which would share my concerns, provide me with additional insights into my condition, and enhance my appreciation of this process of creation of new life.

Such hopes were somewhat naive. The midrashic authors were not female, and could not experience pregnancy, labor or delivery. It is unrealistic to expect them to have entered

into the inner world of the women's psyche, or to have been able to convey the psychological experience of a process from which men are biologically excluded. Moreover, the midrashic authors had concerns other than the communication of women's experience. Such concerns emerge in the examination of their treatment of pregnancy and childbirth.

The midrashic material on these subjects was located in two ways. Firstly, anthologies and subject indices of rabbinic literature were consulted under the general topic headings related to my subject. Secondly, biblical verses which mention pregnancy or childbirth were located in concordances and, using verse indices to the midrashic literature, the midrashic passages in which such verses were cited were examined. This latter method proved to be far less useful in locating midrashic material on my subject, as biblical verses are often cited in the aggadic literature in contexts which have little to do with the original biblical subject.

In the process of compiling this material, those midrashic passages on my subject which were not available in English translation were translated into English. Those passages for which English translations already exist were examined in the original Hebrew, and changes were sometimes made in the existing translation for the sake of clarity. Wherever possible, gender-neutral words were used in translating Hebrew terms which are grammatically masculine.

The material which emerged fell into five general areas, which form the basis of the five chapters of this work. The first chapter is concerned with the aggadic understanding of barrenness and fertility, arising from the treatment of the matriarchs and barren women of the Bible. The second chapter explores the superstitions and folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy which appear in the aggadic literature. The third chapter examines the aggadic speculations regarding the unborn child, its physical and metaphysical development in utero. The fourth chapter treats the experience of labor and delivery as it is portrayed in the midrash, and the fifth chapter is concerned with aggadic views on birth.

The primary difficulty which was encountered during research was the lack of material on this subject. While there is a fair amount of halakhic material relating to pregnancy and childbirth, these subjects do not seem to have inspired a corresponding body of aggadic material. This, in turn, explains the lack of Jewish secondary sources on this subject. One wonders how different the literature would be if women were among its creators. This lack of material on what is a most basic human experience can be seen as presenting a challenge to the modern Jew: to fill in the gaps which have been created by excluding the voices of women.

CHAPTER ONE

BARRENNESS AND FERTILITY

On the sixth day of creation, God blessed man and woman and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply."1 This statement was viewed in the rabbinic literature as no less than a divine commandment to procreate, incumbent upon future generations. The seriousness of neglecting this commandment is indicated by the Talmudic statement that one who fails to procreate is regarded "as though he sheds blood and diminishes the Divine Image."2 Furthermore, such an individual may be responsible for driving the Shekhina (the Divine Presence) from Israel:

> Our rabbis taught: "And when it (the ark) rested, he said: Return O God to the ten thousands and thousands of Israel" (Numbers 10:36), teaches that the Shekhina does not rest on less than two thousand and two ten-thousands of Israelites. Thus, if there are twenty two thousand Israelites less one, and any particular person has not engaged in procreation, does he not cause the Divine Presence to depart from Israel!3

With this in mind, one can begin to appreciate the anguish of those who, for whatever reason, found themselves unable to bear children, and conversely, the pride and joy of those who were fertile. Children were said to secure a woman's position within her home,4 whereas "it was taught: One who has no child is regarded as if he were dead and demolished."5

The latter teaching is derived from statements made by the

matriarchs Sarah and Rachel in Genesis 16:2 and 30:1 on their inability to conceive. Not only were Sarah and Rachel barren, but so were Rebecca, Leah, Hannah and the wife of Manoah, all the mothers of important figures in Israel's past. It is worthwhile to examine how the barrenness and subsequent fertility of these women are treated in the aggadic material in order to gain an understanding of the rabbinic view on barrenness and fertility.

The Bible offers no explanation for the barrenness of these women beyond indicating that it was caused by God. Sarah states that God has restrained her from bearing,6 Isaac pleads with God on behalf of Rebecca because she is barren,7 Jacob tells Rachel that God has withheld children from her,8 and we are told that Hannah had no children because God had shut up her womb.9 That conception is in God's hands alone is clearly seen in the narrative in which Rachel begs for her sister's mandrakes, which were thought to enhance fertility. Such a potion does not alter Rachel's infertility; indeed, it is Leah who conceives, without the mandrakes.10

One could easily assume, therefore, that "failure to bear children is a circumstance which indicates divine displeasure."11 This is an assumption which seems to be borne out by numerous biblical passages. The wombs of the house of Abimelech were closed up by God as a sign of displeasure;12 the punishment for engaging in certain forbidden sexual relations is childlessness;13 and Ephraim is threatened with the

punishment of "no birth, no pregnancy, and no conception".14 Moreover, it seems clear that the absence of barrenness is treated in the Bible as a reward and as a blessing:

> If you obey these rules and observe them carefully...God will favor you and bless you and multiply you; God will bless the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil...there shall be no sterile male or female among you or among your livestock.15

Similar statements regarding fertility are made elsewhere in the Bible,16 leading one to conclude that, as fertility indicates reward and divine favor, so barrenness must demonstrate divine displeasure.

Certain rabbinic passages share this point of view. That Joshua was childless is interpreted in the Talmud as punishment for various sins he committed. The statement is made that "one who answers a word in the presence of his teacher (to a question submitted, thereby showing disrespect for his teacher) goes down to Sheol childless."17 Barren woman are portrayed as "wretched prisoners in their houses" and "fallen (i.e. disgraced)".18 The converse is also true. The blessing received by Obed-edom for keeping the ark of God in his household (II Samuel 6:11) is that his wife and eight daughters-in-law each bore six children at a birth.19

In the case of the matriarchs and Hannah, however, there seems to have been some reluctance to attribute their barrenness to punishment or divine displeasure. Why should our matriarchs, pure and righteous as they were thought to have

been, have evoked God's displeasure? The matriarch Sarah is viewed in the midrash as so righteous that she alone of all women merited speaking with the Blessed Holy One.20 Surely such a woman would not have been cast out of divine favor.

Several midrashim explore the question of the matriarchs' barrenness, and the reasons suggested for it are many and varied. One explanation, in the case of Abram and Sarai, is that their infertility was written in the stars. Abram is portrayed as saying,"Destiny oppresses me", whereupon God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah, saying "Abram will not produce children, but Abraham will...Sarai will not give birth, but Sarah will."21 A physiological explanation for barrenness arises from the seemingly unnecessary repetition in Genesis 11:30 ("Sarai was barren; she had no child"). The superfluous second phrase, "she had no child (valad)", indicates that she had no womb (beit valad), until God fashioned one for her.22 These explanations imply that fruitfulness is a divine and miraculous gift, but do not reveal why that gift was withheld from the matriarchs for so many years.

Other midrashim address that issue. One suggestion which is offered is that the barrenness of the matriarchs was almost a blessing in disguise. God made them barren for so long so that the greater part of their lives would pass without servitude,23 an interesting commentary on the position of a mother in the ancient world. Another explanation which likewise

attempts to understand their barrenness in positive terms is that it preserved their beauty for their husbands to enjoy:

> Why were the matriarchs barren? So that their husbands might enjoy their beauty. For when a woman conceives, she swells and becomes repulsive. The proof is that all the years that Sarah was barren, she sat in her house like a bride within her bridal chamber. When she got pregnant, her luster faded.24

And yet a third explanation presents the matriarchs' barrenness as an unexpected benefit for their husbands. The matriarchs' infertility helped to maintain the appropriate relationship between husband and wife by causing the women to cling all the more to their husbands.25

One might question whether such benefits were so great as to outweigh the distress caused by years of infertility. Such interpretations must not have been fully satisfying, for other explanations are offered for the matriarchs infertility which acknowledge that it was difficult for the matriarchs (and the patriarchs!) to endure. One such explanation suggests that the matriarch's barrenness was devised in order to elicit their prayers and supplications:

> The Blessed Holy One longed for their prayers. The Blessed Holy One said, 'They are wealthy and they are beautiful. If I give them children, they won't pray to me.'26

In the case of Rebecca and Isaac, it is suggested that God desired the prayers of both of them, for they are midrashically portrayed as praying together.27 Elsewhere, it is implied

that the patriarch Isaac's prayer was even more desireable than that of the matriarch Rebecca because "the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man is not like the prayer of a righteous man the son of a wicked man."28 Underlying such a statement is the rabbinic concept of zekhut avot, the notion that the righteous deeds of one's ancestors can "have a protective or an atoning influence"29 for their descendants. This concept is more clearly seen in the following midrash:

> Rebecca was barren for twenty years. After twenty years (Isaac) took Rebecca and went to Mt. Moriah, to the place where he had been bound, and he prayed on her behalf concerning the conception of the womb; and the Blessed Holy One was entreated of him, as it is said, 30 "And Isaac entreated God."31

Prayer at the site of the binding of Isaac was intended to evoke God's compassion by recalling the merit of Abraham, whose faithfulness was so great that he was even willing to offer up his son.

In a Talmudic discussion on the matriarchs' barrenness the general statement is made that "the Blessed Holy One longs to hear the prayers of the righteous."32 Perhaps this is because such prayer is, as it were, capable of moving God to mercy:

> As a pitchfork turns the sheaves of grain from one position to another, so does the prayer of the righteous turn the dispensations of the Blessed Holy One from the attribute of anger to the attribute of mercy.33

Indeed, one midrash states that it was through the prayer of Leah that God was turned to mercy for her sister Rachel:

> Leah stood and raised her voice before the Blessed Holy One and said, 'Master of the Universe, twelve tribes are destined to spring from Jacob. I have already produced six and am pregnant with my seventh. The handmaidens have each produced two, which makes ten. If this (unborn child) is a male, my sister Rachel will not even be as one of the handmaidens.' Upon hearing her prayer, God changed the fetus in her womb to a female...The Blessed Holy One said to her: 'You are merciful; I too shall have mercy upon her.' And so, "God remembered Rachel."(Genesis 30:22)34

Elsewhere, it is stated that Rachel was remembered through many prayers: through her own merit, through the merit of her sister, through the merit of Jacob, and the merit of the matriarchs.35

Another explanation which is offered for the barrenness of the matriarchs and other female figures in the Bible is that it was one of the ways by which God tries the righteous. One passage notes that the length of time that each woman was barren is different, determining through midrashic manipulation of biblical texts that Sarah was barren for twenty-five years, Rebecca for twenty years, and Hannah for nineteen years. This illustrates that "the Blessed Holy One refines the righteous, each one of them, according to their strength." 36

Underlying such a statement is the rabbinic notion that suffering, far from being a form of punishment, is evidence of God's love. Suffering chastens and purifies, and through

suffering, human beings attain the world to come.37 Thus, suffering is seen as a cause for rejoicing:

> Let a man rejoice in sufferings more than in happiness; for if a man has lived all his life in happiness, any sin which he may have committed has not been pardoned; but what is pardoned through suffering is forgiven him...What is the path that brings a man to the world to come? Let one say, this is (through) sufferings. 38

That individuals such as the matriarchs and patriarchs were tried by misfortune is merely an indication of their righteousness, for "the Blessed Holy One does not test the wicked, but only the righteous."39 The barrenness of the our biblical ancestors is even viewed as a demonstration of God's great love for them.40

Another such explanation for barrenness, offered in the case of Sarah and Hannah, is that God made them barren in order to cause them to rejoice all the more in the children that they eventually bore.41 This explanation, like the one offered above, provides a way of understanding the suffering that righteous individuals endure, or by analogy, the suffering that all Israel endures. Whatever suffering may be experienced in the present is only a trial, intended to increase the reward and rejoicing that will follow.

One might expect that, since the midrash tends to avoid treating the barrenness of the matriarchs and Hannah as a sign of divine displeasure or punishment, so it would tend to avoid treating their subsequent fertility as divine favor or reward. However, where reasons are provided for God's remem-

bering these women, such reasons tend to focus on the performance of good deeds or the possession of certain character traits which merit reward. The particular actions or qualities which are said to elicit God's favor are varied, but all reflect values or ideas that were important to the rabbinic mind.

It is not surprising, therefore, that careful observance of mitzvot is mentioned as one of the reasons for both Hannah and Abraham being visited with children. One passage indicates that Hannah and Abraham were careful to recite the proper blessings for every occasion; thus, they were blessed in return with children.42 Another passage indicates that Hannah was deserving of reward because she was strict in the observance of the three mitzvot given to women.43 Yet a third passage portrays Rachel as envious of her sister Leah's good deeds, her reasoning being that "if she were not a righteous woman, she would not have borne children".44

Similarly, character traits such as humility and compassion are treated as meriting reward. One passage states that

> Sarah humbled herself and received her reward, in that she said "God has restrained me from bearing"(Genesis 16:2). The Blessed Holy One said, "You have humbled yourself. You said 'God has restrained ME (not Abraham)'. Therefore, I will visit you (with children)."45

Another passage indicates that Rachel was remembered with children because of her silence on her sister's behalf when Leah was given to Jacob.46 Elsewhere, it is stated that

Sarah conceived because Abraham showed compassion for Abimelech:

> You may regard your compassion as a sign that God's compassion will follow. Whenever you show compassion to your fellow man, God will show compassion for others as well as for you. Abraham is an example: because he procured mercy for Abimelech, having prayed for him, Abraham received his reward at once. Scripture tells us: 'And Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife' (Genesis 20:17). And what reward did Abraham receive? Abraham's wife was remembered and she bore a son, as the verse immediately following tells us: "And God remembered Sarah...(Genesis 21:1)47

Other passages indicate that the matriarchs Sarah, Leah, and Rachel were rewarded because they brought rivals into their homes, giving their handmaidens to their husbands to bear children for them.48 It may be that such a gesture was regarded as selfless and noble for its own sake, or it may be, as one midrash indicates in the case of Hannah, that they were rewarded because this action caused new souls to be brought into the world:

> The Blessed Holy One said (to Hannah), 'By your life, Hannah! You have caused souls to be deposited with me; so I shall repay you.' "And God visited Hannah..."(I Samuel 2:21)49

Finally, maintaining faith in God in spite of misfortune is viewed as deserving of reward. One midrash portrays God saying to Sarah, "As you did not lose faith, so I will not cause you to lose faith." This is followed by God visiting Sarah with a child.50 God's action can be compared to that

of a trustee, one midrash asserts. Whatever is deposited with God is returned, whether it be good deeds or evil. 51 A similar idea is expressed in the midrash which states that "the Blessed Holy One does not frustrate the spirit of the righteous, but gives them all that they desire." The prayers of those that revere God are answered.52

That the barren women of the Bible were ultimately remembered is viewed in the midrash as an assurance that the trials endured by Israel would likewise ultimately be followed by redemption:

> It is written:"God builds up Zion..." (Psalms 102:7) If you wonder at this, "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah that bore you" (Isaiah 51:2). Just as I have done for Abraham and Sarah, so will I do for Jerusalem.53

Elsewhere, Zion is portrayed as one of the seven barren women in Scripture, the others being Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, the wife of Manoah, and Hannah. 54 Just as those women were redeemed from their barrenness with children, so too will a redeemer come to Zion:

> Whenever Scripture says that something is not, it is implying that the converse will be. Thus Scripture says, "Sarah was barren, she had no child" (Genesis 11:30); afterwards she did have a child: "Sarah gave children suck." (Genesis 21:7) Likewise, "Peninah had children, but Hannah had not children" (I Samuel 1:2); afterwards Hannah did have children:"God remembered Hannah, and she conceived, and bore three sons and two daughters." (I Samuel 2:21) Finally, "She is Zion, there is no one that cares for her" (Jeremiah 30:17); but then one will come who does care:

"And a redeemer will come to Zion" (Isaiah 59:20). 55

Given the historical circumstances of the rabbis who composed the midrashim - the destruction of the second temple and the dispersion of the Jews - it is no wonder that the tendency of the midrashim is to try to find some meaning to adversity, to view it as a hidden blessing, or as a form of purification, or as a sign of God's love. It is also not surprising that reward for piety, humility, religious conduct and maintaining faith would be emphasized in the literature, as such qualities were essential to the preservation of the Jewish people. The treatment of barrenness and fertility in the midrash thus illustrates how the midrashic authors coped with their own situation: in the midst of despair they sought and were able to discover assurances of their future redemption.

CHAPTER TWO

SUPERSTITIONS AND FOLK BELIEFS

Superstitions and folk beliefs come into being in order to fill the void between the known and the unknown. They provide ways of explaining or predicting that which is inexplicable and unpredictable. It is not surprising, therefore, that superstitions and folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy abound. It is when contemplating the prospect of a new life that one realizes how great a mystery all life is, and how little control humans have over it. Why should some newborns be healthy while others are sickly, some beautifully formed and others misshapen, some even-tempered and others easily irritated? Why does one couple produce a female child and another produce a male? There is a need to understand or explain such phenomena, a need to provide causes and reasons. The rabbinic literature is no different from that of other peoples and periods in this regard; it too contains its share of superstitions and folk beliefs regarding pregnancy, its attempts to provide reasons and explanations.

As the mother is the one who carries the unborn child inside her body, it is not surprising that many of the child's subsequent characteristics would be attributed to her diet, behavior or activities while pregnant. Indeed, such an approach

is taken today, supported by modern science. Pregnant women are advised by their physicians as to their diet, exercise, and level of physical activity. A general connection is seen between the mother's health and that of her unborn child. However, no connection is seen between specific foods or activities and specific characteristics in the child. Such connections are the kind made by folk science and superstition.

There do exist, within the rabbinic literature, passages which indicate that there is a direct connection between certain foods the pregnant woman eats, or certain activities in which she engages, and specific characteristics her child subsequently possesses. A pregnant woman

> who eats mustard will have intemperate children. One who eats cress will have bleary-eyed children. One who eats fish-brine will have children with blinking eyes. One who eats gargushta (a type of clay, used as a medicine or in place of a cosmetic) will have ugly children. One who drinks intoxicating liquor will have ungainly children. One who eats meat and drinks wine will have children with a robust constitution. One who eats eggs will have children with big eyes. One who eats fish will have graceful children. One who eats parsley will have beautiful children. One who eats coriander will have stout children. One who eats citrons will have fragrant children.1

It seems that certain characteristics of the food, or the animal from which the food was derived, were viewed as transferable to the unborn child. Hot, spicy foods would produce hot-tempered children; hearty foods would produce strong, healthy children, fragrant foods would produce sweet-smelling

children. The graceful movements of a swimming fish would be transferred to the unborn child, as would its blinking eyes. A different Talmudic passage states that beer drinking while pregnant is one of the causes of congenital impotency,2 seeing, perhaps, a connection between the slowing and dulling effect that excessive beer-drinking has on the drinker and the dulled, impaired sexual abilities of the offspring.

A connection was similarly seen between the foods consumed by the mother during pregnancy and the child's religious character. The consumption of forbidden foods was thought to have an adverse effect on the unborn child's character; indeed, the following midrash presents it as the cause of Elisha ben Abuyah's apostasy:

> When his mother was pregnant with him, she passed by idolatrous temples and smelled (forbidden food). They gave her some of that kind (of food) and she ate and it penetrated her stomach like the poison of a serpent (and affected him).3

A slightly different view is presented in the Talmud. There it is stated that a pregnant woman may be given anything that she wishes to eat, in order to satisfy a craving. If it is forbidden meat that she craves, she should first be given a reed soaked in its juice on which to suck, in the hope that this will satisfy the craving. If this is unsuccessful, she should then be given the juice to drink, and if the craving still remains, she may eat the meat itself.4 Here it is not assumed that the mother's craving and eating forbidden foods will impair the child's religious nature. Rather, it is thought

that the craving originates from the unborn child, and is therefore an early sign of the child's religious character. A story is related of a pregnant woman who had a craving for a particular food on Yom Kippur. Rabbi suggested whispering to her that it was Yom Kippur (i.e. informing the child within her). The craving subsided, and the child who was subsequently born was Rabbi Johanan. Another story is then related of a pregnant woman in the same situation who did not respond to the whispered information. The child she bore was a corrupt individual, the sort who would be unconcerned about violating Yom Kippur.5

The superstitions surrounding pregnancy extend beyond the areas of food and drink. The activities of the mother while pregnant were also seen as affecting the unborn child. Having intercourse while pregnant is mentioned in one Talmudic passage as a way to produce vigorous, fair-skinned children.6 Elsewhere it is stated that this is not the case during the first trimester of pregnancy, when intercourse is viewed as harmful to both mother and child, or during the middle trimester, when intercourse is viewed as harmful to the mother but beneficial to the child, but only during the last trimester. Intercourse during the last three months of pregnancy was said to produce well-formed, healthy children.7 (It is possible that such a statement was made as an attempt to counter the perception, articulated elsewhere in the midrashic

literature, of pregnant women as ugly and sexually unattractive.8)

Other activities of the pregnant mother are mentioned as having an affect on the unborn child. Baking during the heat of the day is mentioned in the Talmud as one of the causes of congenital impotency,9 with the thought, perhaps, that excessive heat damages the sexual organs of the developing child. Treading on the blood of an ass while pregnant is said to cause the child to be scabby.10 Certain injuries received by the mother may have been thought transferable to the unborn child, as a story is told of a branded female donkey who subsequently gave birth to offspring with a brand mark.11

Certain actions were superstitiously viewed as possibly fatal to the unborn child. Treading on fingernails which had been clipped and thrown onto the ground is said to cause miscarriage.12 (This statement appears in a passage which lists abhorrent actions, one of which is improper disposal of one's fingernails. It is possible, therefore, that this statement is hyperbolic, intended to impress upon one the importance of proper treatment of human matter.) Hearing the barking of a dog is also said to produce miscarriage, though the passage indicates that it is not so much the bark as the fright which it engenders that causes the miscarriage.13 Such a passage implies that the mother's emotions play a role in causing miscarriage, as does another passage which states that causeless hate leads to household strife and miscarriage.14 (Here,

however, miscarriage is presented as a punishment for causeless hate rather than as a consequence of it.)

With so many possible causes of miscarriage, one would expect that pregnant women were extremely cautious and fearful, lest they inadvertently bring about the loss of their pregnancy. The Talmud mentions the use of a "preserving stone", an amulet of sorts which was thought to protect against miscarriage. This amulet seems to have had such strong folk appeal that it was permitted by the rabbis to be carried by pregnant women even on the Sabbath, when such carrying is forbidden, and even by women who had no history of miscarriage. In fact, a woman could carry such an amulet "not only when she was already pregnant, but even lest she become pregnant and miscarry."15 This is an astonishing concession to superstition, as ascribing protective powers to such an amulet rather than solely to God borders on idolatry.

That such an amulet could be carried by a woman even before becoming pregnant illustrates the fact that the mother's influence over her child was seen as extending back even prior to the child's conception. It was thought that, if a woman saw a good-looking man and had him on her mind, she would conceive children as good-looking as he was.

> Rabbi Johanan was accustomed to go and sit at the gates of the bathing place. He said: "When the daughters of Israel come up from bathing, they look at me and they have children as handsome as I am."16

The mother's thoughts at the time of conception were also seen as having a profound influence on the child's appearance, as the following story illustrates:

> An Arab king asked Rabbi Akiba: "I am black and my wife is black, but she bore me a white son. Shall I kill her for committing adultery?" (Rabbi Akiba) said to him: "Do you have paintings in your house?" "Yes", he answered. "Are the paintings in your house black or white (i.e. of black or white persons)?" "White", he answered. (Rabbi Akiba) said, "When you were having intercourse with her, she fixed her eyes upon the white paintings and gave birth (to a child) like them. And if you wonder at this, learn from the flock of our father Jacob, who were influenced in their conception by the rods, as it is said (Genesis 30:39): 'The goats mated by the rods (and brought forth streaked, speckled and spotted young).'" And the Arab king thanked Rabbi Akiba.17

The same idea underlies the Talmudic passage which states that, in order to produce a red heifer, a red cup was passed before the cow while the male was mating with her.18

Not only her thoughts at the time of conception but even the mother's general attitude toward sexual intercourse was thought to influence the child she would bear. One passage states that a woman who was so eager to have intercourse with her husband that she solicited it would produce extraordinary children "such as were not to be found even in the generation of Moses."19 (This would be the case only if she was modest in her approach, not if she brazenly made demands upon her husband). Another passage states that a man "should make his wife glad to perform the marital office" in order to produce

male offspring.20 Yet another passage states that a certain woman, Imma Shalom, produced exceedingly beautiful children because she and her husband conversed during intercourse, so that his attention might be fully focused on her, and not wandering to thoughts of other women.21

These last two examples indicate that the father, as well as the mother, was thought to have a role in determining some of the child's characteristics. The father's contribution, however, was mostly, though not entirely, limited to the time of intercourse and to determining the sex of the child.

Numerous passages make it clear that male children were preferred over females. Male children were said to bring provision with them, and peace into the world, while females brought nothing.22 Female offspring were thought to be a continual source of anxiety for their parents:

> A daughter is a vain treasure to her father: through anxiety on her account he cannot sleep at night. As a minor, lest she be seduced; in her majority, lest she play the harlot; as an adult, lest she be not married; if she marries, lest she bear no children; if she grows old, lest she engage in witchcraft.23

One passage acknowledges that females as well as males are necessary for the world to continue, yet makes it clear that males are nonetheless preferred:

> The world cannot do without either males or females. Yet happy is he whose children are males and alas for him whose children are females.24

Elsewhere, it is implied that males are needed more than females:

> Both wine and vinegar are needed, yet wine is needed more than vinegar. Both wheat and barley are needed, yet wheat is needed more than barley. (Rabbi's statement on the birth of a granddaughter)25

Since male children were so highly prized, it is not surprising that many passages suggest certain steps that a man can take in order to produce male offspring. One such passage was mentioned above: a man should make his wife glad to have intercourse. Another passage states that the man who sanctifies himself during intercourse will produce male children.26 Yet another passage suggests that the placement of the bed affects the sex of the child; a man desiring male children should place his bed in a north-south position.27

A few of the suggestions are unrelated to the sexual act, such as giving money to the poor,28 or reciting <u>havdalah</u> over wine at the end of the Sabbath,29 or separating from one's wife near the time of her period (i.e. anticipating the interval during which sexual relations are forbidden).30 Such passages imply that male offspring are a reward for the father's piety or punctiliousness in the observance of <u>mitzvot</u>.

Some passages present both the mother and the father as potentially responsible for determining future characteristics of the child. These passages all deal with the moment of intercourse, a time that seems to have been regarded as having a great influence on the child's development.

The sex of the child is seen in many passages as connected to the moment of the parents' orgasm: if the father emitted his seed first, the child would be a female; if the mother did first, the child would be a male.31 (Such a teaching may have encouraged men to "make their wives glad during intercourse", whether or not that was the primary purpose of the teaching.) One midrash states that this is comparable to "two artists, each of whom executes the likeness of the other."32 The assumption here is that the seed emitted first determines the sex of the child; the seed of each parent can only produce children of the opposite sex. Another passage compares this process of sex determination to "two persons entering a bath house. Whichever perspires first is the first to come out."33 Here the opposite reasoning is employed: the seed emitted first is expelled from the womb first, leaving the seed emitted second to determine the sex of the child; the seed of each parent can only produce children of the same sex as the parent. This seems to be the reasoning underlying the Talmudic statement that "one who desires all his children to be males should cohabit twice in succession",34 that is, to insure that his seed, rather than that of his wife, remain in the womb.

The case of simultaneous orgasm seems to leave the sex of the child uncertain; in such cases, prayer is said to influence the sex of the unborn child. Otherwise, a prayer for a male child offered during pregnancy is said to be a vain prayer, as the sex is already determined.35 There seems to

be a difference of opinion on this point, as one passage suggests that the sex of the child is not determined until the fortieth day of pregnancy.36 Thus it was taught:

> Within the first three days (after conception), a man should pray that the seed should not putrefy; from the third to the fortieth day, he should pray that the child should be a male.37

One midrash even asserts that prayer can be efficacious until the moment the woman gives birth. Until that time, it is possible to pray for a male child, as it is not too difficult for God to change the sex of the child in utero.38

Not only the moment of orgasm, but even the general time and manner in which intercourse occurred was said to effect the unborn child. Having intercourse at times when it was forbidden could only have negative consequences for the child. One passage indicates that having intercourse on Yom Kippur produced faithless, corrupt offspring;39 another passage warns that intercourse during the monthly period of separation results in leprous children.40 The location and position of the parents during intercourse was also seen as possibly having adverse effects on the child. Intercourse on the ground was said to produce children with long necks; intercourse in a mill would produce epileptic children.41 The more deviant the sexual practice was thought to be, the worse were the consequences for the child:

> People are born lame because they (their parents) overturned their table (i.e. practiced unnatural intercourse); dumb, because they kiss 'that place'; deaf,

> because they converse during cohabitation; blind, because they look at 'that place'.42

One noteworthy Talmudic passage suggests that certain of the child's characteristics are determined, not by the time or manner of intercourse, nor by any action taken or neglected by the parents, but by the day on which the child was born. This passage links events that happened on that day of creation with certain character traits (eg. a child born on Sunday would be either completely virtuous or completely evil, because light and darkness were created on that day; a child born on Monday would be bad-tempered and divisive because the waters were divided on that day, etc.). It is also suggested that the astrological sign under which the child is born affects the child's character.43 Such a passage stands out against the majority of the superstitions surrounding pregnancy in that it avoids placing the burden of the child's character on the mother or the father, placing it instead on factors wholly beyond their control.

That such superstitions exist at all within the rabbinic literature is interesting, given that the religious mind saw almost everything as originating from God. Indeed, such an attitude regarding the unborn child's characteristics is articulated in the following midrash:

> God decrees for the drop (from which the child will be formed) what its end will be: whether male or female, weak or strong, poor or rich, short or long, ugly or beautiful, thick or thin, humble or haughty. So God gives a decree concerning everything that will happen to him, except

> whether he will be righteous or wicked. This alone is placed in the hands of the human being.44

Perhaps such a midrash can help explain the thinking that would prompt the creation of superstitions and folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy. There was a recognition of the limited control human beings have over their fate. There was a corresponding human need to feel that one's actions have significance. Out of this tension, the smallest and most inconsequential actions could be magnified and seen as having enormous consequences. The superstitions and folk beliefs surrounding pregnancy that appear in the rabbinic literature reflect the human need to understand and provide explanations for that which is really beyond human control.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FETUS

One of the most awesome processes occurring in nature is the development of a fetus within its mother's womb from a single fertilized cell into a human being. In nine short months, a woman's body is transformed and a new life is created. Modern science has taken much of the mystery out of fetal development: the mechanics of fertilization, implantation and cell differentiation are now known; there are even technologies such as ultrasound and amniocentesis which can provide images of and biological information about each unborn child. Yet the awe and wonder still remain.

For the ancient mind, the creative power that produces life was clearly identified with God. The development of a fetus within its mother's womb was seen as the handiwork of God; it was God who fashioned the child's form and features, endowed it with its characteristics and provided it with a soul. This chapter will examine how the aggadic literature treats both the physical and metaphysical development of the unborn child.

It was understood that the fetus began its development from the smallest of human materials. A midrash states that God forms the fetus from "a drop of whiteness."1 This drop,

according to one view, was carefully sifted and separated, that only the purest part might be used in the formation of a new life.2 According to another view, the entire drop was used; none of it went to waste. God separated part of the drop to use in forming the brains, part to use in forming the bones, and part in forming the sinews.3 Both views, though opposing, present the earliest beginnings of a new life as the work of a careful Creator, one who thoughtfully arranges the materials to be used before beginning to work.

One midrash presents the formation of the fetus as a partnership of sorts between the father, the mother and God. Each contributes certain characteristics and the combined effort produces the child:

> When the child is formed in its mother's womb, there are three partners concerned with it: the Blessed Holy One, the father and the mother. The father provides the white substance from which are formed the brain, the nails, the white of the eyes, the bones and the sinews. The mother provides the red substance from which are formed the blood, skin, flesh, hair, and the black of the eyes. The Blessed Holy One provides ten things: spirit and breath, beauty of features, sight of the eyes, hearing of the ears, speech of the lips, the ability to raise the hands and to walk with the feet, wisdom and understanding, counsel, knowledge and strength.4

Such a passage, while acknowledging that human beings make a material contribution towards the creation of a new human being, nonetheless presents God as the sole author the essential elements of life. Without the divine contribution, there would be no living being.

There was no clear opinion on the order in which the various body parts developed. One opinion held that the formation of the embryo commenced with the head (and possibly progressed from top to bottom). Another view was that it began with the navel and developed in all directions from that central point.5 Yet a third view suggested that embryonic development progressed from the surface of the body to the core, beginning with the skin and flesh and ending with the bones and sinews.6 A description of the embryo in the earliest stages of development is provided in the following midrash:

> It was taught: The shape of the embryo at the beginning of its formation resembles a locust. Its two eyes are like the drippings of a fly, as are its two nostrils and its two ears. Its two arms are like two threads of silk; its mouth is like a barley grain and its body is like a lentil. The rest of its limbs are pressed together like a shapeless lump...How does it lie in its mother's womb? It is folded up and lying like a writing tablet. Its head rests between its knees, its two hands rest on its temples; its heels are against its buttocks.7

That such a creature could become a living, breathing human being was seen as wondrous artistry, an artistry wholly beyond the abilities of even the most talented human artist. Several aggadic passages contrast the creative power of God with the far more limited human creative abilities:

> Come and observe how the capacity of human beings falls short of the capacity of the Blessed Holy One. It is within the capacity of a human being to draw a figure on the wall, but he cannot invest it with breath and spirit, bowels and intestines. And that is what Hannah said: "There is

> none as holy as the Lord, for there is none beside you. There is no rock like our God" (I Samuel 11:2). What does "there is no rock (zur) like our God" mean? There is no artist (zayyar) like our God.8

God's creative power was also seen in the way in which the facial features of the unborn child were determined. The facial features were believed to be formed by the fortieth day of pregnancy but they could be divinely altered to convey a message, if necessary. One midrash states that if a woman conceived by her husband and then subsequently committed adultery, the Blessed Holy One would transform the features of the child into those of the adulterer, that their sin might be exposed.9 Conversely, in order to forestall rumors of adultery where it had not in fact occurred, the Blessed Holy One could fashion the features of the child in the unmistakable likeness of its father. This was said to have occurred in Egypt, that no one might claim the that the Israelite children were the offspring of their Egyptian masters.10 It was also said to occur in the case of the patriarch Isaac, that all might believe he was Abraham's son, despite Abraham's advanced years.11 Such creative abilities were beyond human beings, who would not be able to form facial features of any sort within a liquid environment like that of the womb:

> A human king can make a design upon a wall, but cannot design anything on water; the Blessed Holy One designs the fetus within its mother's womb within the water.12

Thus, the development of the fetus was first and foremost seen within the aggadic literature as illustrative of God's creative power. It was also seen as evidence of God's providence. That the fetus was carried safely within its mother's womb was seen as an indication of God's concern for this created being; God watched over and preserved the fetus:

> If a money bag is full and its opening is turned downward, what is inside it (falls out and) scatters. But a woman's bag (i.e. womb) is turned downward and the Blessed Holy One preserves the child (within). Another explanation: A beast walks crouched (in a horizontal position) with its offspring in its womb while a woman walks erect with her child in her womb and the Blessed Holy One preserves the child (within her).13

In addition to preventing the fetus from falling out of the womb, God's providence was discerned in the fact that the fetus was able to thrive and grow in what was viewed as a most inhospitable environment. The womb was thought to be filled with boiling water; the physical space was thought to be as confining as a bathtub; the food eaten by the mother was thought to threaten the fetus with expulsion. Despite all this, the fetus was preserved by God and its spirit was not aggravated.14

Not only did God watch over the physical development of the fetus, but God was thought to endow the fetus with a soul and to guide its metaphysical development. A midrash states that at the time of conception, the drop from which the child is to be formed is brought before God. God decrees for the

drop all its future characteristics, leaving undetermined only whether the individual will be righteous or wicked, as each human being is responsible for his or her own moral behavior.15 It is at that moment that the soul is implanted within the fetus, for were the drop left without a soul, another midrash indicates, the drop would putrefy like meat which is left without salt.16

The angel which is appointed over spirits is summoned to bring a soul up from the Garden of Eden, where all the souls ever to be, from the time of the first human being until the end of the world, are said to reside. The Blessed Holy One commands the soul to enter the drop, whereupon the soul protests, "Master of the universe, the world in which I have been living since the day you created me is fine for me. Why do you want to force me to enter this nauseating drop when I am holy and pure?" The soul is then informed that God created it only for this particular drop, and it is forced to enter the drop against its will.

The drop, together with the soul that now inhabits it, is placed in the mother's womb, and two angels are sent to guard it, that it not leave the womb or be aborted. A light is lit above its head, enabling it to see from one end of the world to the other.17 The kindling of this light is seen in a different midrash as an expression of God's compassion and concern for the fetus:

> It is natural that, if a man is confined to a prison with no one giving him atten-

> tion, and someone comes and kindles a light for him there, the former should feel gratitude towards the latter. So too it is with the Blessed Holy One. When the fetus is in its mother's womb, God causes a light to shine for it there, as Job said:"...in the earliest months...when His light shined above my head" (Job 29:2-3). 18

It is at this time that the education and spiritual development of the soul begins. An angel is said to accompany the soul to Paradise to show it all the righteous individuals who dwell there crowned in glory. The soul is told:

> These whom you see were formed in the beginning like you within their mothers' wombs. They came forth into the world and kept the Torah and the commandments. Therefore, they were found worthy of this goodness that you see. Know that your end will be to leave the world. If you are found worthy and keep the Torah of the Blessed Holy One, you will merit dwelling among these. But if not, know and see that you will earn another place.19

The soul is then taken to Gehenna and shown the wicked, who are beaten with rods of fire. This is the fate of those who do not keep the Torah and the commandments.

Afterwards the soul is taken from one end of the world to the other, shown the righteous and the wicked as well as the place where the body it inhabits will later die and be buried. 20 A Talmudic passage adds that during this period, the soul is taught the entire Torah from beginning to end. "There is no time in which a person enjoys greater happiness than in those days."21

As the soul has received such attention and care in utero, it is reluctant to leave when the time of birth arrives. Against its will, it is brought into the world:

> He does not want to exit from there until (the angel) hits him and extinguishes the light that he had lit above his head and brings him out into the world against his will. The newborn forgets upon his exit (from the womb) all that he saw and all that he knows. Why does a newborn cry as he goes out (from the womb)? On account of all that he has lost...22

Another passage, however, presents the bringing of the child into the world as an act of lovingkindness, comparable to a release from prison:

> It is only natural that, when a man is confined in prison with no one paying any attention to him, and someone one comes and releases him and takes him out, the former should feel gratitude to the latter. So is the fetus within its mother's womb. The Blessed Holy One comes and releases it and brings it out.23

Though presenting differing views on the experience of birth, both passages nonetheless indicate that the unborn child is the recipient of divine care and compassion, whether in utero or through the gift of life, by being brought into the world.

The development of the unborn child is not only treated in the aggadic literature as illustrative of God's creative powers, or as evidence of God's providence. It also is linked to the rabbinic notion of the time to come. This has been seen already in the description of the experience of the soul before birth; the soul is shown what awaits the righteous and the wicked. Before the newborn leaves the womb, one passage

states that it is made to swear that it will be righteous. It is told:

> Always bear in mind that the Blessed Holy One is pure, that God's angels are pure, and that the soul which has been given you is pure. If you preserve it in purity, well and good, but if not I will take it away from you."24

The way to keep one's soul and insure a place in the world to come is indicated in another Talmudic passage: "Whoever keeps the Torah, his soul is kept and whoever does not keep the Torah, his soul is not kept."25 Yet another Talmudic passage compares the giving of the soul by God to the giving of an article of clothing by a king to his servants. The wise servants carefully put the clothing away and they were clean and well preserved when the king requested them again. The foolish servants used the clothing and so returned them soiled and worn to the king. The wise servants were rewarded, while the fools were punished. So, too, will it be with the righteous and wicked when they return their souls to God.26

It is not only in the speculations about the soul that the development of the unborn child was midrashically connected to the time to come. The very formation of a human being from a drop of fluid was seen as an assurance of the resurrection of the dead in the time to come:

> A Cuthean asked Rabbi Meir, 'Do the dead live again?' He answered, 'Yes.' He then asked ('Do they come back to life) secretly or in public?' He answered, 'In public.' 'How can you prove it to me?' he asked. to which Rabbi Meir replied, 'Not from Scripture nor from the Mishnah, but from

> everyday life will I answer you...Men deposit a white drop (in secret) with their wives, and the Blessed Holy One, restores that drop publicly in the form of a beautiful and perfect creature. How much more so will a dead person who departs publicly (from the world) return publicly.27

So it is that the biological process of fetal development is infused with great significance in the aggadic material. In the formation of a fetus, the midrashic authors discerned the workings of God. In the wonderful and mysterious process of the emergence of human life from its elemental beginnings, they saw the manifestation of God's creative power and of divine providence. And the very existence of the fetus, with the perpetuation of life that it represented, provided assurance of a long-awaited future redemption.

CHAPTER FOUR

LABOR AND DELIVERY

Every human being who enters this world is brought forth from a woman's body. Each tiny newborn, with all the hope and promise that a new life represents, is born only as a result of a process which women have experienced through the ages as painful, traumatic and life threatening, as well as joyous and exhilarating. The men whose comments are preserved in the rabbinic literature could not experience the sensations of labor and delivery themselves; nonetheless, they were aware, to a greater or lesser extent, of the experience of women at such a time; they commented on the process of labor and childbirth as they understood it, and attempted to find meaning in it. This chapter will examine some of these comments and perceptions on labor and delivery.

A woman in labor was seen as comparable to an invalid; she was thought to be in a life threatening situation. Therefore, all laws could be abrogated to insure her safety and protect her life, except for the prohibitions against idolatry, forbidden sexual relations and murder, which applies in all cases of saving a life.1 It was stated that one could deliver a woman's baby on Shabbat regardless of the violations of Shabbat that this would entail: one could kindle a fire to

keep the woman warm, summon a midwife from one place to another to be with her, carry oil from one house to another, and light a lamp.2 Concern for the laboring woman's emotional as well as physical well-being is evinced by the statement that even a blind woman could have a lamp lit for her if it would calm her to know that those assisting her delivery could see and tend to her needs.3 Whether or not the woman thought that such violations of Shabbat should occur, they were to be performed for her "as long as the uterus was open".4

The latter statement provides a glimpse into the rabbinic understanding of the physiology of labor and delivery. The mechanics of this process were not fully known. It was recognized, for example, that the uterus must open in some way to enable the child to exit, but it was not clear when the uterus opened nor how long it remained open:

> From when is the opening of the uterus? Abaye said: From when she sits on the seat of travail (i.e. in labor). R. Huna son of R. Joshua said: From when the blood slowly flows down. Others say: From when her friends carry her by the arms (i.e. when she cannot walk). For how long is the opening of the uterus? Abaye said: Three days. Raba said in Rab Judah's name: Seven days. Others said: Thirty days. 5

It was during the first three days after delivery that laws of Shabbat were to be superceded for the woman's sake, whether or not she wished this to occur. Up to thirty days after delivery, however, Shabbat could still be violated at the woman's re-

quest, although such actions would have to be performed by a Gentile. 6

Among the physiological changes mentioned in the midrash as occurring during childbirth is the hardening of the laboring woman's thighs. The woman's thighs were thought to "become like two stones in order that she would have strength when she gives birth."7 The physiological changes that occurred in a woman's body during childbirth were thought to be so great that they were posited as the reason for the absence of menstruation after pregnancy:

> ...according to the view of R. Jose, R. Judah and R. Simeon, the woman's limbs (when she is in childbirth) become dis-jointed and her natural vigor (manifested by her menstrual flow) does not return before the lapse of twenty-four months.8

Others thought that the blood of menstruation was transformed into the milk produced during lactation; thus a woman would not menstruate as long as she nursed her baby.9

Not only were the physiological changes that occurred during labor and delivery thought to be dramatic; they were also perceived as being extremely painful and traumatic for the woman. The pain suffered during labor was thought to underlie the commandment in Leviticus 12:6 that a woman bring a sacri-fice after childbirth. It was thought that the pain was so overwhelming that, in the midst of labor, the woman would swear never to have intercourse with her husband again:

> When a woman sits on the birthstool (i.e. is in labor), she says: From now on, I will never again have intercourse with my

> husband...Because she fluttered in her heart, she must bring a fluttering sacrifice (i.e. a bird): "She shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons..." (Lev. 12:8)10

A similar explanation underlies the ruling that a woman is unclean after the birth of a male for seven days, while she is unclean for fourteen days after the birth of a female:

> (On the birth of a) male, over whom all rejoice, she regrets her oath (to abstain from sexual intercourse) after seven days, (but on the birth of a female) about whom everybody is upset, she regrets her oath after fourteen days. 11

The pain of labor was thought to be so great that, even as much as a week after delivery, the woman would still feel that she did not want to risk experiencing such pain again. The joy and wonder at producing a new human being was not thought sufficient to outweigh the trauma of childbirth until several days had elapsed.

The pain of labor is linked in several midrashic passages with the danger of childbirth. As mentioned previously, childbirth was perceived as a life-threatening event, as indeed it often was in the ancient world. One midrash links the cries of a woman in labor to the odds against her survival, suggesting that the hundred cries that she utters during childbirth intimate that there are ninety nine chances for death and only one for life.12 Another midrash states that a woman in childbirth is, in fact, dying:

> At the time that a woman is in childbirth, they call her "hayeta" (a rabbinic term for a woman in childbirth). Why do they

> call her "hayeta"? Because she is dying, but then lives (hayah).13

Childbirth was seen as a particularly precarious time, not only because of the ordeal to which a woman was physically subjected, but also because it was viewed as a time of judgement. A midrash states that even the angel of death becomes a woman's accuser during childbirth.14 When danger was near, it was thought that one's faults were remembered and judged. A woman's transgressions were recalled and her past sins could negatively tip the balance of her fate. The Mishnah states that three sins in particular would cause a woman's death in childbirth:

> For three transgressions do women die in childbirth: for carelessness in the observance of (the laws relating to) menstruation, the dough offering and the kindling of the Sabbath lights.15

These were the three <u>mitzvot</u> given particularly to women; such a statement may have been intended to impress upon them the importance of diligence in the fulfillment of these <u>mitzvot</u>.

Such a statement, if it represents a widespread belief, may also have contributed to women's distress during labor, as women could have felt with each pain that punishment for possible transgressions was imminent. Perhaps this is why, as one midrash states, women in difficult labor were reassured with the statement: "May the One who answered your mother answer you."16 Such a statement would remind the laboring

woman that prayers were answered as well as punishments meted out during childbirth.

A laboring woman was offered other forms of encouragement as well. The presence of midwives to support and assist the woman in labor is mentioned in the Bible as well as in the rabbinic literature. The matriarch Rachel and the wife of Phineas, both of whom died in childbirth, were encouraged by the midwives assisting them and told not to fear since they had borne sons.17 A midrash comments:

> Thus a woman in labor is soothed and told when she is giving birth: Do not fear, for you have given birth to a male child.18

Two Hebrew midwives are mentioned by name in the book of Exodus: Shifra and Puah.19 These names are treated in the midrash as descriptive of the actions performed by the midwives during labor and delivery: Shifra was said to cleanse and beautify (meshapperet) the infant after it emerged covered with blood, while Puah was said to offer support during labor, crying out (poah) to the mother and encouraging the child to emerge.20 Such forms of encouragement were employed in order to aid the laboring woman through a process that was seen as dangerous, as well as extremely painful.

The rabbinic literature not only contains descriptions of the process of labor and delivery; it also contains passages in which an attempt is made to attribute some underlying meaning or significance to this process. Notwithstanding the pain involved, women were evidently viewed as having been

created in order to bear children. One passage states that God built more chambers in woman than in man so that she could carry the unborn child.21 A parallel Talmudic passage states that

> God built Eve after the fashion of a storehouse. Just as a storehouse is narrow at the top and broad at the bottom so as to hold the produce (safely), so a woman is narrower above and broader below so as to hold the embryo.22

The pain involved in bearing children is seen, at least in one passage, as inherent in the physical structure of a woman's body. A woman's body is compared to the structure of a house; just as a house is fashioned with doors, keys, and hinges (zirim), so a woman's body is said to have doors (i.e. to her womb), keys (i.e. to unlock her womb), and birthpangs (zirim, a play on the word meaning 'hinges').23

Most passages, however, do not treat the pain of childbirth solely as an inherent part of the physical formation of women, but view it as a curse which was imposed upon women. This view is presented in the biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, in which Eve is punished for eating the forbidden fruit with the following curse: "I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."24 The pain women experience in childbirth is thus seen as a punishment for sinning, a punishment which one midrash suggests is not imposed on women who do not deserve it:

"Righteous women were not included in the decree pronounced on Eve."25

The rabbinic literature elaborated upon the curse of Eve, stating that Eve (and her female descendants) were cursed with ten curses, of which the pain of childbirth was but one. The other curses included the pain associated with menstruation, the pain associated with the loss of virginity, the pain of conception and the pain involved in rearing children. Some midrashic passages also included among the ten curses the fact that women had to keep their heads covered, that they were excluded from the company of men, that they were not believed in matters of testimony, and that they had to wait on their husbands.26 It would thus seem that the authors of the midrashim attempted by this means to provide reasons and justifications not only for women's pain in childbirth, but for all manner of tribulations to which women were subject, both by virtue of their physical nature as well as their societal position. The lower status of women relative to men could be understood as part of the curse of Eve, and thus be seen as originating from God rather than from men.

Similarly, the status of men as laborers and providers of sustenance could be seen as of divine origin, for Adam is cursed to toil for food in the same biblical narrative. A rabbinic comment on Adam's curse states that

> the difficulties of earning a livelihood are twice as great as those of childbirth. Of childbirth it is written, "In pain (<u>be-ezev</u>) you shall bear children" (Genesis

> 3:16), whereas in regard to earning a livelihood it is written, "In great pain (be-izzavon) you will eat..." (Genesis 3:17) 27

Such a statement reduces the pain of childbirth to but one small aspect of a larger condition which has been imposed upon both men and women. Both men and women have been expelled from the Garden of Eden and both are now forced to live under less than idyllic conditions in a less than perfect world.

As it was believed that such imperfections would be corrected in the time to come, it is not surprising that the following statement appears:

> in this world a woman bears children with pain, but in the world to come, what is written? "Before she will travail, she will have brought forth; before her pain will come, she will have been delivered of a male" (Isaiah 66:7). 28

The pain of childbirth is linked to this unredeemed world; when redemption comes, such pain will cease. This notion is articulated even more clearly in the following midrash in which the pains suffered by a woman through childbearing are compared to the suffering endured by Israel through subjugation to foreign rule:

> "Sing to God a new song (shir hadash)" (Ps. 96:1). Shirah hadashah (the feminine grammatical form) is not written here, but shir hadash (the masculine form). R. Berekiah and R. Joshua b. Levi said: Why is Israel compared to a woman? Just as a woman receives a burden and discharges it repeatedly until she no longer receives (i.e. becomes pregnant and gives birth repeatedly until she is too old for child-bearing), so Israel is enslaved and re-deemed repeatedly, and then will be en-

> slaved no more forever. In this world, since their pains are like the pain of a woman in childbirth, they utter a song (shirah) before God in the feminine form (Exodus 15:1). But in the world to come, since their pain will not be the pain of a woman in childbirth, they will utter a song in the masculine form. So it is written: "In that day shall this song (shir) be sung" (Isaiah 26:1).29

This passage uses the pain of childbearing as a means to discuss the ultimate redemption of Israel from subjugation, a topic that would have been of immediate concern to the midrashic authors, living as they did under foreign rule.

The aggadic literature treated here presents labor and delivery in terms which reflect the experience of the authors, who, as males, were probably somewhat removed from direct involvement in the event. They noted the discomfort and danger to which women were subjected, but not the joy or exhilaration that could be experienced when bringing a new life into the world. They attempted to understand what they saw as essentially a traumatic experience for women in terms of a larger view of the human condition. The pain in childbirth was linked to the pain inherent in human existence, pain to which both men and women are subject and from which both yearn for redemption.

CHAPTER FIVE

BIRTH

Every person who lives was born, and every person who lives will die. Birth and death are perhaps the only human experiences that are universally shared. Nonetheless, the way the experience of birth is viewed and the way the procedures of childbirth are carried out varies from culture to culture and generation to generation. This chapter will examine the treatment of birth in the aggadic literature, both in terms of the mechanics of childbirth (i.e. descriptions of the child at the moment of birth, how the newborn was handled and cared for, etc.), as well as in terms of the larger view of the event and its significance within the human life cycle.

The descriptions of birth that are found in the aggadic literature contain a mixture of fact and folklore. It was noted, for example, that most infants cry at the moment of birth; the explanation provided for this observation, which was mentioned in a previous chapter, was that the infant was forced by an angel to leave the womb against its will, and cried on account of the comfort and happiness that it had lost.1 It was also noted that the presentation of some infants at birth was the occipito anterior position (i.e. face down) while others assumed the occipito posterior position (i.e.

face up). This was erroneously thought to be determined by the sex of the child; males were said to face down, while females faced up. One midrashic explanation offered for this notion linked the position of the newborn at birth with the position thought appropriate for each sex during intercourse:

> The female emerges in the position she assumes during intercourse and the male emerges in the position he assumes during intercourse. The former, therefore, turns her face upwards, while the latter need not turn his face. 2

Another midrashic explanation connected the position at birth with the material from which Adam and Eve were said to have been created:

> If its face is turned downward, know that it is a male, who looks through his mother at the earth from which he was created. And if its face is turned upward, it is a female, who looks at the source of her creation - the rib.3

Such explanations, while perhaps serving the purpose of articulating distinctions between the sexes, reflect little experience with the reality of the delivery of infants.

The delivery of a child seems generally to have been attended by a midwife. Not only did the midwife aid the mother during labor, but she tended to the infant's needs upon birth. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the names of the midwives in Egypt, Shifrah and Puah, were understood midrashically to refer to duties performed by midwives during labor and delivery; among the duties mentioned are the cleansing and beautifying (<u>meshapperet</u>) of the newborn (performed by Shifrah).

The midwife Puah, in addition to encouraging the laboring woman, was said to revive the newborn through artificial respiration, by blowing air (mefi'ah) into the child when it was thought to be dead. The importance of the presence of a midwife to care for the newborn infant is indicated by the midrash which states that God provided an angel to act as a midwife for the Israelite women in Egypt:

> When the time of childbirth arrived, they (the Israelite women in Egypt) went and gave birth in a field under the apple tree...and the Blessed Holy One sent an angel from the high heavens who washed and beautified (the newborns) in the manner that a midwife beautifies a newborn.4

In this version, the women were unable to summon a midwife to assist their delivery, lest the Egyptians discover and kill their newborn children. That God was said to provide this angel indicates how important the presence of someone to properly care for the mother and newborn was thought to be.

Just as the laws of Shabbat could be abrogated in order to care for and aid the woman in labor, so certain laws could be superceded in order to tend to the infant's needs upon delivery:

> All that is stated in the passage of rebuke (Ezekiel 16) is done for the woman in childbirth on Shabbat. As it is said, "as for your birth, when you were born your navel cord was not cut, and you were not bathed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt, nor were you swaddled" (Ezek. 16:4). "As for your birth, when you were born": from here we learn that an infant may be delivered on Shabbat; "your navel cord was not cut":

> hence we learn that the navel cord is cut on Shabbat; "you were not bathed in water to cleanse you": hence the infant is washed on Shabbat; "nor were you swaddled": hence the infant is swaddled on Shabbat.5

It is interesting to note, however, that the actions portrayed in this passage, all of which have to do specifically with the infant, are presented as being performed "for the woman in childbirth."

The care of the newborn also included the care of the afterbirth, for the two were seen as somehow connected even after the placenta was cut. It was thought that storing the afterbirth in a warm location would keep the infant warm:

> The navel cord is cut and the afterbirth stored away in order to warm the newborn. The daughters of kings store it in bowls of oil, the daughters of wealthy men in tufts of wool, and the daughters of poor men in rags.6

As might be expected, the time of birth was generally treated in the midrashic literature as an occasion for great joy. This is reflected in the following passage, which admits to a bias in favor of male children but nonetheless treats the birth of either sex as a joyous event:

> Even though the newborn issues foul and soiled, covered with fluids and blood from the womb of its mother, it is taken up, and all caress it and kiss it, particularly if it is a male.7

Another midrash states that "there is great rejoicing when a righteous person is born...there is great rejoicing when a righteous person who is the child of a righteous person is born."8 This passage alludes to the birth of the patriarch

Isaac, which is elsewhere described as an event in which all of creation rejoiced: "the heaven and earth, the sun and moon, the stars and constellations."9 The birth of Moses is similarly portrayed as an event which elicited a supernatural response: "At the time when Moses was born, the whole house filled with light."10

Other passages, however, temper the joy of birth with a more sober view of the life into which the child enters:

> When a person is born all rejoice; when he dies all weep. It should not be so; rather when a person is born there should be no rejoicing over him, because it is not known in what class he will stand by reason of his actions, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad. When he dies, however, there is cause for rejoicing, if he departs with a good name and leaves the world in peace.11

In contrast to the statement above regarding the joy at the birth of a righteous individual, one midrash states that when a righteous person is born, "no one feels it". It is only when they die, after having made an impact on the world through their righteousness, that the loss is felt.12

It is at the moment of birth that the possibility of sinning enters the newborn, for it is then, according to one midrash, that the Evil Inclination enters:

> Antonius asked our teacher (Rabbi Judah Hanasi): When is the Evil Inclination placed in human beings? When the infant leaves its mother's womb, or before it leaves the womb? He answered: Before it leaves the womb. (Antonius) replied: No. For if it were placed in the infant before it leaves the womb, the infant would dig its way through the womb and come out.

> Rabbi agreed with him, for his view corresponds to that of Scripture: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth (mine'urav)" (Gen 8:22). R. Judah said: Mine'arav is written, which means from when he is awakened (nin'ar) to go forth from his mother's womb.13

Another passage suggests that the Evil Inclination, while perhaps present from birth, is not manifest in a newborn, and only develops as the child matures: "A child of six or seven or eight or nine does not sin, but only after age ten; so he cultivates the Evil Inclination."14 The beginning of life is thus seen as presenting a challenge to each newborn, to live one's life in such a manner that one leaves the world as pure as one entered it:

> "Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out" (Deut.28:6). Your exit from the world shall be as your entry: as you entered it without sin, so may you leave it without sin.15

The manner in which one enters the world and the manner in which one departs are compared in another aggadic passage; here, the intention is not to exhort one to the path of righteousness, but to instill a sense of humility:

> When a person enters the world, his hands are clenched as though to say, "The whole world is mine; I shall inherit it." But when he departs from the world, his hands are spread open as though to say, "I have inherited nothing from this world."16

However much one may accomplish in a lifetime, one nonetheless leaves life in the same lowly condition as one enters: with a cry, with a groan, and devoid of knowledge.17

Not only was the manner in which humans enter the world compared with the manner in which they leave; it was also compared with the manner in which they would re-enter the world at the time of the resurrection. Indeed, the fact that infants cry at birth seems to have been seen as an assurance that resurrection would occur in the time to come:

> What is meant by "the grave and the barren womb..."(Proverbs 30:16)? Now what connection has the grave with the womb? This teaches you that just as the womb receives and brings forth (a child), so does the grave too receive and bring forth...If the womb, which receives in silence, yet brings forth (the child) amid great cries; then the grave, which receives the dead amid cries, will all the more so bring them forth amid great cries. This refutes those who maintain that resurrection is not intimated in the Torah.18

The resurrection of the dead was an important element in the rabbinic conception of the time to come. It is evident from the last line of the passage quoted above that there were those who challenged this notion, and that there was a need to refute such challenges. By using the process of birth as evidence to support the doctrine of resurrection, the phenomenon of childbirth assumed a symbolic significance greater than that of the event itself; birth was not only the beginning of life on earth, but an assurance of ultimate redemption.

The aggadic literature presents the phenomenon of childbirth in both literal and metaphoric terms. Descriptions are provided of the moment of birth, the care received by the newborn and the joyous reactions elicited by the event. But

the treatment of childbirth is not limited to descriptive passages of the way the first moments of a human life were greeted in the ancient world. The contemplation of the entrance of a new human being into the world provided an opportunity to examine the manner in which human beings lead their lives in this world, and to encourage the kind of conduct which was thought to be desirable and praiseworthy. It also provided an opportunity to articulate the hope, ever present in rabbinic thought, for a world redeemed in the time to come.

CONCLUSION

Every literature is bound by the time and place in which it was composed, influenced by the values and priorities of the authors and their culture, and constrained by the limits of prevailing human knowledge. That the aggadic literature is no exception becomes apparent when one examines its treatment of the subjects of pregnancy and childbirth. The ideas and concerns which are articulated in the aggadic treatment of these subjects reflect the circumstances of the authors, circumstances which are very different from those of the modern reader. Concerns which the modern reader brings to the literature may be nowhere addressed by the midrashic authors. The modern reader might conclude that the aggadic treatment of pregnancy and childbirth is of limited value; however, within this material, certain truths or insights which remain applicable can also be discerned.

The modern reader who seeks within the midrash descriptions of the inner experience of pregnancy and childbirth will inevitably be disappointed. The midrashic literature faces an obvious limitation with regard to the articulation of experiences that are felt exclusively by women: the midrashic authors were men. The statements and feelings of their female counterparts were not preserved. The midrashic authors

could not enter the hearts and minds of women in order to convey the psychological experience of pregnancy and childbirth. They could only note their observations, which did not always correspond to the range of emotions that women might feel. An example of this, noted in the chapter on labor and delivery, is the fact that the experience of childbirth is portrayed in the midrashic literature as an essentially traumatic one. The joy and excitement at bringing a new life into the world is not expressed, only the pain and danger involved in childbirth. This pain and danger could be observed by men and related to other areas of concern, such as the suffering inherent in human existence. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it was the contemplation of other such areas which constituted the midrashic authors' primary concern, not the communication of women's experience.

The modern reader is also confronted with the midrashic authors' limited understanding of human physiology and fetal development. The factors that influence conception were not known; barrenness and fertility were understood solely as an expression of the will of God. Superstitions abounded concerning the sex, appearance, characteristics and health of the unborn child. The development of the fetus was not seen as the unfolding of a biological process; it was the result of divine intervention. God fashioned the fetus and watched over it, preserving it from destruction in the supposedly inhos-

pitable environment of the womb. The physiology of labor and delivery was a mystery.

The physiological conceptions which are articulated in the midrash are, therefore, of limited usefulness. Indeed, one could not reasonably expect them to be otherwise, formulated as they were without benefit of modern science and technology. Moreover, the authors of the midrash were not scientists involved in the investigation of human development; they were religious individuals, interested in the physiological processes of pregnancy, fetal development and childbirth as manifestations of the creative power of God.

The midrashic authors brought other concerns to their treatment of pregnancy and childbirth, concerns which go beyond the specific topics under discussion and reflect the circumstances under which this literature was composed. The circumstances with which the midrashic authors had to contend included the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersion of the Jews. In order to preserve the Jewish people, it was necessary to stress the observance of those practices which would bind the people together, and to encourage the development of those characteristics which would aid individual and group survival. Thus one finds articulated within the aggadic treatment of pregnancy and childbirth the importance of both the proper observance of the mitzvot and the practice of behavior that was considered praiseworthy. The fertility of the once barren matriarchs was midrashically presented as a

reward for piety and observance of mitzvot, as well as for cultivating desirable character traits such as humility, compassion, and faith in the face of adversity. Punctiliousness in the observance of mitzvot was suggested as a means of obtaining the desired male offspring. Torah study was presented as an essential aspect of the soul's experience in utero, an experience which was deemed to be the happiest time of one's life. The promise to be righteous through the observance of mitzvot was said to be exacted from every soul before birth. Conversely, outright violations of the commandments or acts which were regarded as improper or undesirable were said to have negative effects on one's unborn children, resulting in miscarriage, congenital birth defects, diseases, or character defects.

The midrashic authors also had to contend with the suffering which was brought upon Israel by subjugation to foreign rule, and the seeming lack of reward for maintaining one's faith. To encourage piety in the face of oppression and to generate the hope necessary for Jewish survival, they articulated a vision of redemption and reward in the world to come. This vision appears within the aggadic treatment of pregnancy and childbirth. That the barren matriarchs were ultimately granted offspring was seen as an assurance that 'barren' Zion would be granted a redeemer. That human beings were formed from a drop of fluid was midrashically interpreted as an assurance of the resurrection of the dead in the time to come, as was

the cry of an infant at birth. The pain of childbirth was linked to Israel's suffering through subjugation to foreign rule; both would cease in the time to come.

The modern reader may not share the midrashic authors' views on reward and punishment, or their hope for bodily resurrection. Such a reader lives under very different circumstances from those facing the midrashic authors and has different assumptions and concerns. Underlying the aggadic treatment of pregnancy and childbirth, however, the reader can still discern attitudes that remain vital and important. In the treatment of the laboring woman, however inaccurate the understanding of her physiological and psychological state, one can perceive the supreme value which was placed on every human life. In the speculations regarding conception and the formation of the fetus, one can discern a sense of awe and wonder at the creative power which produces life, and an appreciation for the work of art which is every human being. And in the encouragement of righteous behavior and the vision of the world to come, one can hear the yearning for a perfected world that still animates the modern soul.

NOTES

Chapter One

1. Genesis 1:28

2. Yevamot 63b.

3. Yevamot 63b-64a.

4. Bereshit Rabbah 71.8

5. Bereshit Rabbah 45.3. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 71.9.

6. Genesis 16:2

7. Genesis 25:21

8. Genesis 30:2

9. I Samuel 1:5

10. Genesis 30:14-21

11. David Mace, Hebrew Marriage: a Sociological Study (New York: The Philosophical Library Inc., 1953), p.203.

12. Genesis 20:18

13. Leviticus 20:21

14. Hosea 9:11.

15. Deuteronomy 7:12-14.

16. Exodus 23:26, Leviticus 26:9, Deuteronomy 28:11.

17. Erubin 63a-63b.

18. Bereshit Rabbah 71.1.

19. Berakhot 63b-64a. Compare Bamidbar Rabbah 4.21.

20. Bereshit Rabbah 20:12 and 45:14.

21. Bereshit Rabbah 44:12. Compare Pesikta Rabbati 43, 179a, Kohelet Rabbah 5:4, and Rosh Hashana 16b.

22. Yevamot 64b. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 47.2 and 53.7, Pesikta Rabbati 42, 177a. The same is said of Rebecca in Bereshit Rabbah 63.5 and of Rachel in Tanhuma Hakadum Vehayashan, Vayeze 15.

23. Bereshit Rabbah 45.5 and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:32.

24. Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:32. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 45.5.

25. Bereshit Rabbah 45.2 and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:32. Compare Yalkut Shimoni on Shir Hashirim, section 986, in which the verb root 'rpk' appears as 'prk'.

26. Tanhuma, Toledot 9. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 45.5 and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2.32.

27. Bereshit Rabbah 63.5

28. Yevamot 64a.

29. Solomon Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (New York, Schocken Books, 1961), p.171.

30. Genesis 25:21

31. Pirke Derabbi Eliezar 32

32. Yevamot 64a

33. Yevamot 64a.

34. Tanhuma, Vayeze 8.

35. Bereshit Rabbah 73:1

36. Pesikta Rabbati 43, 181a.

37. Bereshit Rabbah 9.10.

38. Sifre Devarim 32.

39. Bereshit Rabbah 32.3

40. Yalkut Shimoni, Lekh Lekha 78.

41. Pesikta Rabbati 43, 180a.

42. Pesikta Rabbati 43, 179a.

43. Pesikta Rabbati 43, 180a.

44. Bereshit Rabbah 71.9

45. Pesikta Rabbati 42, 175a-175b.

46. Bereshit Rabbah 73.2. Compare Tanhuma, Vayeze 6.

47. Pesikta Rabbati 38, 165a. Compare Baba Kamma 92a.

48. Bereshit Rabbah 71.10, Bereshit Rabbah 73.2

49. Pesikta Rabbati 43, p.181b.

50. Bereshit Rabbah 53.3

51. Pesikta Rabbati 43, 181a-181b, and Bereshit Rabbah 53.8.

52. Pesikta Rabbati 43, p.179b.

53. Tanhuma, Vayera 16.

54. Pesikta Derav Kahana 20.1

55. Pesikta Derav Kahana 18.3. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 38.11.

Chapter Two

1. Ketubot 60b-61a.

2. Yevamot 80a.

3. Kohelet Rabbah 7.18 and Ruth Rabbah 7.6.

4. Yoma 82a.

5. Yoma 82b-83a.

6. Sanhedrin 70b.

7. Niddah 31a.

8. See Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2.32 and Bereshit Rabbah 45.5. Compare, too, Yevamot 34b, where it is stated that Er tried to prevent Tamar from conceiving in order to preserve her beauty.

9. Yevamot 80a.

10. Ketubot 60b.

11. Bamidbar Rabbah 9.2. Compare Vayikra Rabbah 15.5.

12. Niddah 17a.

13. Baba Kama 83a. Also Shabbat 63b.

14. Shabbat 32b.

15. Shabbat 66b.

16. Berakhot 20a.

17. Bamidbar Rabbah 9.43 and Tanhuma Hakadum Vehayashan, Nasso 13.

18. Avodah Zarah 24a.

19. Nedarim 20b.

20. Baba Batra 10b.

21. Nedarim 20a-20b.

22. Niddah 31b.

23. Sanhedrin 100b.

24. Baba Batra 16b. Compare Sanhedrin 100b.

25. Bereshit Rabbah 26.7

26. Shevuot 18b.

27. Berakhot 5b.

28. Baba Batra 10b.

29. Shevuot 18b.

30. Shevuot 18b.

31. Niddah 31a; Tanhuma, Tazria 3.

32. Vayikra Rabbah 14.9.

33. Vayikra Rabbah 14.9.

34. Niddah 31a.

35. Berakhot 60a.

36. Yevamot 69b. Compare Niddah 30b.

37. Berakhot 60a.

38. Tanhuma, Vayeze 8.

39. Sotah 46b.

40. Vayikra Rabbah 15.5

41. Ketubot 60b.

42. Nedarim 20a.

43. Shabbat 156a.

44. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

Chapter Three

1. Vayikra Rabbah 14.6

2. Niddah 31a. Compare Vayikra Rabbah 14.6.

3. Vayikra Rabbah 14.6.

4. Kohelet Rabbah 5:13. Compare Niddah 31a.

5. Yoma 85a.

6. Vayikra Rabbah 14.8.

7. Vayikra Rabbah 14.7. Compare Niddah 25a-25b and 30b.

8. Berakhot 10a. Compare Tanhuma Hakadum Vehayashan, Tazria 3. Also compare Niddah 31b where a similar thought is expressed, using the image of a human farmer or dyer rather than an artist.

9. Bamidbar Rabbah 9.1.

10. Pesikta Derav Kahana, Piska 11 and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4.24.

11. Tanhuma, Toledot 6. Compare Baba Mezia 87a, where such a change of facial features is said to occur after Isaac was already born.

12. Tanhuma, Tazria 2.

13. Tanhuma, Tazria 3. Compare Vayikra Rabbah 14.3.

14. Tanhuma, Tazria 3 and Vayikra Rabbah 14.3.

15. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

16. Bereshit Rabbah 34.12 and Sanhedrin 91b.

17. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

18. Vayikra Rabbah 14.2.

19. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

20. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

21. Niddah 30b.

22. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3.

23. Vayikra Rabbah 14.2

24. Niddah 30b. A similar thought is expressed in Devarim Rabbah 4.4.

25. Menahot 99b.

26. Shabbat 152b.

27. Kohelet Rabbah 5.12.

Chapter Four

1. Yoma 82a.

2. Shabbat 128b.

3. Shabbat 128b.

4. Shabbat 128b-129a.

5. Shabbat 129a.

6. Shabbat 129a.

7. Tanhuma, Tazria 3. Compare Sotah 11b and Shemot Rabbah 1.18 which state that the woman's thighs become cold as stones.

8. Niddah 9a. Compare Bekhorot 6b.

9. Niddah 9a. Compare Bekhorot 6b.

10. Bereshit Rabbah 20.17. Compare Tanhuma, Tazria 4 and Niddah 31b.

11. Niddah 31b.

12. Tanhuma, Tazria 4. Compare Vayikra Rabbah 27.7 and Pesikta Derav Kahana 9.6.

13. Kohelet Rabbah 3.2.

14. Kohelet Rabbah 3.3.

15. Shabbat 2:6.

16. Devarim Rabbah 2.6.

17. Genesis 35:17 and I Samuel 4:20.

18. Bereshit Rabbah 82.9.

19. Exodus 1:15.

20. Kohelet Rabbah 7.3. Compare Sotah 11b and Shemot Rabbah 1.17.

21. Bereshit Rabbah 18.3.

22. Berakhot 61a.

23. Vayikra Rabbah 14.4. Compare Bekhorot 45a.

24. Genesis 3:16.

25. Shemot Rabbah 1.23. Also Sotah 12a.

26. Erubin 100b, Pirke Derabbi Eliezer 14, Avot Derabbi Natan 17a. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 20.15.

27. Bereshit Rabbah 20.22 and Pesahim 118a.

28. Vayikra Rabbah 14.9.

29. Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:37. Compare Mekhilta Derabbi Ishmael, Shirata 2.

Chapter Five

1. Tanhuma, Pekudei 3. Compare Niddah 30b.

2. Niddah 31a.

3. Shemot Rabbah 1.18. Compare Bereshit Rabbah 17.13. Also Sotah 11b.

4. Shemot Rabbah 1:16. Compare Sotah 11b.

5. Shabbat 129b.

6. Shabbat 129b.

7. Pesikta Derav Kahana, Piska 9. Compare Vayikra Rabbah 14.4 and 27.7, Tanhuma Hakadum Vehayashan, Tazria 1.

8. Bereshit Rabbah 63.1.

9. Tanhuma, Toledot 2.

10. Sotah 12a.

11. Kohelet Rabbah 7.4. Compare Shemot Rabbah 48.1.

12. Kohelet Rabbah 7.4.

13. Bereshit Rabbah 34.12. Compare Sanhedrin 91b.

14. Tanhuma, Bereshit 7.

15. Baba Mezia 107a. Compare Kohelet Rabbah 3.2.

16. Kohelet Rabbah 5.21.

17. Kohelet Rabbah 5:21.

18. Sanhedrin 92a. Compare Kohelet Rabbah 3.2.

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